

"Position Statement Concerning the Use of Antemortem Fingerprints for Humanitarian Purposes to Identify Unknown Deceased Persons

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Background:

Throughout the world, more and more fingerprint systems and databases come into place every year for border control screening, government identification purposes, and other various background and security vetting checks even in the private sector. The goal of these systems is to identify and verify the identity of persons, and are essential for quick and efficient vetting.

Fingerprints also play an important role in the identification of victims of disasters or mass fatality incidents, where there are numerous unidentified bodies that require rapid scientific identification. Identification through fingerprints is one of the only three primary identifiers according to the internationally recognized and accepted INTERPOL Disaster Victim Identification standards. These primary identifiers, (fingerprints, DNA, odontology), are required in many countries to effect a legal identification and issuance of a death certificate.

The utilization of fingerprints for identification is a fast and very cost-effective method of identification. One of the most important factors of being able to use the maximal potential of fingerprints recovered from deceased in a DVI operation is the availability of a reference fingerprint record taken from the person while still alive, known as antemortem records.

With the growing complications of data privacy protection such as the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), it is becoming ever more difficult to request and obtain fingerprint records. The availability of obtaining fingerprint records and the willingness of countries to share that data with proper authorities for identification falls within the scope of the policy makers who need to take into account humanitarian needs when controlling this data.

Position Statement:

With this statement we ask all policy makers, internationally, to take into account the important role of fingerprints in the identification of unidentified bodies. Not only for identification of victims of disasters or major crimes but for identification of unidentified bodies in all cases.

We respectfully urge all policy makers when drafting and revising policies on the use of fingerprint data to include an exemption to the law that enables humanitarian use of the fingerprints exclusive from normal data protections and restrictions. Through an identification made using fingerprints, the family of the missing person/victim can be quickly informed and they can be given a sense of closure."