



Physical Anthropology Section – 2004

H70 Truth, Justice, and Forensic Anthropology in Latin America

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The author will introduce a new forensic organization dedicated to the application of forensic anthropology to human rights and judicial investigations in Latin America and present the experiences of some of the organizations' members.

Through introducing the Latin American Forensic Anthropology Association (ALAF) to a wider forensic community, we hope to expand the network of Latin American forensic specialists and supporters, encourage forensic work in judicial investigations and see the organization's objectives adopted more widely in the region.

This session presents the Latin American experience of applying forensic anthropology and archaeology to human rights and other judiciary investigations over the past two decades. The presenters will describe the origin of the application of forensic anthropology in Latin America, overviews of the state of forensic anthropology investigations in a number of countries and discuss major trends, challenges, and problems in their work. In February 2003, for the first time, forensic anthropologists from throughout Latin America, and Dr. Clyde Snow, who chaired the meeting, gathered at Austin College in Sherman, Texas to discuss national experiences, commonalities and differences in particular cases and possibilities for working together to further forensic work in judicial investigations. Following this meeting, ALAF, the Latin American Forensic Anthropology Association was established.

ALAF's founding members largely work for non-governmental organizations that were trained by Dr. Clyde Snow, and pioneered the application of forensic anthropology to human rights investigations in their own countries, including Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, and Peru. As a result, ALAF is sponsored by the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG), Human Rights Office of the

Archbishop of Guatemala; Center of Forensic Analysis and Applied Sciences (CAFCA), the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team (EPAF), and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF). Founding members of ALAF from Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela work within national medical legal systems and in universities, enriching the background and membership of the association.

ALAF founding members from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela have established objectives for forensics in Latin America that range from establishing ethical and professional criteria for the practice of forensic anthropology to concern with the access of families of the deceased to procedures and results of forensic investigation. ALAF is concerned with the promotion of professional accreditation, improving the training of professionals working in this field, promoting the adaptation of international forensic standards by national forensic institutes, and mechanisms of protection for ALAF members and families. Another ALAF objective is defending the scientific and technical autonomy of forensic anthropology investigations in Latin America and the Caribbean because these investigations are often lodged in state-run medical-legal institutes. Because forensic anthropologists and archaeologists in Latin America, whether working as independent experts or inside government institutions, often work on cases where state institutions are reportedly involved in crimes under investigation, this relationship is often a source of tension. Especially under these circumstances, in many cases in Latin America, forensic investigations are vital to truth and justice. Through the organization of ALAF, we hope to contribute to protecting the integrity of these investigations as well as enlarging a community for forensic practitioners.

This session, introduced and moderated by Dr. Clyde Snow, includes participants from Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru, and Chile who are ALAF founding members. They will discuss and share their national and international experience in forensic investigation both in their home countries and internationally. Through the introduction of ALAF to a wider forensic community, we hope to expand the network of Latin American forensic specialists and supporters, encourage forensic work in judicial investigations and see these objectives adopted more widely in the region.

Forensic Anthropology, Human Rights, Latin America