



**“Healing the Wounds of Conflict and Disaster:  
Clarifying the Fate of Missing Persons in the OSCE Area”  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe  
Rep. Chris Smith, Chairman  
February 28, 2012**

Welcome to our witnesses and to everyone joining us this afternoon.

Today we will hear testimony on how governments and NGOs can more successfully identify and locate persons missing as a result of conflict, disasters, crimes, such as human trafficking, and other violations of human rights, and hold accountable those responsible for perpetrating atrocities. Across the OSCE thousands of families await knowledge of what happened to a relative from these causes – a profoundly human and humanitarian need that we cannot ignore.

This commission has not ignored this need. Particularly since the mid-1990s, we have held many hearings that have touched on missing persons from the conflicts in and between countries of the former Yugoslavia, and both the International Commission on Missing Persons and the Missing Persons Institute of Bosnia and Herzegovina have appeared here before as Commission witnesses. Frank Wolf and I have visited the western Balkans, including Vukovar in August 1991 and Srebrenica, when the region was still engulfed in ethnic hatred, and I returned to Srebrenica in July 2007, where, more than ten years after the genocide, I saw the coffins, prepared for burial, with the remains of hundreds of men slaughtered in 1995, recently identified through technologies developed by the International Commission on Missing Persons.

But it is time to take stock of this need, what governments and NGOs have done to respond to it, and think about how that response can be further improved. The greatest concerted effort that has been made within the OSCE to identify and locate missing persons was in the western Balkans, in the conflicts of the 1990s. More than fifteen years after the end of the Bosnian conflict, and more than ten years since the end of the heaviest fighting in Kosovo, most of the missing persons have been identified and located, and we are in a position to take stock of our efforts there, and how lessons learned there can be applied elsewhere – for example in sub-Saharan Africa, where the number of missing persons is staggering.

I particularly want to draw attention to the magnificent work of the International Commission on Missing Persons, which has now located and returned the remains of over 18,000 victims of war alone, is now in danger of losing ground gained, because of difficulties over its legal basis. One of the purposes of this hearing is to learn more about how we can support the ongoing work of the ICMP. At this moment I am preparing to introduce legislation that would call on the Secretary of State to “make every effort to advance” at the UN a proposal for a “permanent and internationally recognized legal status” for the ICMP, so that it can carry out its mandate on a global scale.

Finally, as the author of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and its reauthorizations, I look forward to discussing with the witnesses the trafficking aspects of the missing persons tragedy – the identification and location of persons missing because they have been trafficked.