



### D53 The Role of Forensic Science as a Tool Against Violence — The Colombian Experience

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the importance of Interagency and International Cooperation.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by demonstrating active participation in the implementation of criminal policies. The importance of interagency cooperation and of sharing information. Interconnectivity among law enforcement agencies.

The purpose of this paper is to show to the audience the importance of implementing an interagency cooperation strategy, as well as the key role of international cooperation, both of which have been critical to the enormous scientific progress accomplished in Colombia for the benefit of law enforcement agencies, police officers, investigators, and prosecutors.

Historically, Colombia has been affected by high violence and crime rates. Criminal activities, such as drug trafficking, insurgent and paramilitary actions, kidnapping, human rights and International Humanitarian Law violations, and common crime have increased significantly in the last 15 years.

All of the above, together with a weak criminal judicial system and a strategic geographic location, have contributed to Colombia's position as a target of international assistance, aimed at solving these endemic problems.

Therefore, as part of the so-called Plan Colombia, an assistance program implemented by the United States, the U.S. Department of Justice, through its agency ICITAP (International Criminal Investigation Training and Assistance Program) promoted cooperation for the development and enhancement of Colombian Forensic Sciences, as a collaborative strategy to support both investigators and prosecutors in their daily fight against the scourge of crime.

Traditionally, the criminal justice system in Colombia has been inquisitory in nature, following the European continental model. This is an obstacle to the submission of evidence by defense attorneys. The defense relies solely on the official evidence submitted by the government. This situation was aggravated by the fact that the crime labs of the law enforcement agencies acted on their own and there was no cooperation among them. This is an obviously obstacle to successful results.

The audience will see that crime rates have declined significantly in Colombia, as a result of a joint effort and will find a clear-cut link between crime reduction and investigative and forensic developments.

The paper will describe the operation of the forensic database interconnection system through the wireless networking of law enforcement agencies in various Colombian cities. Successful investigations will be used as examples of the key role of enabling information sharing among agencies. The Colombian reality of interconnectivity will be described.

Case studies concerning the use of DNA will show how the CODIS system was the tool that helped investigators solve the case of a serial rapist and arrest a rebel leader. These cases were made possible by the fact that investigators had the immediate support of the forensic experts who operate the IBIS database. Other cases concerning the identification of counterfeit drugs through the image databases shared by Questioned Documents Labs will also be described.

The Colombian experience is an example for the international forensic community. It is an evidence of how forensic scientists, concerned with the destiny of their homeland, may become both leaders and trainers who promote, design, recommend, and actively participate in the implementation of policies and strategies against crime.

#### Information Sharing, Interagency Cooperation, Violence