

RECOVERING DNA FROM SKELETAL REMAINS

Since 1987, EAAF has been in contact with various laboratories in other countries which have facilities for genetic analysis, and specifically the recovery of genetic material (DNA) from skeletal remains. Our inquiry is motivated by the difficulty, in many cases, of obtaining sufficient pre-mortem information to make a positive identification. The problem is evident in the case of Argentina, but even more crucial in the cases from Central America, where the population suffering human rights violations is primarily rural, with little or no access to dental care.

In April, 1991, DNA from bone was used for the first time to identify the remains of a fifteen-year-old in a legal case in England. Since 1990, EAAF has maintained contact with the laboratory which conducted the analysis. We have already sent them samples of our work at the cemetery of Avellaneda, from which they have recovered DNA. In the near future, we hope to incorporate this line of investigation as part of our identification process. This valuable precedent gives us hope that we can use this method to resolve cases of human rights violations throughout Latin America.