

FAFG: TRUTH FROM THE GRAVES AND THE POWER OF IDENTIFICATION

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For over 23 years, we - Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala (FAFG) - have applied forensic sciences to the investigation of crimes against humanity suffered in Guatemala. We work to identify the disappeared, promote justice, and clarify history. Unearthing the truth, recovering the remains of their loved one(s), and re-burying them with dignity in accordance to cultural traditions brings about real impact to the lives of the families and generates progress towards transitional justice. Focusing primarily on investigating crimes from the internal armed conflict in Guatemala, FAFG also applies forensic sciences to cases of missing migrants, natural disasters, and citizen security, demonstrating how forensic sciences can be applied to solve a humanitarian problem and change lives through identification.

We utilize multidisciplinary methods from criminology, social anthropology, forensic anthropology, forensic archaeology, and forensic genetics. Our Multidisciplinary Human Identification System has developed through years of experience, applying science from all disciplines of investigation, buttressed by the trust and participation of the family members, and results in the strongest possible confirmation of identification. Our ISO 17025:2005 accredited DNA lab operates under rigorous international scientific standards and is the only non-governmental internationally certified DNA laboratory in the region.

Drawing from decades of experience of investigating crimes from the internal armed conflict and the imprint of Forensic Anthropologist Dr. Clyde Snow's legacy and teachings, I will demonstrate how the FAFG developed a forensic methodology and strategy that serves mostly the needs of the family members, strengthens the Guatemalan judicial system, and clarifies history. These cases extend our understanding of violence through time and space, as understood through the discovery and excavation of clandestine graves, thus illuminating strategies and disproportionate responses executed by successive military governments. Specific cases will highlight the transformation of the FAFG strategy and development of the unique Multidisciplinary Human Identification System, illuminating the relatives of the victim's narrative that unfolds with the confirmation of an identification, its value to clarify history and challenge deep-rooted impunity.