



INTERPOL

## FACT SHEET

# *Disaster victim identification*

The process of identifying victims of major disasters such as terrorist attacks or earthquakes is rarely possible by visual recognition. Comparison of fingerprints, dental records or DNA samples with ones stored in databases or taken from victims' personal effects are often required to obtain a conclusive identification.

As people are travelling more and more, there is also a high probability that a disaster will result in the deaths of nationals from many different countries.

### ► INTERPOL'S SUPPORT

When a major disaster occurs, one country alone may not have sufficient resources to deal with mass casualties. In some cases, the incident may have damaged or destroyed the country's existing emergency-response infrastructure, making the task of victim identification even more difficult. A coordinated effort by the international community can significantly speed up the victim recovery and identification process, enabling victims' families to begin the healing process and societies to rebuild, and, in the event of a terrorism incident, assisting investigators to identify possible attackers.

Member countries can call on INTERPOL for assistance in disaster victim identification (DVI) immediately in the aftermath of a disaster. The services offered by INTERPOL include:

- Assistance from the Command and Coordination Centre at the INTERPOL General Secretariat in Lyon, France, to send messages between National Central Bureaus 24 hours a day in Arabic, English, French or Spanish;
- Acting as a law enforcement coordination hub to other international or intergovernmental organizations, such as ICRC, ICMP, IOM, UN, AU, ASEAN or EU;
- An Incident Response Team to provide further assistance upon request, such as on-site investigative support or connection to INTERPOL's databases;
- Downloadable DVI documents (guide and forms) on the INTERPOL public website;
- Provision of DVI software.

### ► DVI EXPERTISE IN THE FIELD

Since 2004, a total of 32 DVI teams have been deployed to disasters across the world. In November 2013, an INTERPOL DVI team supported authorities in the Philippines following Super Typhoon Haiyan which left nearly 7,000 people dead or missing.

Following a high-profile terrorist attack at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya (September 2013), in which more than 60 people were killed and some 175 others wounded, an INTERPOL DVI Team assisted Kenyan authorities with crime scene processing and the identification of victims.

In January 2015, an IRT was sent to Burkina Faso to support local authorities in the identification of victims from 12 nations after a terrorist attack.

INTERPOL assisted Belgium and French authorities in the identification of victims after terrorist attacks in Paris (2015 – 20 nationalities), Nice (2016 – 20 nationalities) and Belgium (2016 – 11 nationalities).

## *Disaster victim identification*

An IRT was deployed to support the identification process after the crash of a Malaysian Airlines Airplane in Ukraine (2014 – 12 nationalities) and a Germanwings Airplane (2015 - 18 nationalities) in France.

### ► **MULTI-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH**

INTERPOL's DVI activities are supported by a Working Group on Disaster Victim Identification, which is made up of forensic and police experts. The overall purpose of the Working Group is to provide direction and focus to the development of international good practice in DVI. The Working Group meets bi-annually to discuss improvements to procedures and standards in DVI matters. Policies and guidelines have been produced in the following areas and are backed up by training programmes:

- Victim care and family support;
- Occupational care for DVI teams;
- Compliance with international standards and forensic quality assurance controls;
- Information-sharing and exchange;
- Operational assistance to countries which lack DVI capacity.

The development of a database containing and matching nominal and forensic data of Missing Persons and Unidentified Bodies is under way to support member countries in matching unsolved cases in both, routine business and in the aftermath of a disaster.



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#### ► **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Contact us via our web site. For matters relating to specific crime cases, please contact your local police or the INTERPOL National Central Bureau in your country.

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