



Physical Anthropology Section - 2012

H59 Mechanisms to Address Missing Persons: The Sub-Working Group on Forensics in Kosovo

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After attending this presentation, attendees will become aware of the complex nature of the recovery, analysis, and identification of human remains of missing persons, particularly in situations of armed conflict. This presentation will highlight the long-term nature of such projects, and the inevitable challenges that are faced throughout such a process. The main goal at this presentation will be to highlight the need for a mechanism to effectively coordinate the various participants in the field to successfully address these complex challenges; examples of such mechanisms and the lessons that can be learned from these models for the future will be provided.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the need for having a long-term perspective and plan to address the problem of missing persons. In addition, by making attendees aware of how work carried out at the start of a project can have serious ramifications later on, the need for continuity throughout the process will be demonstrated.

The issue of missing persons is a worldwide problem and the integral importance of forensics in trying to successfully address this matter continues to grow. The Western Balkans, in particular, Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, and Kosovo, has seen a massive involvement of international and national forensic experts to recover, analyze, and identify persons who went missing as a result of the 1990's armed conflicts in this region. However, following all these efforts, approximately 14,000 persons remain unaccounted for (Bosnia @ 10,000, Kosovo @ 2,000, Croatia @ 2,000). Some of the main challenges today, are limited information on new gravesites, poor coordination between the actors early on in the process, many different actors involved at different times in the process, potential misidentifications, and large numbers of unidentified human remains stored in facilities in Kosovo (300-400), Bosnia (3,000), and Croatia (900). The reasons for these unidentified remains are numerous and complex, and to address them successfully will require a coordinated strategic approach.

While mechanisms have tried to address the challenges that the process faces from a forensic point of view, it is also important to highlight the need to involve the families and the wider community in assisting in the resolution of these issues. One example of a mechanism that has focused on these technical challenges is the Sub Working Group on Forensic issues in Kosovo. In 2005, the Working Group on Persons Unaccounted for in Connection with Events in Kosovo, realized the need for the involvement of forensic specialists and better coordination of concerned actors, established the Sub Working Group on forensic issues (SWG). The main goal of this forum is better management and acceleration of the forensic process.

For the construction of future mechanisms it is important to evaluate the successes and failures of this mechanism. Many challenges still face the process today; indeed these are not exclusive to Kosovo; across the Western Balkans similar challenges are being faced concerning the recovery, examination, and identification of missing persons from the conflicts of the 1990's. The need for a regional approach to these issues must be considered.

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