



A81 Climate, Conflict, and Migration—Applications of Forensic Science to Address Humanitarian Issues in a Growingly Complex Global Environment

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the broader connection between the growing challenges brought about by climate change, and how it is impacting armed conflict and migration, and the humanitarian challenges that stem from these issues. Attendees will learn about the importance of understanding cultural and religious diversity, how this impacts on a transnational problematic, and how forensic sciences can transcend these issues and help address these growing humanitarian challenges.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by emphasizing the importance of introducing thinking surrounding cultural and religious issues on how they work and look to address the growing challenges in identifying human remains through understanding the root causes of this problem and will help forensic practitioners develop better models for approaching this complex issue.

When we think of crossing borders, we often see this as simply a physical barrier; for example, passing from one state into another. The movement of people globally, whatever the reason may be, has created much greater borders than simply physical ones. We live in a growingly globalized world, and the impact this has when we look at the problematics of migration, conflict, and climate only go to reflect this. Our connectivity plays a great role in this, breaking down what were traditional borders and allowing us to live in a very interconnected ecosystem. This same connectivity allows us as forensic scientists to attempt to address what often seem insurmountable challenges, especially when they relate to trying to determine the origin and identity of someone who is found dead along the large number of human paths that transverse our planet.

Pushed out of their homelands by the growing impact of climate change, which often fuels conflict over already-scarce resources and land, the numbers of persons perishing throws down some of the greatest challenges facing us as forensic scientists as we grapple with the task of trying to find a way to ensure the handling and disposition of the dead, in line with the legal, cultural, and religious needs of someone we may know nothing about, and the task of attempting to give this person back their name.

With communities now living transregionally, connected by a growingly integrated communications network, the idea of country of origin and destination for migrants tends to blur. The efforts of forensic science can bring together an interconnected network of family members to try and piece together the many fragments of information in the efforts to identify a missing relative. However, this can leave forensic practitioners and all those involved in the search process trying to navigate the complex patchwork of culture and society.

A growing recognition and engagement of the forensic community in humanitarian and human rights issues is providing hope. Advances in areas such as forensic genetics, the use of stable isotopes, and complex network analysis of population movement all are playing an important role. However, forensic science alone will not address these challenges. Major legal considerations must be understood, for example, in terms of cross-border transfer of data. With such divergent systems in place across the globe, this only further underlines the need for the harmonization of systems and procedures between and within states to allow for better transfer of necessary information in a format that can be used both practically and legally by all concerned.

Understanding climate change and how it will impact conflict through the battle for scarce resources, forced displacement from flooded areas, or cities no longer able to provide sufficient water for inhabitants will be essential as we look to the real impact this will have on the death of civilians in the years to come. Understanding how this will impact communities will be essential as we try to understand what role forensic science will inevitably play in trying to recover and, where required, identify the victims of these realities of the future.

Climate Change, Armed Conflict, Humanitarian Forensics