



### D60 Forensic Science in a Postwar Context

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The goal of this presentation is to present to the forensic community the experience of forensic anthropologists in Guatemala, and the relation with the advancement and weaknesses of the forensic field in a post war context.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by discussing important issues related to the importance of forensic science.

Guatemala, a small country in Central America, lived one of the longest civil wars in Latin America, which lasted from 1962 until December the 29th, 1996, when the guatemalan government and the guerrilla movement signed the Peace Accords.

A few years before that, and due to the pressure of human rights organisations, forensic anthropology started to occupy an important place in the investigation of the recent past and the clarification of some of the most horrendous crimes that were committed during that dark period of guatemalan history.

During this period, there has been a significant advance in the quality of the work that is carried out, including, among other achievements the realisation of a big amount of forensic anthropology investigations, most of them related to the last two decades. Some of these correspond to mass graves, some of them are individual burials or hidden cemeteries. The guatemalan teams (three) have worked very hard to respond to the increasing demands of exhumations throughout the country. It has also improved the working systems at their laboratories, to make sure that the reports are submitted at the shorter term possible.

Some teams are looking forward to work not only in the forensic anthropology field but to contribute in the development of professional criminal investigation (and thus contribute in the creation of laboratories throughout the country), and to develop other sciences that could allow the creation of a solid base for the advancement of criminal investigations.

There is also the interest in making a continuing effort to build a strong relation with similar organisations, that are interested in the development of forensic sciences in the country, and with the strengthening of the national legal system.

Investigation processes about the legal system, would allow to find the problems that have to be addressed urgently. As a part these effort organisations such as the Centro de Analisis Forense y Ciencias Aplicadas CAFCA (Forensic Anthropology and Applied Sciences Centre) are also working on internal and external education processes on issues that include forensic anthropology, legal aspects of exhumations, national legal system, human rights, national recent history, among others.

There is a strong need to encourage the advance of forensic sciences in the country, by including forensic studies on a graduate and postgraduate level and also by the interaction with the national legal system.

The legal system's attitude towards the investigation of crimes needs to change. The treatment given to crime scenes in the country reflects that justice and truth are in many occasions, not the main interest. Even though serious crimes have occurred, the capacity of the national system, and the attitude towards discovering the truth through the serious treatment of evidence reflects the voids that need to be filled and the non professional attitudes that need to be corrected.

#### Guatemala, Forensic Sciences, Postwar Context