

# CHILE

*A mission to assist the Identification Unit of the Chilean Medical Legal Institute establish a bank of blood samples from relatives of disappeared Chilean citizens*

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In early 1998 the Identification Unit at the Legal Medicine Institute in Santiago, Chile requested EAAF's assistance as formal advisors to a project involving the creation of a bank of blood samples from relatives of disappeared Chilean citizens.

In 1997 EAAF began developing a bank of blood samples in Argentina designed to help identify skeletal remains that cannot be identified through traditional forensic anthropological methods. EAAF members take samples from relatives of disappeared citizens and preserve them in the blood bank, which will be sequenced in genetic laboratories in Argentina, the U.S. and the U.K. When a skeleton suspected to belong to a disappeared person is discovered, comparison between mitochondrial DNA from the remains and from blood samples of likely relatives can determine with an extremely high degree of certainty whether or not the victim and the person who provided the blood sample were related. (See the EAAF's 1997 *Annual Report* and the Argentina section of this report for a more detailed description of this project.) A similar bank of blood samples has been created at the Durand Hospital in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and is used by the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo to identify disappeared children.

During the Chilean military dictatorship (1973-1989) approximately 3000 were disappeared or summarily executed and buried by the armed forces and the secret police in undisclosed locations. A number of bodies suspected to belong to these victims have been recovered, but cannot be identified through traditional forensic techniques, due to lack of pre-mortem data. Therefore, the Identification Unit, which was created to investigate these

cases, decided to use genetic testing and, taking the protocols and forms created in Argentina as models, requested EAAF's assistance.

Between August 15th and 18th 1998 EAAF member Luis Fondebrider traveled to Santiago. During his stay he helped members of the Legal Medicine Institute establish the blood bank, and discussed the terms of a formal collaborative agreement between EAAF and the Institute. He also gave a talk before members of the Association of Families of Disappeared Persons, at which he discussed the applications of forensic anthropology and genetic testing to human rights cases.

Finally, EAAF met with the local office of the Ford Foundation and to discuss the possibility of future support for its projects in Argentina.