



### F59 Dental Identification in a Massacre Case

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The goal of this presentation is to describe the dental approach adopted by a team of forensic scientists who conducted the identification of 11 individuals who were kidnapped and murdered by an illegal armed group as a result of the Colombian domestic conflict.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by exploring how dental identification was completed on the 11 victims of a guerilla massacre.

Twelve congressmen of the state of Valle del Cauca in Colombia were kidnapped on April 11, 2002. After five years of captivity, eleven of them were murdered.

As soon as the news on the victims' death was published, family members requested the bodies. A Commission of the ICRC was appointed to undertake body recovery activities in the area. Additionally, a commission of international forensic scientists was created to oversee the forensic recovery process conducted by the Colombian forensic team.

The ICRC commission found obstacles due to the timeline established by the armed group to return the bodies. Other constraints were the topographic conditions and limited access to the area. The deadline for delivery of the victims' bodies was purposefully delayed by the kidnappers. Additionally, the conditions of the terrain was a significant limitation.

One week after the arrival of the forensic scientists in Cali, the bodies were taken to the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences. The waiting time was used by forensic scientists to conduct detailed planning in terms of management, logistic coordination, forensic scientists' roles, and detailed analysis of the victims' antemortem information, i.e., photographs, medical records, dental records, intra- and extra-oral x-rays, myofunctional plates, retainer plates (after orthodontic treatment), dental models, etc. Both medical and dental records were supplemented by telephone interviews with treating dentists. Information on every potential victim was published on a bulletin board at the morgue as a tool to orient the identification process. Each piece of evidence was analyzed jointly with the international forensic team. Informative meetings with family members were carried out. The participation and support of well-known international forensic scientists contributed to build trust among relatives, who provided additional information and new evidence for identification purposes.

The forensic identification process started after the 11 bodies were inspected by the Technical Investigation Team (CTI). At the morgue, forensic odontologists contributed significantly with identification tools due to advanced decomposition of the bodies. Initial identification was corroborated using formal odontoscope and fingerprint comparison. Two forensic odontology teams were created for verification purposes. First, a forensic odontologist of the National Institute of Legal Medicine examined and described dental findings, followed by an odontologist of the Technical Investigation Team who verified the records and minimized potential error. Postmortem evidence included each and every dental feature, positive and/or negative findings in bone and soft tissue, intra- oral X rays and/or dental models. This presentation will describe each one of the cases identified using odontology, as well as the evidence supporting dental identification.

The conclusion of this effort was that adequate planning of how, when, who, and where is an essential success factor and that antemortem information weaknesses on potential victims may be overcome by a detailed analysis of existing evidence. In this case, forensic odontology

was able to orient the initial identification and represented an added value to the forensic approach. The support of the international commission, harmonious work, and high scientific standards were essential to generate confidence among the victims' family members and the international community at large.

**Dental Identification, Massacre, Antemortem Information**