



Physical Anthropology Section - 2014

H74 Building Standards and Capacity to Investigate Mass Graves in Iraq: Requirements and Challenges

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of the key challenges facing the forensic anthropologists and archaeologists of the International Commission for Missing Persons (ICMP) who are delivering training, introducing standard operating procedures, and building the capacity of Iraqi national teams to independently and effectively undertake mass grave excavations and examinations in post-Saddam Hussein-era Iraq.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating how effective assessment, planning, and flexible delivery based on legal and national requirements can achieve impact in the face of post-conflict, organizational, and logistical difficulties to successfully develop a national capacity to investigate and recover missing persons.

It has been widely publicized that up to one million Iraqis are currently missing within the country as a result of Hussein Regime crimes, mass executions, and cross-border wars. Many thousands of these missing persons are believed to be buried in a vast number of mass graves which litter the cities, towns, and countryside. Since late 2008, the ICMP has worked to assist both the Iraqi government and, ultimately, the families of the missing by addressing the issue of mass graves in Iraq through an integrated program of training in forensic archaeology and anthropology, augmenting the Iraqi national capacity in mass grave excavation, and the examination of human remains.

The project objectives include assisting the Ministry of Human Rights (MHR), Medical Legal Institute (MLI), and Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs (MoMAA) in the implementation of investigative and scientific work that fulfills the requirements of the Iraqi Law on the Protection of Mass Graves and laws governing the roles of forensic doctors at exhumations. A further objective is improving the capacity of Iraqi professionals of all ethnic groups in locating, excavating, and examining mass graves and ensuring that the process is sustainable. The required outcome is that Iraqi teams develop an acceptable minimum standard of excavation, recording, examination, and evidence control that is implemented in investigations. This standard must be acceptable for courts and provide suitable data and samples for successful parallel DNA analysis, database, and antemortem data collection processes that can provide a basis for future identifications.

Assessment of existing capacity and institutional knowledge allowed planning of strategies to deliver a modular training program based on developed best practice and experience. A flexible system provided skills knowledge, demonstration and practice, assessment, feedback and post-course mentoring, examination, and reporting. The ICMP has employed a program of practical mentoring support to assist teams in gaining and sustainably maintaining the experience and skills to work independently to consistent required legal standards. Site investigation monitoring by ICMP provides dynamic progress feedback, allowing teams to develop and ICMP to design further training to enhance and focus on specific skills development. Reviews of ICMP training and monitoring of the post-course placement of trainees in their institutions provides data to allow flexible adaptation of courses to suit the requirements of ministries and teams. Further advanced training in new disciplines and skills (such as dealing with commingled remains) is being undertaken to ensure consistent standards are developed and maintained.

Maintaining momentum and meeting ambitious targets in a post-conflict environment poses many operational and strategic challenges for ICMP International training teams. This presentation offers an overview of the key challenges with particular focus on security concerns, procurement and logistics, environmental factors, and multi-agency coordination. The future requirements and the need to continue the development of their departments will be discussed. The scale of the potential project to identify the missing is a great challenge.

Mass Graves, Iraq, Standards