Press Release

Delegation from El Salvador Visits International Commission on Missing Persons

El Salvador seeks legal and scientific guidance to strengthen institutional capacities

Sarajevo, May 15th, 2012 – As a result of the cooperation between the Center for Human Rights at the University of California at Berkeley, the Salvadorian organization Pro-Búsqueda de Niñas y Niños Desaparecidos (ProSearch missing children) and the International Commission on Missing Persons, ICMP hosted a multidisciplinary workshop for a delegation of 9 representatives from El Salvador.

The delegation consisted of representatives from state institutions and NGOs, including the Ombudsman for Human Rights, the National Search Commission, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Institute for Legal Medicine of the Republic of El Salvador, as well as Pro-Búsqueda de Niñas y Niños Desaparecidos (ProSearch missing children), Tutela Legal del Arzobispado de San Salvador and Centro para la Promoción de los Derechos Humanos Madeleine Lagadec.

During their weeklong visit, the participants met with experts from different fields relevant to the search and identification process, including forensic archeologists, anthropologists and geneticists, as well as representatives from judicial bodies, the Missing Persons Institute (MPI) and families of the missing. The delegation members also engaged in debates and roundtable discussions regarding policy issues, institution-building concepts, the need for purpose-specific legislation, the role of the families of the missing and the creation of central records on missing persons.

"El Salvador is struggling to deal with a significant number of missing persons cases and the fact the is delegation has come here not only to visit ICMP, but to visit local BiH institutions and NGOs, shows a commitment to address this issue,” said Kathryn Bomberger, Director-General of ICMP. “I believe this visit of key people will help El Salvador move ahead with addressing this painful issue.”

According to unofficial sources, it is estimated that the violent conflict in El Salvador, which took place between 1980 and 1992, resulted in the disappearance of around 8,000 individuals, a significant number of which included children. Several organizations have been created to specifically address the issue of missing children, including the National Search Commission and ProBusqueda. In addition to persons missing from the earlier conflict, an increasing number of persons continue to go missing from organized crime and illegal migration.

According to Ester Alvarenga, Coordinator at ProBusqueda “the aim of this visit is to acquire important knowledge on the scientific work performed by ICMP to identify missing persons, as well as to learn about the elements that can enable us to develop local capacities to search for the missing from the armed conflict.”

Dr. Cristian Orrego, Director of Forensic Projects at the Center for Human Rights at Berkeley University, stated that "this visit was very relevant, as it enables us to discuss the extraordinary task and results ICMP has achieved in the last decade, which should in turn help provide guidance to El Salvador.”
Dr. Florentín Meléndez, coordinator of the Commission for the Modernization of the Supreme Court of Justice stated that the visit, “highlighted the relevance of the technical and scientific cooperation that would strengthen the scientific investigation of crimes perpetrated in El Salvador and in particular the role of the Legal Medicine Institute, in cases of grave violations of human rights such as the cases of enforced disappearance and the disappearance of children in the country.”

This visit was made possible by the financial support of the US State Department.

ICMP seeks to secure the co-operation of governments and other authorities in locating and identifying persons missing as a result of armed conflicts, other hostilities or violations of human rights and to assist them in doing so. ICMP pioneered the use of DNA technology to identify large numbers of missing persons. Today ICMP has helped scientifically identify 18,000 persons and its database houses 150,000 genetic samples. ICMP maintains the highest throughput capability for DNA-based identifications in the world and as such it has become a center for global assistance, not only in cases of human rights violations, but also in disaster situations. It has also developed a unique software platform called the fDMS to manage the complex data, which it makes available to governments.

For further information, or for photographs, please contact Jasmin Agović on +387 33 280 800 or +387 61 225 239, email press@ic-mp.org, or visit our website at www.ic-mp.org