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**Subject:** Interesting article in the Economist this week on Identification of Remains

**Date:** Fri, 18 Apr 2008 08:30:42 -0400

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Missing persons

## What the dead have to say

Apr 17th 2008 | NICOSIA AND SARAJEVO  
From *The Economist* print edition

The grim skills of identifying and analysing human remains  
transferred from one benighted place to another

AP



AT THE new "family viewing facility" in the divided capital of Cyprus, human bones across the island are laid out on a long table covered with white cloth. Greek-Cypriots come for long-lost relatives, and to collect the bones for reburial.

Elias Georgiades, a Greek-Cypriot ex-police officer, says the first reaction is rage without someone for 30, maybe 40 years. They demand to know exactly what happened with gratitude for the identification.

It has taken a long time to get to this point. The last real fighting on Cyprus took place in 1974, fomented by the dictators who held sway in Athens, triggered a Turkish invasion. Mass graves date from earlier rounds of fighting. Until recently the fate of missing Cypriots and about 500 Turkish-Cypriots—was mainly treated as a propaganda issue, not as a human problem that cried out for a solution.

The fact that (so far) about 100 Cypriot families have been able to bury a loved one is a small amount of experience in the identification of human remains that has been built up over years of tyranny.

At a technical level, the biggest "school" for the genetic identification of human remains is where an International Commission on Missing Persons was set up in 1996 at The Hague. By matching DNA from exhumed bones—ideally from a femur or tooth—with blood samples, the ICMP's three laboratories have identified the bodies of 14,000 people who were killed in the ravaged Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo. These include more than 5,000 of the 8,000 boys who are thought to have died at Srebrenica in 1995.

As Kathryn Bomberger, the ICMP's director-general, points out, the speed and accuracy of DNA has risen sharply in recent years. It now takes only a few weeks to train a person to use a "collection kit" which costs just a few dollars.

AP



For some Cypriots, an end to searching

Iraqi forensic specialists have been trained in Bosnia to investigate the 270 mass graves in their country. Although some Iraqi graves, containing victims of Saddam Hussein, are being investigated by ranking American experts, the country will need a lot of local expertise in forensic investigations.

The ICMP has been asked to help with investigations into the murder of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri; and Ms Bomberger recently went to Colombia to offer advice on how to handle the remains of the victims of the 1985-90 conflict. The Sarajevo agency also helps after natural disasters: when the 2004 tsunami samples were sent to Bosnia in German diplomatic bags; 900 DNA matches were found.

An important supporter of the cause of identifying missing persons is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Swiss-based humanitarian body. Its officials helped to draft a UN convention on "the rights of persons who have disappeared", adopted by the General Assembly in 2006. This affirms the right of families to know the truth, and to get compensation; it also describes as a "criminal practice" the abduction without trace. With its 140-year-old experience of working with prisoners of war, the ICRC can reassure the families of prisoners who are still alive, and it can help the parties to observe the law. But it has no mandate to engage in post-conflict exhumations.

The greatest fund of knowledge about the political and moral dilemmas of foren Argentina, where at least 9,000 people disappeared during the 1976-83 military ascertain their fate have been spearheaded by non-government organisations

The mentor of Argentina's forensic anthropologists was Clyde Snow, an American the age of 80; he has analysed remains ranging from Egypt's Tutankhamun to Mr Snow is famous for propagating the idea that every skeleton tells a life-story

Five of Mr Snow's pupils formed the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, which has provided its well-honed skills in more than 40 countries, including Cy EAAF co-founder who is now based in New York, the organisation tries to work just to take genetic samples, but to get a full picture of how and why people die forensics.

In the EAAF's home base of Argentina, the identification of human remains has were so widely dispersed. Only 300 victims have been recognised, but the procedure to genetic skills that were refined in Bosnia—and to new insights from America, of human material were found in the wreckage of the terrorist attacks of 2001, a

Armed with a \$1.5m grant from the United States Congress, the Argentine NGC along with counterparts in Peru and Guatemala, to speed up the identification encouraging relatives to offer blood samples and by taking advantage of the lat

In Bosnia and Argentina, the results of exhumation and forensic analysis have prosecutors. The war-crimes court in The Hague, which is supposed to mete out the post-Yugoslav mayhem, is grateful for the ICMP's help.

In Cyprus, the identification effort is taking place under a UN mandate, with help delicate Greek-Turkish consensus which could be blown sky-high, in the view of judicial procedures. Even 40 years on, it seems, people's desire to face up to th

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**Subject:** And So the War Ended...

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