

## **THE THAI TSUNAMI VICTIM IDENTIFICATION – CHALLENGE AND LESSONS LEARNED**

**Ingo Bastisch,**

*Bundeskriminalamt, Wiesbaden, Germany*

---

The Tsunami killed thousands of people at the Thailand coast areas. The victims had to be identified so that they could be repatriated to their families. The bodies were examined in morgues in the several affected provinces and the data were transferred to the Thai Tsunami Victim Identification Information Management Center (TTVI-IMC) at the grounds of Phuket. Hundreds of Thai and international staff worked there and accomplished an utmost successful operation. Until the end of December 2005 when the TTVI-IMC was transferred to Bangkok police headquarters nearly 2,900 victims were identified.

The primary means of identification were dental, fingerprint or DNA comparison. In many cases, especially when information was not sufficient, identifications were approved by a combination of the different disciplines including also physical data like gender, age, clothing etc. At the end of April 2005 approximately 1400 victims were identified by the TTVI-process: nearly 1,200 by dental, about 200 by fingerprints, 10 by physical but only 5 by DNA! The delay of the DNA process could be related to a variety of reasons. These included among others: ante mortem (AM) and post mortem (PM) sampling, PM DNA profiling, analysis standards, matching criteria, matching software, sample management, chain-of-custody, legal aspects, lack of continuity because of staff rotation, commercial interests, finance issues and politics. A number of measures needed to be taken to solve all those issues. In the meantime DNA played a role in about one third of the identifications.

The role of DNA in Disaster Victim Identification needs to be improved. DNA analysis has the power to speed up the identification process significantly. It is therefore necessary to agree on certain standards and procedures. This is currently under development internationally (ISFG, Interpol), in Europe (ENFSI) and in a number of individual countries world-wide.