



Syrian Commission for Transitional Justice Visits Bosnia and Herzegovina

On June 15-19, 2014, the [Syrian Commission for Transitional Justice \(SCTJ\)](#), headed by Dr. Radwan Ziadeh and SCTJ staff, visited Bosnia and Herzegovina. The trip was organized and planned in cooperation with the [International Commission on Missing Persons \(ICMP\)](#). The purpose of the visit was to learn about the Bosnian experience in the field of transitional justice, especially the enforced-disappearance file. The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) is based in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo and works on locating and identifying persons missing as a result of armed conflicts, human rights abuses, and disasters. ICMP revealed the fate of a large number of people who were missing due to the Bosnian War between 1992-1995.

Mrs. Kathryn Bomberger, the Director-General of ICMP and an international advisory board member of the SCTJ, prepared an extensive program for the SCTJ staff to learn about the different aspects of the organization's work and the Bosnian experience in regard to state institutions, civil society, and the war victims' families.

What distinguishes the Bosnian transitional justice experience from other countries is that they used advanced technology to identify the missing via DNA analysis, and later to inform the families of the victims about the fate of their missing person. Additionally, DNA analysis results and findings were used as evidence against the perpetrators of war crimes in both the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, which was established in 1993, and the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was established in 2003 and specialized in war crimes according to the Bosnian law that was adopted by the Bosnian legislative institutions. Such technologies helped in revealing the fate of 70% of the men who were missing during the Bosnian war which is a record breaking percentage of finding the missing throughout the history.

Moreover, the delegation was briefed on the Bosnian experience in establishing international and regional courts under international supervision, initiating modern laws that preserves the rights of the victims and the missing, and imposing sanctions against perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocides in accordance with international human rights law and international conventions and agreements.

Furthermore, the delegation learned about Bosnian efforts in the field of memorialization and honoring victims through setting memorials in public places and building galleries and shrines to honor the memory of thousands of the civilian victims. The delegation met associations and civil society organizations such as the Association of the Mothers of Victims and the Missing, which played a great role in making their personal tragedy be heard and in pressuring the international community to achieve some justice for them and the victims.

Additionally, the delegation studied ICMP's dedicated experience in the field of information technology by saving and protecting data, and using the designed applications and programs to store and utilize this huge amount of information. The visit involved also important discussions to utilize ICMP's experiences in the Syrian case through holding an agreement with SCTJ which should be finalized in the next few days.

The visit included several field trips where the delegation visited DNA labs in Sarajevo in addition to visiting Srebrenica, where the largest massacre of unarmed Bosnian civilians took place in 1995. Also the



delegation visited Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 genocide, and the main special grave of the victims of Srebrenica Massacre, where the delegation placed wreaths of flowers.

Finally, the delegation went to Tuzla city where they visited an identification center. The center preserves corpses and remnants that were found in mass graves, which later are classified, recorded, and stored, before being analyzed in labs in Sarajevo by extracting a DNA sample from the bones. Also, the delegation visited ICMP's Identification Coordination Division in Tuzla which was established to contact the families of the missing to take DNA samples. Samples are sent to the labs in Sarajevo and DNA analysis results are sent back to Identification Coordination Division in Tuzla where a cross-checking process takes place to identify victims. At the end corpses and identifications of victims are handed to their families via state institutions' mechanisms and protocols.

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For additional information on the Syrian Commission for Transitional Justice, please contact info@syriatransitionaljustice.org.

