



A7 Massacre of AWA Indians in Colombia: Genetic Identification

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After attending this presentation attendees will learn about the problems posed by the parties to the armed conflict in Colombia, including law enforcement officers who fight against illegal groups, namely FARC, ELN, rightist paramilitary groups, such as the so-called self-defense groups of Nariño, the Black Eagles, and the “Rastrojos” which are at the service of drug traffickers. The AWA Indian community is caught in the middle of this conflict and it has been the victim of massacres, displacement, and forced disappearance. At least ten Indians, whose bodies were not found at the time, were stabbed to death during a massacre that occurred in February 2009. In March and May 2009, five bodies were found and referred to the Legal Medicine in Tumaco for the corresponding autopsy and sample collection for purposes of genetic identification by the Genetics Lab at the Southwestern Regional Office in Cali. The technical problems of collecting samples from family members will be described, as well the difficulties of analyzing the genetic results

obtained, due to the high rate of endogamy among victims and family members.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by describing the key aspects of these cases in terms of the identification of victims that belong to protected populations covered by the International Humanitarian Law, as well as the evaluation of genetic information provided by family members, considering the high level of endogamy existing in geographically isolated Indian communities. This presentation will describe the methods of DNA extraction from skeletal remains and PCR amplification of DNA via autosomal STRs and Y chromosome used by the Genetics Lab of the Legal Medicine. The contribution of the genetic study that supports criminal investigations involving populations protected by the International Humanitarian Law will be highlighted. These vulnerable communities require humanitarian assistance to protect their rights, their beliefs, their children, and their land. The contribution of the Genetics Experts of the Southwestern Regional Office of the Institute of Legal Medicine in court is noteworthy. Expert reports supported the positive identification of five AWA Indians who were recovered.

Four massacres of Indian communities were reported in 2009. Forty victims belonged to the AWA community, which is made up of approximately 30,000 individuals who live in small villages, spread out in twenty-six Indian reservations in the areas of Roberto Payan and Barbacoas in Nariño. During the massacre of February 2009, the victims' bodies disappeared. Five bodies were subsequently found in May of the same year. The bodies recovered had signs of torture and stabbing. The victims were positively identified through genetic analyses of the samples provided by family members who were located in forest and mountain areas. The genetics lab was able to determine kinship among the five victims and eleven family members. Three family groups were targeted in this massacre. Some of the profiles obtained from family members were entered in the national genetic profiles database and will be compared with unidentified bodies that may be found and recovered as part of on-going investigations conducted in the area. The efforts of government agencies, NGO's, and international organizations in terms of body recovery, location of family members, and positive identification of the victims must be highlighted. The discovery of the events and its causes show the AWA community is a highly vulnerable population in the Colombian domestic conflict.

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