

THE ROLE OF FORENSIC SCIENCE IN CLARIFYING THE FATE OF MISSING PERSONS

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THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

- **MISSION STATEMENT:** The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and disasters and to provide them with assistance.
- **MANDATE:** The work of the ICRC is based on the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols, its Statutes – and those of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – and the resolutions of the International Conferences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent



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THE ICRC IN NIGERIA

- Present in Nigeria since 1988 but also worked in Nigeria during the civil war 1967 - 1970
- Currently our work is focused on the humanitarian crisis in the Northeastern, North central and south-south part of Nigeria
- Working with the Nigerian Red Cross to provide emergency assistance services.
- Supporting Nigerian Health Services – provision of primary health care services and reproductive health services, rehabilitation services for disabled people.
- Helping people affected by armed violence through distribution of essential household items
- Promoting international humanitarian law amongst parties to the conflict.
- Promoting detainee welfare
- Putting family members back in touch and reuniting them
- Promoting the protection and respect for the dignity of the dead



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ICRC FORENSIC ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

- The ICRC is using Forensic Science to help strengthen its humanitarian response for the affected population by ensuring the protection of rights and dignity of the dead and promoting the need for the restoration of their identities
- Working hand in hand with forensic practitioners and institutions to strengthen their capacity is a core focus of the ICRC, through training, infrastructural support, or advisory services
- The ICRC has developed guidance with recommendations for authorities and forensic institutions for the dignified management of the dead



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MISSING PERSONS

- **WHO ARE THE MISSING:** Individuals of whom their families have no news, whose status as alive or dead cannot be confirmed as their location and condition are not known
- **SITUATIONS THAT CAN RESULT IN MISSING PERSONS:** Armed conflicts, disasters, migration and other situations of violence.



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MISSING PERSONS IN NIGERIA

- By June 2021, the ICRC and the NRCS are actively handling the cases of over 24,000 persons who have been reported missing.
- 472 families of missing persons received news about the whereabouts or fate of their loved ones.
- 58 children or vulnerable adults were reunited with their family members.
- 129 families of missing persons received psychosocial, economic or other relevant support



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ROLE OF FORENSIC SCIENCES

- For missing persons from any of the contexts listed above, there is a chance that such persons are dead.
- Preventing persons from becoming missing by ensuring proper handling and management of human remains.
- Resolution of missing person cases through effective recovery techniques and scientific identification of the body and eventual handover to the families.



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ROLE OF FORENSIC SCIENCES – Adequate Management of the Dead

- This generally refers to the processes and mechanisms employed when managing dead bodies and it covers the recovery, storage pending identification and possible temporary or permanent burial of the body.
- Data collection – at every stage of the process
- All appropriate precautions as identified by the WHO must be employed when handling the dead.
- Recovery of human remains



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ROLE OF FORENSIC SCIENCES – Adequate Management of the Dead

- Appropriate storage conditions (adequate coding or labelling systems, temperature) should be employed.
- Temporary burial
- Chain of Custody – failure could result in mismatching of human remains to families or acquaintances.
- When every activity is duly documented, we can prevent cases of missing persons



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ROLE OF FORENSIC SCIENCES - Forensic Human Identification

- This generally refers to the application of scientific processes to the clarification of the identities of unknown/unidentified human remains
- Antemortem data – this includes all information about the missing person that can be provided by the family and acquaintances. This includes but is not limited to physical characteristics, photographs, DNA sample, circumstances of disappearance, medical history etc.
- Postmortem data – this includes all information obtainable from the human remains to help in clarifying the cause and manner of death and/or identification. This includes all data collected at the scene and the morgue.



ROLE OF FORENSIC SCIENCES - Forensic Human Identification

- Identification is a multidisciplinary process that can include one or all of the processes listed below.
- ✓ Autopsy (cause and manner of death) – Led by the Forensic Pathologist
- ✓ Fingerprint Analysis – Fingerprint Analyst
- ✓ DNA Analysis – Forensic Geneticist
- ✓ Dentition analysis – Forensic Odontologist
- ✓ Biological Profile – Forensic Anthropologist
- ✓ Radiography - Radiographer



FORENSIC HUMAN IDENTIFICATION

- Reconciliation of data both AM and PM
- This involves various disciplines and experts

The image shows two INTERPOL DVI forms. The yellow form is titled 'INTERPOL DVI Form - Missing Person' and includes fields for 'A. M. (initial)', 'Family name(s)', 'First name(s)', 'Date of birth', 'Age', 'Sex', and 'AM No.'. It also features a 'DENTISTRY' section with a grid for recording dental findings for primary teeth change specific FDI code, numbered 11 through 37. The pink form is titled 'INTERPOL DVI Form - Unidentified Human Remains' and includes fields for 'P. M. (initial)', 'Place of disaster', 'Nature of disaster', 'Date of disaster', and 'PM No.'. It also features a 'DENTISTRY' section with a grid for recording dental findings for primary teeth change specific FDI code, numbered 11 through 37. Both forms are placed on a wooden surface.



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CHALLENGES FACED

- As a country, the identified challenges in Nigeria includes
 - Lack of database for missing persons and unidentified bodies
 - Lack of Adequate manpower/Forensic experts
 - Outdated or inexistent laws for the medicolegal system
 - Inadequate Funding
 - Lack of Adequate equipment



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RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government interests and initiatives
- Collaboration between experts, law enforcements and other Government sectors
- Establishment of a database for missing persons and unidentified bodies
- Review of medicolegal systems and associated legislations
- Increased awareness programs
- Increased educational programs



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SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

- There is a good chance that a missing person case would result in a death investigation
- Prevention: when mechanisms of action are in place for effective management of the dead, chances of an individual getting missing is reduced.
- Resolution: in the event of a missing person case(death investigation), scientific experts with technical know hows are able to assist in the process of identification.



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