



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2004

### H71 Perspectives and Recommendations From the Field: Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights in Argentina

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The author will describe the work and goals of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), a non-governmental, non-profit organization dedicated to the application of forensic sciences mainly forensic anthropology and archaeology - to the investigation of human rights violations.

The presentation examines the work of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team to the forensic community, including perspectives and recommendations that have emerged from almost two decades of field work throughout the world.

This paper describes the work and goals of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), a non-governmental, non-profit organization dedicated to the application of forensic sciences mainly forensic anthropology and archaeology - to the investigation of human rights violations.

EAAF, founded in 1984 when democracy returned to Argentina, was created to recover the remains of people "disappeared" by the state during the preceding military regime and to address the failure of state institutions to provide knowledge and support to families and others searching for their loved ones. This paper briefly describes the legal, historical, psychological, and technical contexts the team arose from and confronted upon its creation, and how these have contributed to the team's methodology for working on human rights cases in Argentina and other parts of the world.

At the request of local or international tribunals, human rights organizations, and truth commissions, the EAAF has worked in most Latin American countries, as well as Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. During this work, EAAF has developed a systematic approach for forensic investigations, including extensive preliminary work, archeological work and laboratory analysis. Because many members of the forensic community are familiar with the methodologies used in archeological and laboratory work, this paper focuses on the particular details of EAAF's preliminary investigation, including the collection of background information, ante-mortem data, and information about and visits to reported killing and burial sites related to the case. EAAF often works at the invitation of local non-governmental organizations (NGO). Often at great risk to their members, they form an essential bridge between investigative bodies and witnesses, survivors and families of the victims. The team also advocates the central role of families of victims in the investigation process. Normally, after verifying that families are seeking a forensic investigation, EAAF involves members in the preliminary investigation and provide explanations of and access to forensic procedures and laboratory results.

Based on our experiences working as forensic anthropologists in the field and for truth commissions, special commissions of inquiry and national and international tribunals, EAAF has observed a variety of perspectives, issues and problems and developed a number of suggestions in response to investigating violations in the context of institutional bodies that are established for fixed periods of time. These include mechanisms to continue recovery and identification processes beyond the mandates of commissions or tribunals, witness protection programs, and counseling and psychological support for persons who testify and for families and friends of victims and staff members before, during and after exhumations. EAAF also advocates direct contact between forensic teams and local NGOs and with relatives of victims of human rights violations.

Finally, this paper summarizes the main currents and future challenges currently confronting the EAAF. These include improving access to DNA analysis for human rights cases, training local teams and experts and the application of international forensic protocols into national forensic systems.

**Forensic Anthropology, Argentina, Human Rights**