Latin American Association of Forensic Anthropology (ALAF) Conferences

ALAF held its 4th Conference in Lima, Peru, from March 31st to April 4th, 2008 and the 5th Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina from October 26th to 28th, 2009. These conferences bring together ALAF members—coming mostly from Latin America, Spain, Portugal, and the US, and working mainly in anthropology, archaeology, and genetics, but also from other forensic disciplines—as well as others interested in Latin American forensic anthropology. Participants present on their work in their local contexts, advances in forensic techniques, challenges encountered in their work, and other topics. The conferences are also intended to encourage exchange of experiences and collaboration regionally.

Background on ALAF

In February 2003, EAAF organized a meeting of Latin American anthropologists working in the forensic field, mostly from NGOs, including EAAF, the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team (EPAF), the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG), the Center of Forensic Analysis and Applied Sciences (CAFCA) from Guatemala, and the Archbishop’s Human Rights Office of Guatemala (ODHA). Thanks to the generosity of Dr. Clyde Snow, Cat and Henry Butcher, Austin College, and an Open Society Institute institutional grant to EAAF, the group was able to meet for five days to discuss creating a regional professional network. The meeting resulted in the establishment of ALAF, and furthermore, the development of the association’s objectives and principles. Dr. Clyde Snow, who has assisted in launching and training most of the Latin American non-Latin American Association of Forensic Anthropology (ALAF) Conferences

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governmental forensic teams, chaired the meeting.

ALAF, a non-profit association, emphasizes as its main objectives: to promote the use of forensic anthropology and archaeology in judicial investigations in Latin America and collaborate with judicial branches on the improvement of criminal procedures and investigations, to establish ethical and professional criteria for the practice of forensic anthropology, to ensure the quality and scientific independence of the practice, to support the application of forensic standards to the Latin American context, to promote further training for forensic anthropologists and archaeologists in Latin America and abroad, to create an independent accreditation board that will certify qualified practitioners, to promote mechanisms to provide families of the deceased access to forensic investigations (in accordance with international conventions protocols and recommendations), and to protect ALAF members and their families, considering the risks that accompany work in forensic anthropology in some Latin American countries.

An interdisciplinary approach is fundamental for forensic investigations. Many disciplines like geophysics, genetics, entomology, pathology and odontology can be involved in collecting evidence. Furthermore, in human rights cases, preliminary investigations often require anthropologists to examine police, judicial, military, morgue and cemetery records, as well as working with human rights NGOs, and various other institutions and specialists. The importance of the contribution of all these disciplines to the work of forensic anthropologists and archaeologists encouraged ALAF to promote a multidisciplinary membership comprised of not only active forensic anthropologists and archaeologists, but also members from other forensic disciplines, including genetics, criminalistics, pathology, odontology, and many other related fields. This approach is visible at the ALAF conferences, where presentations deal with many forensic approaches, often in combination.

ALAF has contributed to the scientific and ethical discussions around topics such as: identification of bodies, instruments and techniques of detection and registration of burial locations, the right to truth, the need for psychosocial support during forensics work, recovery of evidence from crime scenes, case studies in the identification of victims, cause of death, and analyzing fractures and pathology, to name a few. ALAF has also held conferences in Guatemala in 2004 and in Colombia in 2005.

ALAF has played a key role in creating a space for specialists outside and within the forensic field to come together and exchange ideas, practices and challenges in efforts to spread advances of forensic anthropology in Latin America.

**4th ALAF Conference: “Forensic Anthropology and the Search for Missing Persons in the Context of Latin America”**

**March 31st to April 4th, Lima, Peru**

The 4th ALAF Conference brought together more than 300 forensic investigators working in Latin America, students, representatives from civil society and human rights organizations, justice administration officials, among others for the five-day conference. The
conference theme centered on comparing and contrasting forensic investigations for missing persons, for humanitarian or human rights purposes, in Colombia, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, Mexico, Argentina, and Uruguay, as well as presentations discussing forensic investigations in Spain related to the 1930s civil war. Investigators or representatives from each country had an opportunity to present their experiences and the results of case study investigation. Presentations were given about the following topics: Searching for Missing Persons, Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights, Preliminary Investigations and Forensic Anthropology, Field Methods and Techniques, Identification and Cause of Death. The roundtable discussions focused on the current status of the missing people in Colombia, the forced disappearances in Latin America and the challenges faced with the judicial system.

During the 4th Conference, the discussions of increasingly specialized scientific investigatory tools and methods revealed how the discipline has grown to occupy a more significant place in the academic world and in Latin American society. The social and political obstacles faced by practitioners in certain countries were addressed, including the role of community participation in Colombia and Peru to supplement investigations was particularly highlighted, and the security threats involved in working on forensic investigations of human rights cases. An International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) representative presented on the ICRC’s Missing Project and efforts to create an ante-mortem and post-mortem database to centralize information on missing persons and unidentified remains from forensic investigations.

At the 4th ALAF Conference, EAAF members were involved in the following presentations:

- Somigliana C. and M. C. Perosino. *El consentimiento informado en casos de violaciones a los DDHH.*

The 5th Conference consisted of panel discussions and workshops, highlighting the importance of standardizing forensic anthropology investigations in Latin America. The more than 200 participants included forensic anthropologists, archaeologists, doctors, dentists, and biologists, who contributed in the exchange of information on methodologies of investigation, focusing particularly on the relationship between genetics, anthropology and historical research in the search for victims of disappearance. Representatives from the ICRC’s Missing Project and the European Association of Forensic Anthropology (FASE) also attended. The presentations focused on the importance of a multidisciplinary approach, even as technology improves and becomes more complex. Members also took time to reflect on the development of the field in their own contexts.

A tribute was organized for Dr. Clyde Snow, in recognition of his role in forming ALAF and in supporting the development of forensic anthropology in Latin America. Special workshops were given on: the application of forensic genetics to forensic anthropology by geneticists Dr. Carlos Vullo, EAAF, and Dr. Mishel Stephenson, FAFG; on bone trauma in the interest of forensics led...
by Jose Pablo Baraybar, EPAF; and a workshop on minimum requirements for psychosocial accompaniment during investigations and exhumations, led by Carmen Rosa Cardoza, EPAF and Susana Navarro García, ECAP. The conference concluded with a guided tour of ESMA, the former Naval Mechanic’s School in Buenos Aires, one of the largest clandestine detention centers active during the last military dictatorship in Argentina.

At the 5th ALAF Conference, EAAF members were involved in the following presentations:


- **Detección de grupos muy correlacionados de personas desaparecidas usando redes complejas.** Caridi, I, C. Dorso, P. Gallo, and C. Somigliana.

- **Iniciativa latinoamericana para la identificación de personas desaparecidas: Argentina (Video).** D’Amelia, V.

- **Identificaciones de restos femeninos vinculados a la investigación de desapariciones y homicidios de mujeres en un contexto fronterizo. Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.** Doretti, M, S. Egaña, P. Bernardi, S. Turner, and M. Salado Puerto.

- **Bancos genéticos para la identificación de restos humanos en contexto de violación de los derechos humanos. La necesidad de una guía para su creación.** Doretti, M, L. Fondebrider, C. Ayerdi, M. Salado Puerto.


- **El desarrollo de capacidad forense local para investigar el destino de los desaparecidos: el ejemplo de Chipre. Fondebrider, L.** M. Salado Puerto.


- **Métodos de exploración en antropológica forense: su implementación en sitios cementerios y centros clandestinos de detención.** Nieva, M, J. Nóbile, and M. Castillo.

- **La antropología forense ante el hallazgo de restos óseos en forma fortuita. Un caso de aplicación.** Nieva, M, M. Fumagalli, G. Ghidini, and P. Gallo.


- **Distribución y patrón de fracturas: una perspectiva dinámica.** Selva, M. and S. Egaña.

- **Identificación y reasociación intraesqueletal en restos mezclados, estudio de casos en Argentina.** Varela, S, M. Salado Puerto, C. Vullo, L. Catelli, and C. Romanini.

- **Dimorfismo sexual y necesidad de validación metodológica a nivel poblacional. Estudio en población argentina.** Wolff, I and M. Salado Puerto.

ENDNOTES

1. This conference was supported by the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team, the Project Counseling (PCS), the Peruvian Episcopal Commission (CEAS), The Peru National Coordinator of Human Rights (CNDHH), The Ecumenical Foundation for Development and Peace (FEDERPAZ), the Peru section of Amnesty International, and the Rural Education Service (SER). ICRC provided support for participant registration and Alas Peruana University assisted with printing of folders and posters.

2. This conference was supported by the National Bank of Argentina Foundation, the Argentine Delegation to the European Commission and the Open Society Institute. The ICRC provided support for ALAF members to attend, and the World Archaeological Conference provided workshop support.
Awards

Mercedes Doretti Receives MacArthur Fellowship (2007)

EAAF member and co-founder Mercedes Doretti was awarded a MacArthur Fellowships for 2007, also nicknamed the “Genius Award”. Each year, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation awards $500,000 fellowships to between 20 and 30 individuals in recognition of “exceptional creativity, promise for important future advances based on a track record of significant accomplishment, and potential for the fellowship to facilitate subsequent creative work.” The MacArthur Foundation invites individuals with extensive experience in a particular field to nominate a colleague qualified for this recognition. The MacArthur Fellowship is a “no strings attached” award and the recipients are then free to spend the money as they see fit.

Even though it is an individual award, Doretti considers this award to belong also to her EAAF colleagues and as a result donated it in full to the team. EAAF believes the award gives more legitimacy to forensic scientists

Buenos Aires, 1987. Mercedes Doretti, second from right, with other original members of the team and Dr. Clyde Snow, third from right, who has helped train and mentor the team since its inception. Photo: Eric Stover.
working in human rights investigations worldwide. In addition, the award reinforces the right of families of victims of human rights violations to independent forensic investigations in their search for truth and justice. The team is excited by the possibilities this support will open for innovative applications of forensic anthropology and genetics to human rights cases worldwide.

Finally, Mercedes is grateful to both her nominators and the MacArthur Foundation for this honor.

**Konex Foundation Award (2008)**

Since 1980, the Konex Foundation has given out awards to the most distinguished individuals and institutions in Argentina. The Konex Awards are presented annually, with each year focused on a different category or field, such as: sports, entertainment, visual arts, science and technology, literature, popular music. Categories repeat every ten years. In 2008, the Konex Foundation focused on the field of Science and Technology.

EAAF was awarded the Merit Award for its work and contributions in the field of Scientific and Technological Research Institutions. The award recognizes EAAF’s efforts in the pursuit of truth and the right to know, as well as their contributions to the advancement of the field of academic forensic anthropology.

**LEILA GUERREIRO RECEIVES NUEVO PERIODISMO AWARD FOR AN ARTICLE ABOUT EAAF (2010)**

Argentine journalist Leila Guerreiro won the prestigious Nuevo Periodismo CEMEX+FNPI Award in July 2010 for her article “El rastro en los huesos” about EAAF’s work. The Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano Foundation, presided over by Nobel Prize Laureate Gabriel Garcia Marquez, provides awards annually to an outstanding journalist writing in Spanish.

“Rastro en los huesos” (“Traces in the Bones”) was published in the Colombian magazine Gatopardo in April 2008. Clarín, one of the leading Argentine newspapers, published the article as a separate supplement after Guerreiro received the award. The article covers EAAF’s work mostly in Argentina, describing in detail the process leading up to an identification. Guerreiro visited the EAAF office in Buenos Aires every day for three months. Guerreiro, when referring to her article, said “the only way of telling the complete story was to wait and witness two key moments: the exhumation of a corpse, and the return of human remains to their rightful family”. EAAF is extremely pleased for Leila, and congratulates her on the award; it was a pleasure to receive her in the office and speak with her about the team’s work over those three months.
THE MISSING: Forensic activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross

Following the 2003 International Conference on ‘The Missing’, organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, Switzerland, the organization acquired its own forensic expertise to help promote and implement the recommendations from the Conference. These recommendations are related to the forensic sciences and human remains, to help prevent and resolve the tragedy of the missing from armed conflicts, internal violence and natural catastrophes.

The main activities of the ICRC’s Forensic Unit include:

- Advising forensic practitioners, institutions and other concerned stakeholders worldwide on forensic best practices, especially as they apply to humanitarian purposes;
- Supporting the implementation of forensic best practices for the recovery, management and identification of human remains from armed conflicts, internal violence and catastrophes;
- Training a wide range of practitioners, from managers to field operators, in forensic best practices for preventing and resolving cases involving the missing;
- Setting standards of forensic best practices for humanitarian objectives;
- Developing tools for forensic practitioners and related stakeholders for investigations into the missing, including specialized IT tools, body-recovery equipment, etc.;
- Empowering the forensic community, including the improvement of communication, coordination and cooperation;
- Carrying out humanitarian forensic case-work, including in catastrophe situations.

Since their launch in 2003, the ICRC’s forensic activities expanded from 3 to more than 40 operational contexts around the world. The ICRC’s Forensic Unit grew from 1 to 9 full-time forensic specialists and it also employs a growing number of external forensic consultants, including experts from EAAF.

EAAF, with its extensive experience in investigating disappearances, participated actively in the 2003 Conference and has since collaborated closely with the ICRC’s Forensic Unit in a number of activities around the world, including advisory services, training, development of tools and standards. Also, the ICRC has supported EAAF’s participation in some leading forensic events, including international meetings and trainings.

For further information, reports, or interviews on ICRC’s forensic activities please consult: http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/(PSearch)?SearchView&Query=forensic&searchWv=1&searchFuzzy=1&SearchOrder=1&SearchMax=0&style=Custo_results_search2 or contact the ICRC Forensic Unit at: gva_op_assist_forensic@icrc.org.

Tehran, Iran. EAAF member Mercedes Salado Puerto (third from left), along with geneticist William Goodwin (second from right), University of Central Lancashire, and participants in a course on the use of forensic anthropology and archaeology in identifying human remains, sponsored by the ICRC’s “The Missing” Project. Photo: EAAF.
Document and Outreach

Visual documentation and outreach activities are part of EAAF’s effort to share the results of forensic investigations, along with the personal stories accompanying them, to affected communities, associations of families of victims, human rights organizations, related institutions, and society at large. The team is proactive about distributing this material free of charge in Argentina and abroad, making editions in several languages, whenever possible.

**DOCUMENTARIES**


*The Last Place on Earth (2004)*, co-produced by EAAF and Mambo Films, documents the exhumation of the largest dictatorship-era mass grave uncovered thus far in Argentina, located in San Vicente Cemetery, Córdoba. The film traces the search and hopes of four families of the disappeared. In Spanish.

*Sr. Presidente (2006)*, directed by Liliana Arraya and Eugina Monti, portrays the repression under the last Argentine military dictatorship in the northern city of Córdoba. In a letter sent to then *de facto* President General Videla in 1980, the city’s judicial morgue employees described conditions in their working environment. This included information on the hundreds of unidentified remains, many showing evidence of gun shot wounds and torture, that passed through their facility in the first years of the dictatorship. Using this letter as a connecting thread, several interviews with different individuals reconstruct the past. Together they capture the urgent search for truth in Argentina recent history.

**PHOTO EXHIBITION**

Curated in 1999, the traveling exhibition illustrates how forensic anthropology contributes to the investigation of human rights violations by using EAAF cases in different countries. The catalogue is available online at [http://eaaf.typepad.com/eaaf_traveling_photo/](http://eaaf.typepad.com/eaaf_traveling_photo/). A new edition of the photo exhibition was produced in 2010, incorporating EAAF’s use of DNA technologies in the Latin American Initiative for the Identification of the Disappeared (LIID).

**BOOKS**

*Tumbas Anónimas* (Anonymous Graves) describes the first forensic searches for the “disappeared” in Argentina under the leadership of Dr. Clyde Snow, as well as EAAF’s

*San Vicente Cemetery*, published in 2005, explains EAAF's forensic investigations in San Vicente Cemetery, Córdoba, which led to the uncovering of the largest dictatorship-era mass grave in Argentina. Edited by EAAF.

**ANNUAL REPORTS**

EAAF has published annual reports on its activities since 1991, which describe the team's work in Argentina and abroad, as well as special sections on related material, and are close to 200 pages. The team also produced shorter versions of its annual reports in 2006 and 2007. Also in 2009, EAAF published a mini-report (with both Spanish and English versions together) about the planning and logistics involved in launching the Latin American Initiative to Identify the Disappeared (LIID) in Argentina, a national genetics program meant to dramatically increase the identifications of disappeared persons.

**WEBSITE**

Those interested can keep abreast of EAAF news and recent missions, and read more about each publication on http://www.eaaf.org.

**PRESENTATIONS**

Every year EAAF participates in conferences and panel discussions, gives presentations and classes, and leads forensic anthropology workshops and trainings in most countries in which it is involved. These outreach activities are geared to a broad range of people, from a specialized audience in universities and medical legal institutes, to the general public, including school children, families, and affected communities.

**ARTICLES**

In recent years, EAAF has made an effort to write about the most significant cases under investigation or about our reflections on working as forensic anthropologists in the human rights field. Following are the scientific papers and articles that the team has published in peer-reviewed journals and books since 2000.

**Recent articles by EAAF members:**


ARGENTINE FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY TEAM

EQUIPO ARGENTINO DE ANTROPOLOGÍA FORENSE

2007-2009 TRI-ANNUAL REPORT
Covering the period January 2007 to December 2009


EAAF volunteers who assisted with fact checking, photo research, and proofreading include Ronald Leiva, Liz Noth, Amarilla Sanders, Janet Summers, Liz Noth, Rachel Daniell and Elle Saine.

EDITORS AND TRANSLATORS: Mercedes Doretti, Raymond Pettit, and Brigitte Schmid

DESIGNER: Amy Thesing

FRONT COVER: Photos from laboratory analysis of bone fragments recovered during EAAF’s 2008 excavation of clandestine burials at the former CDC in the Arana Police Station, La Plata.