

**SPEECH BY ICMP DIRECTOR GENERAL KATHRYNE BOMBERGER  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIGNING THE HOST STATE AGREEMENT BETWEEN  
THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS  
AND  
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON MISSING PERSONS**

Monday, 5 October 2015  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, The Hague

Your Excellencies, colleagues, friends of ICMP and soon-to-be friends:

Unfortunately, it often takes a crisis to remind us about the issue of missing persons.

Almost 20 years ago, ICMP was established to address the issue of missing persons from the crisis of that period--the conflicts that raged through the former Yugoslavia and which resulted in over 150,000 deaths and over 40,000 missing persons.

Today there is a new crisis in Europe.

Among the millions of refugees and migrants fleeing conflict or persecution, thousands go missing and among them are many vulnerable groups, including children.

The crisis has generated a steep rise in the crime of human trafficking. Thousands of families have been separated and are desperately seeking information about the whereabouts of loved ones. In addition, many migrants and refugees have died in the course of land and sea crossings, and their whereabouts are unknown.

The current crisis demonstrates the complexity and cross-cutting nature of the problem of the missing, as well as its global reach.

Europe is not alone in facing this issue.

In fact there is not one country in the world that does not have a missing persons problem, whether from conflict, human rights abuses, disasters, organized crime, or other causes.

This issue is also not new. Persons have gone missing for as long as mankind has existed.

Following the initiative of the Dutch Government, a concrete response to this problem has been created.

In December last year, five countries signed an agreement that establishes ICMP as an international organization. In addition to the Netherlands, the other signatories are the United Kingdom, Sweden, Belgium and Luxembourg. El Salvador will also sign the treaty this year. In that country at least 8,000 persons are still missing from the conflicts of the 1980s.

In El Salvador, as in so many other countries, an investment in resolving missing persons cases could contribute to ending decades of violence and preventing future violence.

Today, I am proud to be here as we sign a Headquarters Agreement.

These two critical initiatives, the Treaty and the Headquarters Agreement, allow ICMP to augment its efforts to tackle this pernicious and complex global problem in a manner that ensures the cooperation of all governments and safeguards the rights of surviving families, particularly women and children.

Among these rights, is the right to justice, which is why it is fitting that ICMP will have its seat in The Hague, the international city of peace and justice. From here we can cooperate more closely with our colleagues, including colleagues from the International Criminal Court, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the Netherlands Forensic Institute, The Hague Institute for Global Justice and the High Commissioner for National Minorities of the OSCE.

I am proud to say that the late Max van der Stoep, who was the first High Commissioner, was also one of ICMP's first Commissioners.

Equipped with our new status and from our new Headquarters, we intend to build on 20 years of success.

During this year, we look forward to bringing relevant international organizations together for the inaugural meeting of the Inter-Agency Committee on Missing Persons. The first meeting will focus on the issue of missing migrants.

Next year we hope to inaugurate the Global Forum on Missing Persons, which will bring together governments, civil society organizations, academics, scientists and others to address gaps in our understanding of the problem, as well as shortcomings in international and domestic law.

We also intend to harness new technologies to advance the science of human identification.

And we look forward to working with your ministry and other supporting governments to address missing persons cases from Syria to Mexico and from Sri Lanka to Central Africa. In each of these cases the number of missing is staggering and presents a serious impediment to peace and stability.

We will work with our State Parties and others to highlight this issue at every opportunity, whether it is the next United Nations Human Rights Council meeting in March in Geneva, or the United Nations General Assembly meeting next year.

On behalf of the ICMP Commissioners, including the Chair Ambassador Tom Miller, Her Majesty Queen Noor, Ambassador Rolf Ekeus, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek, the Rt. Hon. Alistair Burt and of course the former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Wim Kok, I would like to underscore this fact: Dutch support has been absolutely critical to the development of ICMP and to ensuring a stable, law-based response, so that ad hoc mechanisms no longer have to be established every time there is a crisis.

It is a tribute to Dutch pragmatism: If there is a problem, you will find a solution to fix it.

We are not only grateful for the years of support, but are proud to have you as a partner.

Thank you.