

Just So You Know: The HHRRC's Impact Transcript

Introduction [00:00:05] Now, this is recording RTI International Center for Forensic Science presents just science.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:00:23] Hello and welcome to Just Science, a podcast for justice professionals and anyone interested in learning more about forensic science, innovative technology, current research and actionable strategies to improve the criminal justice system. I'm your host, Paige Presler-Jur with the Forensic Technology Center of Excellence, a program of the National Institute of Justice. Today, we'll be discussing the Humanitarian and Human Rights Resource Center, which is supported by the NIJ FTCOE, together with the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. Our guests are Dr. Duarte Nuno Vieira, who is a professor of forensic medicine, forensic sciences and medical law at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Coimbra. He is also our 2020 AAFS HHRRC Clyde Snow, awardee. We're also joined by Dr. Claudia Plans, who is one of the HHRRC funding recipients and a professor of historical archeology, as well as the creator and coordinator of the Specialization Course in Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights at the Federal University of Sao Paolo, Brazil.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:01:38] Duarte can you tell us what it means for you to have been recognized as the 2020 Clyde Snow awardee for your outstanding contributions to humanitarian action and the global advancement of human rights?

Duarte Nuno Vieira [00:01:52] Well, it was quite a surprise, but it was also a tremendous honor. I had the opportunity of knowing Clyde Snow when he was already just a little age, that he was a fantastic person. He has done a tremendous job at an international level. And he was in the origin of one of the main teams that works in humanitarian field, the Argentinian team of forensic anthropology. And he was quite a character. So I never imagined when I began my career that one day I will receive an award, especially one award with the name of Clyde Snow. That has a very special significance for me.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:02:24] Can you tell us a little bit about what humanitarian forensic action is?

Duarte Nuno Vieira [00:02:29] Okay. We must to think that there is no stand or legal definition of humanitarian forensic action. Usually the definitions, they depend from the area, from where they came. So law professionals, they use one definition that people from haptics, they use a different definition of politicians. They use a different definition. But the International Committee of Red Cross has proposed a general definition for humanitarian forensic action, and they consider it as the range of forensic science activities that seek to alleviate human suffering and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of armed conflicts and situations of catastrophes. If it is then free of charge in a neutral and then impartial way and framed under international humanitarian law. So it has to obey to these ethical principles to be neutral, to be impartial, to be free of charge and to be done under international humanitarian law.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:03:24] Can you tell us about the importance of applying contemporary forensic science and forensic medicine principles to global humanitarian and human rights projects?

Duarte Nuno Vieira [00:03:34] I will say that forensic medicine always has had a humanitarian perspective. Of course, we always work for the protection of victims, for the

protection and the dignity of the human being. But this is, in fact, an emerging field because natural catastrophes, catastrophes deriving from the scientific and technological progress. And then fortunately, hardened conflicts are still a sad reality today. I will even say that they are increasing. They are increasing because there is a higher population density. People travel today much more than what they travel in the bus. So there is today in a larger mobility of the world's population. And so natural disasters and disasters deriving from the transport fuels are today a reality that are happening always. We have these climate changes and we can say today that these climate changes are originating almost every month, some catastrophe somewhere in the world. Floodings, earthquakes, cyclones, etc. They are happening everywhere and unfortunately also conflicts. They are a sad reality and they are also increasing. The secretary general of the United Nations goal very recently had the attention of the world for these increasing the world's conflicts in many parts because cultural conflicts, political conflicts, religio conflicts. They are still the sole reality in the 21st century. So say that there is an increased need for humanitarian forensic action, because all the situations is not only the number of victims, of lethal victims of people, that these appear of the missing persons. But in all these situations, always violence increase. All the cases of conflicts, all the cases of catastrophes always have, as a consequence, also an increase in all forms of violence and especially in some forms of violence. For example, in armed conflicts, sexual violence always rises a lot. And this is, again, one area where forensic medicine has to be asked to interfere. And where we can have a fundamental role because of forensic medicine is not only anthropology, and pathology is not only that, persons is also living persons that need to be examined, that need to be excessive. And there are investigations also to be done in the living. And so these situations affect the death and affect the leaving until there is a large area for the action of forensic sciences.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:05:49] Absolutely. So what do you think would be the next steps that the forensic community, specifically, even AAFS members, would be able to impact this area?

Duarte Nuno Vieira [00:06:00] We must prepare for the future. And what we can say is that we have an unpredictable future. No one can know exactly what the future will be. And since you cannot predict the future, what you can do is to prepare yourself until what we have is the teaching and training in this area. So training people to know how to act when, however, they are confronted with situations of conflicts, with situations of catastrophes, giving education in this area and put these in the curriculums even at undergraduate level. In my time, no one teaches us in the faculties, for example, these kinds of interventions. And today you have to put in the curriculums of the disciplines of legal matters, not the disciplines of forensic sciences. Even in the disciplines of ethics, et cetera, these kinds of concepts and these kinds of concepts. So education, training and refaat, training and reenforce expertise, training people, how to act and to do these kinds of procedures and though and actually know how to do them, even if they do not have the best facilities, even if even if they do not have the best equipment. But it's possible to do a lot in terms of humanitarian forensic action, even when you have very basic and simple things to do work that really does bring us over to clarity.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:07:11] And Claudia, you know, we would love to hear about your Humanitarian and Human Rights Resource Center supported project.

Claudia Plans [00:07:18] With the support in the amount provided by the HHRRC, we start to gather the necessary equipment should they buy anthropological analysis and improve the laboratory facilities at the university, which until then had not no equipment at

all. We managed to buy from basic instruments such as calipers to a very specialized equipment such as a 3D scanner for this project.

Claudia Plans [00:07:40] In 2014 the federal university of Sao Paulo created the Center for Forensic Anthropology and archeology to receive the first Brazilian case of attempting to identify missing persons militants during the Brazilian dictatorship. The Peru's working group GTP, as we used to say. As an archaeologist at the university who had experience with bio anthropological methods just to meet sex age, stature in this ancestry, I was indicate by the Dean of the University to implement forensic anthropology at the university. The GTP received a forensic anthropologist from different institutions and during my experience in this project, I realized that there was no protocol with standardised methods for estimating the biological profile of the individual develop in Brazil, no database record. The all information from a Brazilian for risky context was not to be viewed either. Both the protocol in the database had an enormous potential to improve forensic anthropology and its application human rights and resume so in 2017. As our universe professor, I created the first specialization course in forensic anthropology, in human rights and to the university. Not that you'd make both. Academic is in the area of archeology, history and social sciences. It's always forensic expert from the Medical Legal Institute in Brazil to have a qualified background in training for risk anthropology, conducting, researching and applying math to this in their day by day cases cautiously in contributing to an even positive results. In addition, we started our research project entitled Project of Validation in Forensic Anthropology in order to access, validate and test international by anthropological methods.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:09:25] Wow, it sounds like you have overcome many hurdles for your work. Can you tell us more about how you have overcome the hurdles?

Claudia Plans [00:09:34] Yeah. At first to one of our main hurdles was to get a on was to a logical collection for this research.

Claudia Plans [00:09:40] However, after an agreement with the institute of indication researching forensic science in Sao Paulo state which had a bond collection from the public cemetery. Our biggest problem was to obtain financial reserves for the research. The political economic crisis in Brazil has paralyzed scientific research in recent years and obtain the funds especially for my era, which is still under development in Brazil, such as forensic anthropology and the human rights was almost impossible. So when we found out about the possibility of a daily financial resources from HHRRC, it seemed to us that we could finally to find a way to enable politically and to develop financially. Our research improved even in Brazil.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:10:25] Thank you so much. Can you tell us about what's next for your project?

Claudia Plans [00:10:30] Well, our protocol of the research project developed by the coordinators have 35 methods just to meet sex, age, stature and ancestry. The methods were chosen from the international territories. Most used in forensic anthropology worldwide. Our aim is to access them in our specific context. The Brazilian population, as this is a project carried out blindly related to antemortem data, we still cannot achieve the complete conclusions. But you have already seen relevant results mainly from methods used for estimate ancestry in those methods that depend on the application and the result of another method so such as ancestry and sex, for example. In this case, we aim to increase our sample knowledge, calibrate some of these methods and create. That could

be used by forensic experts in Brazil. We will start on a project that aims to excavate and analyze a mass grave of Brazil's indigenous community. The shovel that for the process of genocide during the military dictatorship in Brazil. This new project then begins this year. Also has the support of HHRRC. It's a pioneer project then dealing with the indigenous rights in Brazil. It's also the first time that we will have a project that associates forensic anthropology and archeology in Brazil total necessary for its contribution in application to human rights. Therefore, HHRRC support for the research project associated with the first course in forensic anthropology in human rights that they coordinate the to me and expand the teaching training in academic research scenario in the future for east archeology in anthropology in Brazil.

Claudia Plans [00:12:08] It's great to hear the impact that the HHRRC has been able to have for your project. One of the other aspects that I think it's really important that the HHRRC is doing is providing guidance and mentorship from AAFS members to support these humanitarian forensic action projects. Can both of you tell me about a time that you received that type of mentorship and what it meant for you in order to keep your research going?

Claudia Plans [00:12:36] I would like to thank the HHRRC support to our project, and they would like to reassure that all these initiatives will have a crucial impact in the medium term indeed, to help consolidate their academic contributions to human rights in the Brazilian society.

Duarte Nuno Vieira [00:12:50] Now, I think the Humanitarian Human Rights Resource Center is doing a great job in this kind of mentorship, not only in scientific research projects, which can improve the application of forensic sciences in this area, but also in training projects. For example, we have already sponsor certain sponsor some training projects, namely, for example, in Filipinas where the National Commission of Human Rights has no training at all on what to do and how to do it. So it's this kind of work that it's absolutely fundamental to improve the future, because as I was saying, it's education, training and expertise. These are three fields and the Humanitarian Human Rights Resource Center has to have an intervention in these three areas. And of course, we have inside the center a very good group of professionals from all over the world that can cover the five continents and that are there. Besides the sponsor and the mentorship that can be provided by the Communitarian and Human Rights Resource Center, even individually, all the members, all the members of the scientific advisory board, all the members of the center can also mentor professionals and they are being involved in that. So all the forensic experts can count on the support of the Humanitarian Human Rights Forensic Resource Center for whatever they need in terms of expertise or repeat, in terms of education, in terms of training.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:14:10] Well, we're running near the end of our time together. I'd like to thank our guests today, Dr. Duarte, Nuno Vieira and Dr. Claudia Plans for sitting down with just science to discuss the impact forensic science makes on investigations of humanitarian and human rights injustices.

Claudia Plans [00:14:28] Thank you.

Duarte Nuno Vieira [00:14:29] Thank you for the invitation. And let me congratulate you for the fantastic work that you are doing.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:14:33] I'd also like to thank you, the listener, for tuning in today. If you enjoy today's conversation, be sure to like and follow just science on your podcast platform of choice. For more information on today's topic and resources in the forensic field, visit [forensiccoe dot org](http://forensiccoe.org). There you will find additional webinars, guidance documents, report and conference information. Please follow the Forensic Technology Center of Excellence on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn or sign up for our newsletter for release dates for resources.

Paige Presler-Jur [00:15:07] I'm Page Presler-Jur and this has been another episode of Just Science.