

# Managing Deaths in International Emergency Situations

*Pierre Guyomarc'h, PhD, on behalf of the Forensic Unit of the  
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)*

# The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)



ICRC

*The ICRC is a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization. We have a mandate to help and protect people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence.*

ICRC's actions are aimed at protecting the lives, health and dignity of people affected by violence through:

- **Protection**
- **Assistance**
- **Prevention**



# International Humanitarian Law



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*International humanitarian law (IHL) or the “law of war” is a set of rules that aim to limit the effects of armed conflict and protects people who are not participating in hostilities.*

Geneva conventions (1949) and Additional Protocols (1977, 2005)

## Obligation to search for the dead

GC I Art 15; GC II Art 18; AP I Art 17, Art 33; AP II Art 8

## Maintaining the dignity of the dead (non-despoliation and proper burial)

GC I Art 15, Art 17; GC II Art 18, Art 20; GC III Art 120;  
GC IV Art 130; AP I Art 34; AP II Art 8

## Identifying the dead

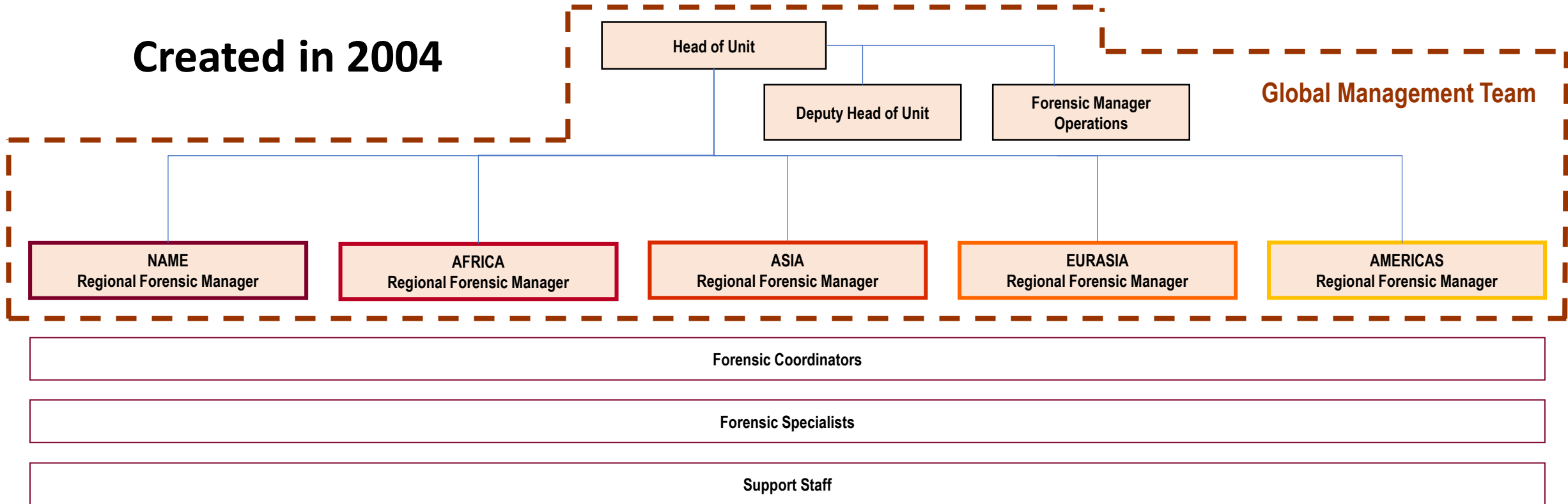
GC I Art 16-17; GC II Art 19-20; GC III Art 120;  
GC IV Art 129; AP I Art 33

# The Forensic Unit



ICRC

Created in 2004



**100 staff positioned globally (+19,500 humanitarian staff)**

***Forensic anthropologists, archaeologists, pathologists, odontologists, geneticists***

## *Humanitarian Forensic Action:*

*The use and application of forensic sciences in the humanitarian sphere  
(armed conflicts, disasters, migration, other situations of violence)*

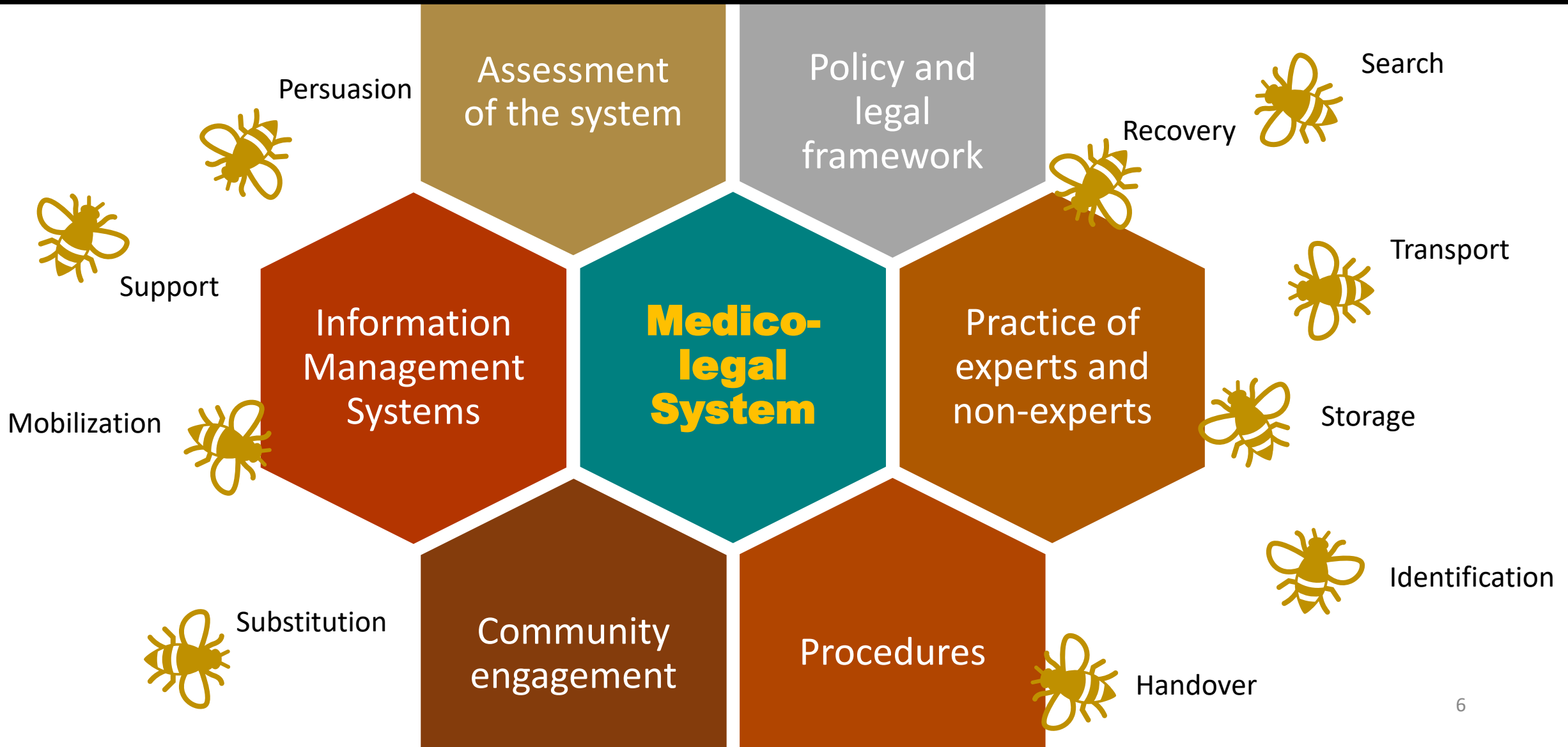
- Protection of the dead in humanitarian settings
- Resolving and preventing missing cases
- Community and practitioner centric approach
- Integrated Medico Legal System approach



# Support Medico-legal systems



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# ICRC FORENSIC HUMANITARIAN ACTION



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Emergency  
Preparedness

## THE DEAD AND IHL

Mortuary  
Operations  
Management

Search,  
Recovery,  
Analysis,  
Identification



# Forensic Unit Publications



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## GUIDELINES FOR INVESTIGATING DEATHS IN CUSTODY



REFERENCE

## MEDICOLEGAL FACILITIES

GUIDELINES  
FOR ARCHITECTURAL PROGRAMMING  
AND CONSTRUCTION ASSISTANCE

## GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF FORENSIC GENETICS IN INVESTIGATIONS INTO HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW VIOLATIONS

Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto  
República Argentina



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<https://shop.icrc.org/>

## THE RECOVERY OF HUMAN REMAINS IN WEAPON-CONTAMINATED SETTINGS



REFERENCE

## Management of Dead Bodies after Disasters: A Field Manual for First Responders Second Edition



Revised and Updated



# Forensic Programs



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# Forensic Programs



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Sensitization  
meetings



Forensic  
training

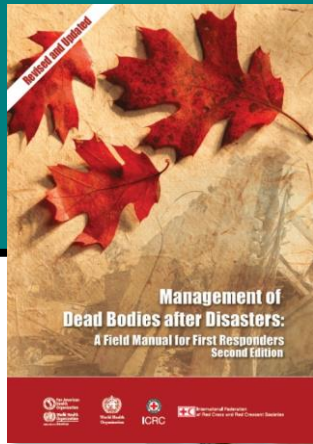
Donations



First  
responders  
training







# Emergencies



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5.1: Full length of the body, front view



5.2: Whole face, front view



5.3: Distinguishing features and personal effects

Proper handling  
of remains and  
data collection

Management of Dead Bodies after Disasters: A Field Manual for First Responders

## ANNEX 1 DEAD BODY INFORMATION FORM

**Unique code:**  
(Use this same code on associated files, photographs or stored objects.)

**Possible identity of body** (Explain reasons for attributing a possible identity):

**Person completing this form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Official status: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Recovery details** (Include place, date, time, by whom to coordinate, if available. Indicate if other bodies were not possible relationship, if identified)

Unique Code: \_\_\_\_\_

### A. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

A.1	General condition (mark one)	a) Complete body	Incomplete body (describe)		Body part (describe)	
		Well preserved	Decomposed	Partially skeletonized	Fully skeletonized	Stunt
A.2	Apparent sex (mark one and describe evidence)	Male		Female		Undetermined
Describe evidence (genitals, beard, etc.)						
A.3	Age group (mark one)	Infant	Child	Adolescent	Adult	Elderly
A.4	Physical description (measure or mark one)	Height (crown to heel with arms):		Short	Average	Tall
		Weight (specify units):		Slim	Average	Fat
A.5	a) Head hair	Colour:	Length:	Shape:	Baldness:	Other:
	b) Facial hair	None	Moustache	Beard	Colour:	Length:
	c) Body hair	Describe:				
A.6	Distinguishing features:	Use additional sheets if needed. If possible, include a sketch of the main findings. Note if photographs taken (include unique code in all photographs)				
	Physical (e.g. old amputations - limbs, fingers)					
	Surgical prostheses (e.g. artificial limb)					
	Skin marks - scars, tattoos, piercings, tattoos, moles, etc.), specify location					
	Apparent injuries (include location, size)					
	Dental condition (crowns, gold teeth, abscesses, false teeth). Describe any obvious features					

Chain of custody,  
temporary burial



# COVID-19 – ICRC Forensic Response



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IASC Inter-Agency  
Standing Committee

Q SEARCH

## COVID-19: GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD ICRC FORENSIC UNIT

This document provides guidance on the management, or handling, of the remains of persons suspected or confirmed to have died from coronavirus disease (COVID-19). It is meant to give an overview of key recommendations for managing infectious human remains to practitioners and planners, including decision-makers involved in the overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This document complements existing guidance on managing the dead in situations requiring the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The document is divided into two parts:

- 1 Management of the dead linked to COVID-19: Technical recommendations for death-care workers
- 2 Long-term response to increased deaths from COVID-19: Preparatory guidelines for a continuity response plan.

## COVID-19 Inter-Agency Guidance for the Management of the Dead in Humanitarian Settings



ICRC

## CEMETERY PLANNING, PREPARATION AND MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19: A QUICK GUIDE TO PROPER DOCUMENTATION AND DISPOSITION OF THE DEAD

### INTRODUCTION

The management of the dead (MotD) process includes proper documentation and appropriate disposition, including temporary burials.<sup>1</sup> Local capacities to perform this process can quickly become overwhelmed if there is a sudden and significant increase in the number of deaths.

# COVID-19 – ICRC Forensic Response



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## COVID-19 BASIC MEASURES

FOR HEALTHCARE AND DEATHCARE WORKERS IN THE HANDLING OF THE DEAD (FOR ISLAMIC BURIALS)

Safety and well-being of staff is the top priority. Ensure all necessary equipment is provided as well as the required guidance and support throughout the process.

In all situations and in line with standard health and safety procedures, wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is standard practice for the handling of the deceased. A risk assessment should be conducted to determine that the recommended level of PPE is adhered to prior to handling COVID-19 infected bodies.

## COVID-19 GUIDELINES ON MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD (FOR SIKH FUNERALS)

The Sikh funeral – *Antam Sanskaar* (final rite of passage) – focuses not on loss and grief, but on celebrating the soul's opportunity to re-join *Waheguru*. Often, the bereaved family, close relatives and friends attend the cremation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, last rites might be adapted to minimise the possible risk of further infection.

## COVID-19 GUIDELINES ON MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD (FOR HINDU FUNERALS)

The funeral or *Antyesti* (last sacrifice) is the last *Samskara* (rite of passage) in the Hindu life cycle. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, last rites might be adapted to minimise the possible risk of further infection.



## ICRC REGIONAL DELEGATION TO INDONESIA AND TIMOR-LESTE

GUIDELINES ON MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD WITH COVID-19 FOR PROTESTANTS

TO CHRISTIAN MINISTERS, CONGREGATION, AND CHRISTIAN BELIEVERS,

THE ICRC GUIDANCE AIMS TO ENSURE SAFETY OF HEALTHCARE WORKERS  
AND THE COMMUNITY, ALONG WITH THE DIGNITY OF THE DECEASED.



# Staff presence



ICRC

## EURASIA




### Regional Forensic Manager

Jane Taylor (Moscow)

[jtaylor@icrc.org](mailto:jtaylor@icrc.org)

Forensic Specialists: 19

## FORENSIC COVERAGE

-  Staff presence
-  Covered
-  Not directly covered

## AMERICAS

### Regional Forensic Manager

Alejandra Jimenez (Panama)

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Forensic Specialists: 22

## AFRICA

### Regional Forensic Manager

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Forensic Specialists: 9

## NAME

### Regional Forensic Manager

Denise Abboud (Amman)

[dabboud@icrc.org](mailto:dabboud@icrc.org)

Forensic Specialists: 9

## ASIA

### Regional Forensic Manager

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Forensic Specialists: 12

Headquarter (Geneva) ([forensics@icrc.org](mailto:forensics@icrc.org))

Head of Unit: Luis Fondebrider

Deputy Head of Unit: Maria Dolores Morcillo Mendez