



## Pathology Biology Section – 2006

### **G22 Identifying Corpses of Foreigners in the State of Advanced Decomposition: Sri Lanka After the Tsunami 2004**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of disaster victim identification under difficult conditions.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by assisting the forensic community in understanding the necessity of cooperation of different nations and individual specialists concerning mass disaster victim identification under difficult conditions (e. g. foreign country, different mentality, and multinational victims advanced decomposition)

After the tsunami numerous tourists were reported missing in Sri Lanka. Main objectives of the German disaster victim identification (DVI)-team were sustaining a general survey of the circumstances and to achieve actual dates concerning foreign victims, German citizens in particular, and to proceed with their identification. Exceptional conditions consisted in a relatively small percentage of multinational foreigners among a vast amount of local disaster victims and in the enormous area where the deceased were disseminated. Extensive search operations revealed that dead bodies of presumptive foreigners were located in hospitals, funeral parlours, swamps, or provisional graves. Lead-managed by local authorities, exhumations could be performed. Major challenges consisted of advanced decomposition, and some of the bodies were almost skeletonized by feeding defects. Moreover several bodies had been embalmed with formaldehyde. Pre-screening for an assumable foreign nationality was performed on the grounds of clothing, items carried along by the victims and dental work. The final identifications by multinational DVI-teams were mainly based on dental findings and results of DNAexamination performed in Austria. Targeted police investigations also revealed that numerous people were alive either in Germany or still in Sri Lanka.

At February 25th, 2005, the mission was completed successfully and no more German citizen was reported missing in Sri Lanka. It has to be emphasized that the complaisant support of the local authorities and the notable obligation of each individual specialist appointed by different nations, comparably contributed to the successful and effective completion of this complex and exceptional task.

**Identification, Mass Disaster, Tsunami**