



Physical Anthropology Section – 2004

H72 The Development of Forensic Anthropology in Chile

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From this presentation, attendees will learn about the development of forensic anthropology in Chile and how the discipline has contributed to ongoing human rights investigations in the country.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by examining the development of forensic anthropology in Chile, especially in relation to human rights cases.

Forensic anthropology in Chile arose in the context of systematic human rights violations carried out by the military dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). The dictatorship killed more than 5000 political prisoners and "disappeared" another 2000.

In 1989, the Association of Relatives of Disappeared Political Prisoners (AFDD) invited Dr. Clyde Snow and members of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) to serve as forensic experts in a case of the discovery of remains that were thought to correspond with disappeared political prisoners. During this visit to Chile, Dr. Snow spoke of the necessity of forming a forensic anthropology team independent from state organizations in order to guarantee the independence of scientific investigation not influenced by political pressures. AFDD convened a group of anthropologists and archaeologists who participated in the College of Anthropologists, the national association for this discipline. In 1990, an interdisciplinary group including anthropologists, archaeologists, odontologists and specialists in biochemistry formed the Chilean Forensic Anthropology Group (GAF) as a non-profit organization. Over the course of five years, this group participated in numerous discoveries of remains, mostly in relation to judicial investigations focusing on the search for and investigation of the disappeared. This work addressed a great void in the country with regard to human rights investigations. In 1994, the GAF dissolved and the Identification Unit of the Medical Legal System, a governmental organization under the Ministry of Justice, was formed. This multidisciplinary unit, staffed by medical doctors, odontologists, and anthropologists, is exclusively dedicated to the identification of disappeared political prisoners. In 1998, the Genetic Sample Bank of Families of Disappeared Political Prisoners was formed, the first governmental genetic sample bank of its type in Latin America. The bank maintains genetic samples from families of the victims for safekeeping so that, when necessary, remains may be tested against these samples.

Presently, more than 500 judicial investigations are underway that will ideally lead to the discovery of the disappeared, the identification of their remains and the determination of responsibility for their disappearance. Forensic anthropology is central to these goals.

Forensic Anthropology, Chile, Human Rights