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H84 Anthropological Review of Remains From Srebrenica as Part of the Identification Process

Piotr Drukier, MSc, Eva Klonowski, PhD, Laura Yazedjian, Rifat Kesetovic, and Edwin F. Huffine, MS, International Commission on Missing Persons, Alipashina 45a, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

This paper presents the procedures established by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) during anthropological review of Srebrenica remains as a part of large scale, DNA supported identification process. This unique approach to the problem of highly commingled remains may also be helpful in establishing standard procedures for resolving similar occurrences of mass identification in other post conflict areas.

This paper impacts the forensic community by combining an anthropological review and DNA testing results to produce accurate identifications and to reassociate skeletal remains.

During exhumations in the Podrinje area (eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina), led by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) from 1996 to 2001 and the Bosniak Commission on Tracing Missing Persons from 1996 until the present, more than 6,000 cases were collected from surface and exhumed from single, multiple and mass graves (primary and secondary) that related to fall of UN Safety Zone of Srebrenica on July 11th, 1995. Due to number of missing persons coupled with the conditions of the recovered bodies, classical anthropological methods were not of great use in producing significant numbers of identifications. Therefore a DNA supported identification program was created in order to help resolution to families of missing persons.

The large-scale, DNA identification process of Srebrenica victims operated by the International Commission on Missing Persons at the Podrinje Identification Project required establishing and using new and specific anthropological procedures. Due to history of Srebrenica graves, the majority of cases exhumed in area of Podrinje represent highly commingled and very often incomplete remains. The majority of exhumed cases had already been examined by anthropologists and an autopsy performed by pathologists. However, in order to help ensure that not only as complete a set of remains as possible were returned to the family, but also that each set of skeletal remains consisted of only one individual, additional anthropological review procedures were established. The role of the forensic anthropologist in the process of identification was not limited to estimating sex, age at death, stature and defining antemortem trauma. It also required creating new types of "visual" body inventories during examinations and reassociating commingled remains. Furthermore, a system of exchanging information among DNA laboratories, morgue and forensic examination officials on the status of additional DNA samples collected from the remains, and the results of anthropological review for antemortem and postmortem comparison helped produce a highly efficient system for both reassociation and identification.

Commingling, Reassociation, Forensic Anthropology, Human Identification