

The First Latin American Symposium on Human Identification

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The First Latin American Symposium on Human Identification was held in Brasilia, Brazil, from August 11-13, 1997. Over 120 scientists attended, representing most countries in South America and nearly every province in Brazil. Over the course of three days, the group listened to 20 formal presentations from speakers from Latin America, Europe and North America, who described their experiences using DNA typing in their laboratories.

SPEAKERS

The talks covered a wide range of areas and focused on many aspects of the development of STRs as tools for human identification. From South and North America, Dr. Emilio Yunis, Dr. Mitch Holland and Dr. Daniel Corach described their studies on the identification of human remains from a series of disasters that had occurred in Colombia, the United States and Argentina, respectively. From the United States and Switzerland, Dr. Cecelia Crouse and Christian Gehrig described their use of STRs for forensic casework. Dr. Salmo Raskin and Dr. Sergio Pena of Brazil talked about the use of STRs for paternity testing.

The development of a Brazilian population database using the STR loci of the *GenePrint*[™] PowerPlex[™] 1.1 and FFFL Multiplex Systems was the focus of Dr. Arthur Eisenberg's talk. Jeff Ban, from the Commonwealth of Virginia in the United States, and Joao Luiz Neves de Oliveira, from the Brasilia Federal District of Brazil, discussed the planned development of forensic DNA databases for their respective regions. Other talks covered the use of STRs in diagnostic testing (Dr. Rita de Cassia Stocco dos Santos), the development of new technologies for using STRs (Dr. Kevin McElfresh),

and the development of STR instrumentation (Dr. Sheila Colby) and reagents (Dr. James Schumm). Finally, an overview of the CODIS system was presented by Dr. Arthur Eisenberg, with the offer from the United States FBI to provide such software to any Latin American laboratory willing to support the development of a criminal DNA database.

CONCLUSIONS

During the meeting, Latin American and international representatives engaged in a number of small group and individual discussions. By the end of the meeting, the consensus was reached that STR technology is the best choice for human identification. The group agreed that the use of a minimum of 12 loci offered the power of discrimination necessary for both forensic DNA testing and paternity analysis. With that decision, the need for the rapid development of population databases using STRs was given high priority. As a result, the development of the database from Dr. Rui Fernando Pilotto's lab, presented by Dr. Eisenberg, was seen as a major step forward.

By the end of the meeting, a network of Brazilian labs was established with the express purpose of exchanging data and working together to establish STR technology in their country. The existing Argentine network of DNA typing labs has indicated its willingness to work with the Brazilians to assist in what may well become a pan-continental development. In the future, this meeting, like the Promega Symposium held annually in the United States, will be seen as a watershed in the development of DNA typing on the South American continent.

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