

NOVEMBER 2019

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MONDAY
JULY 15

DNA EVIDENCE PRESENTED AT MLADIC GENOCIDE TRIAL

Penn State Law faculty member Dermot Groome is well into the second year prosecuting the trial of Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at The Hague. Last week, a Penn State Eberly College of Science adjunct faculty member stepped up to the witness stand to present DNA evidence confirming the identities of almost 7,000 of the suspected 8,000 victims of the genocide that Mladic is accused of planning and overseeing.

Dr. [Thomas J. Parsons](#), who is an assistant adjunct professor at Penn State, directs Forensics Sciences for the [International Commission on Missing Persons \(ICMP\)](#). ICMP was created in 1996 with the primary role of ensuring the cooperation of governments in locating and identifying missing persons in the region of the former Yugoslavia. He said his testimony explained the methodology ICMP used to analyze the remains found in mass graves that were revealed through aerial imagery provided by the U.S. and others. The remains were then matched via a database that contained DNA taken from 90,000 family members of the missing. This task was complicated, he explained, by the efforts of the military under Mladic's command to scatter the remains from the mass gravesites along the countryside to give the appearance that the victims were killed in combat. The forensics team at ICMP was able to link much of these scattered remains to remains found in the mass gravesites "constraining the narrative that the perpetrators can say of what actually happened," Parsons said.

Dr. [Mitchell Holland](#), director of the Forensic Science Program at Eberly College, said that Professor Parsons spoke about his work during a visit earlier this year. "The wonderful thing about the ICMP's work is that DNA has now become a means to hold people accountable for committing atrocities against groups of people. The story in Srebrenica is a very specific and heinous example of such violations. As a result, the threat of using DNA to prosecute these cases is serving as a deterrent of future crimes against humanity around the world," he said.

Students enrolled in The Dickinson Schools of Law of the Pennsylvania State University's International Justice Externship at The Hague have had the opportunity to work on the Mladic case under Professor Groome's supervision. Professor Groome pointed out the importance of Dr. Parsons testimony, "Dr. Parson gave evidence that helps establish the identity of the victims of the Srebrenica massacres. His work is not only an important contribution to the evidence in the case but has given the families of the victims the ability to bury their loved ones with dignity."



International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

Kaitlyn Charette '15, watched Dr. Parsons' testimony and is an ICTY intern working with Professor Groome and his team this summer. According to Charette, "It is one thing to say you want to work toward achieving positive change for the world. Yet, it is a completely different experience to actually be a part of a team of driven individuals who are working toward achieving this very goal."

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CONTACT INFO

P 717-240-5000

F 717-241-3503

E DICKINSONLAW@PSU.EDU

[DEPARTMENT DIRECTORY](#)

