

**STATEMENT TO THE COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION, REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS OF
THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE,
THURSDAY 3RD OCTOBER 2013**

**ADAM BOYS, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON MISSING
PERSONS**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this statement.

I am speaking today on behalf of ICMP's Commissioners: Ambassadors Thomas Miller, Rolf Ekéus, Knut Vollebaek and Carolina Barco, the former Prime Minister Wim Kok and Her Majesty Queen Noor.

ICMP is the only international organization whose sole mandate is to address the issue of missing persons from armed conflict, human rights abuses, disasters, human trafficking, drugs related violence and other causes. We are funded by numerous governments including 33 members and 3 observer states of the Council of Europe.

ICMP has worked on this issue, in European countries, since 1996. So, in the five minutes permitted to me I will not be able to go into very much detail.

But, if my statement achieves nothing else, I would simply like to underline our eagerness to contribute to the Council of Europe's future fact-finding and policy formulation on this issue. I would also like to repeat ICMP's invitation to members of the Sub Committee to visit ICMP's facilities and offices to get a feeling for the work of the organisation.

ICMP was recently described by the EU Special Representative to Bosnia as “the most effective international community intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina” so I promise that your visit will be worthwhile.

I will make only a few comments on our main areas of concern with the report. In September, on first hearing of the report, we provided seven pages of interventions addressing some of the more important points. I hope that the Secretariat and the Sub Committee might also take those comments into account.

In the context of the Western Balkans, over 70% of the 40,000 persons who went missing have been accounted for. This is an unprecedented achievement and includes 90% of those reported missing after the fall of Srebrenica.

Using state of the art forensic sciences, ICMP has identified over 17,000 people in the Western Balkans and strongly recommends this as a way forward for Europe and the rest of the world. ICMP has assisted Balkan states to accurately account for missing persons from armed conflict and massive human rights abuses. The use of accurate scientific evidence is critical to forensic investigations and enables families of the missing, governments and courts to deal with facts rather than fiction.

The report views the fact that only about 1,050 people were identified in the region last year as a sign of failure. Whereas we see this as a sign of continued progress. For a full 8% of the remaining missing to be identified in one year indicates the continued engagement by the governments involved and not a lack of political will.

To make identifications, ICMP has, since 1999, collected ante mortem data and blood samples from over 90,000 relatives of missing persons. Consequently, we see no evidence of a “fear of reprisals” being a barrier to case resolution in the context of the Western Balkans.

On the contrary, this modern approach to missing persons empowers families to demand answers of their elected officials and to seek justice. Conversely, it also enables governments to provide answers and to ensure that justice is served.

This modern approach requires that domestic rule-of-law institutions take responsibility and that they have access to the sort of technical capacity that ICMP provides.

Here I would like to address an important matter where the report's information may be outdated. DNA testing is not expensive. Yes, ten years ago it certainly was a costly technology. But, the fully accredited scientific processes that ICMP has developed mean that the cost of DNA testing is less than 300 Euros per missing person.

By establishing - through negotiation, rather than imposition - the Missing Persons Institute, ICMP has enabled Bosnia and Herzegovina to engage in meaningful, regular and productive cooperation with Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia.

Far from international cooperation being a failure, the commitment including regular financial support to the process provided by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia is exceptional when compared to other parts of Europe and indeed the world.

Next year, we anticipate these countries will jointly sign a Declaration on the Responsibilities of States with regard to missing persons. And, we are already working with them on the creation of a single, unified, list of the missing.

Having said this, we do agree with the conclusions of the draft report on the situation in Kosovo.

The involvement of domestic authorities is notably absent in Kosovo and the issue has largely been dealt with as a technical one only.

Further progress is very unlikely. Because, while I have discussed the critical importance of accurately accounting for the missing. It is equally important that affected countries own the process and engage in an honest reckoning with the past. We have described this in our extensive Kosovo report which is available on our website.

This sentiment also applies to Cyprus, where ICMP has recently begun providing assistance, but where only limited investigations into the circumstances of disappearances are conducted. As we know from the Western Balkans, families not only want to know the fate of their missing relatives; they also want justice.

Future reports should recognize the fact that, for the first time in the history of this issue, something has happened in South Eastern Europe that other parts of Europe and the world can and do benefit from.

I would be happy to provide further information to the Rapporteur.

I am grateful also to the committee for considering the amendments that we have already provided and for permitting this brief intervention.