

Friends of FAFG
Uncover the truth



u n c o v e r

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ANNOUNCING OUR NEW WEBSITE!

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the second issue of Friends of FAFG's newsletter: *Uncover*. Thanks for your engagement and interest in our last newsletter!

An important announcement: **We have launched our new website! The new site also includes a new donations platform that allows for one-time or recurring donations.** Click [here](#) to navigate to the site!

In the February newsletter, please find the latest updates from Friends of FAFG's projects and news from Guatemala about the new administration of President Bernardo Arévalo in Guatemala.

We look forward to keeping you informed in 2024 about successes and challenges affecting the search for the Disappeared.

Sincerely,
Friends of FAFG

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Our new website features **new photos, descriptions of projects**, news articles highlighting our work, an interactive global map of Enforced Disappearances, and a **new form for donations!**

[Click to visit!](#)

Friends of FAFG Updates and News



The New Spring in Guatemala

Friends of FAFG and applauds the successful inauguration of **President Bernardo Arévalo** and greatly looks forward to working with the Arévalo administration to promote key human rights issues especially regarding the search for Disappeared. Friends of FAFG recognizes the incredible and committed protests of the indigenous authorities which were crucial to the successful democratic transition.

Comprehensive Forensic Approaches for the Disappeared in Mexico

Friends of FAFG and FAFG continue to support and accompany Mexican State search institutions with investigation protocols, inter-institutional collaboration, and forensic capacity-building to identify the outstanding number of reported missing and disappeared persons. During the final trimester of 2023, project highlights include the technical accompaniment provided by FAFG experts during family reference sample taking campaigns and exhumation processes.



FAFG provided accompaniment to the National Human Identification Center (CNIH) during reference sample campaign in Tamaulipas (pictured above) and Colima, taking **136 total samples**. Additionally, **270 reference samples** were delivered to FAFG's genetics lab for processing and analysis before they will be added to the CNIH genetic database. FAFG also supported the technical process of excavation and exhumation in the De la Rosa Municipal Pantheon in Durango (pictured below) where human remains belonging to a minimum of **51 individuals** were recovered.



[Read more about the project](#)

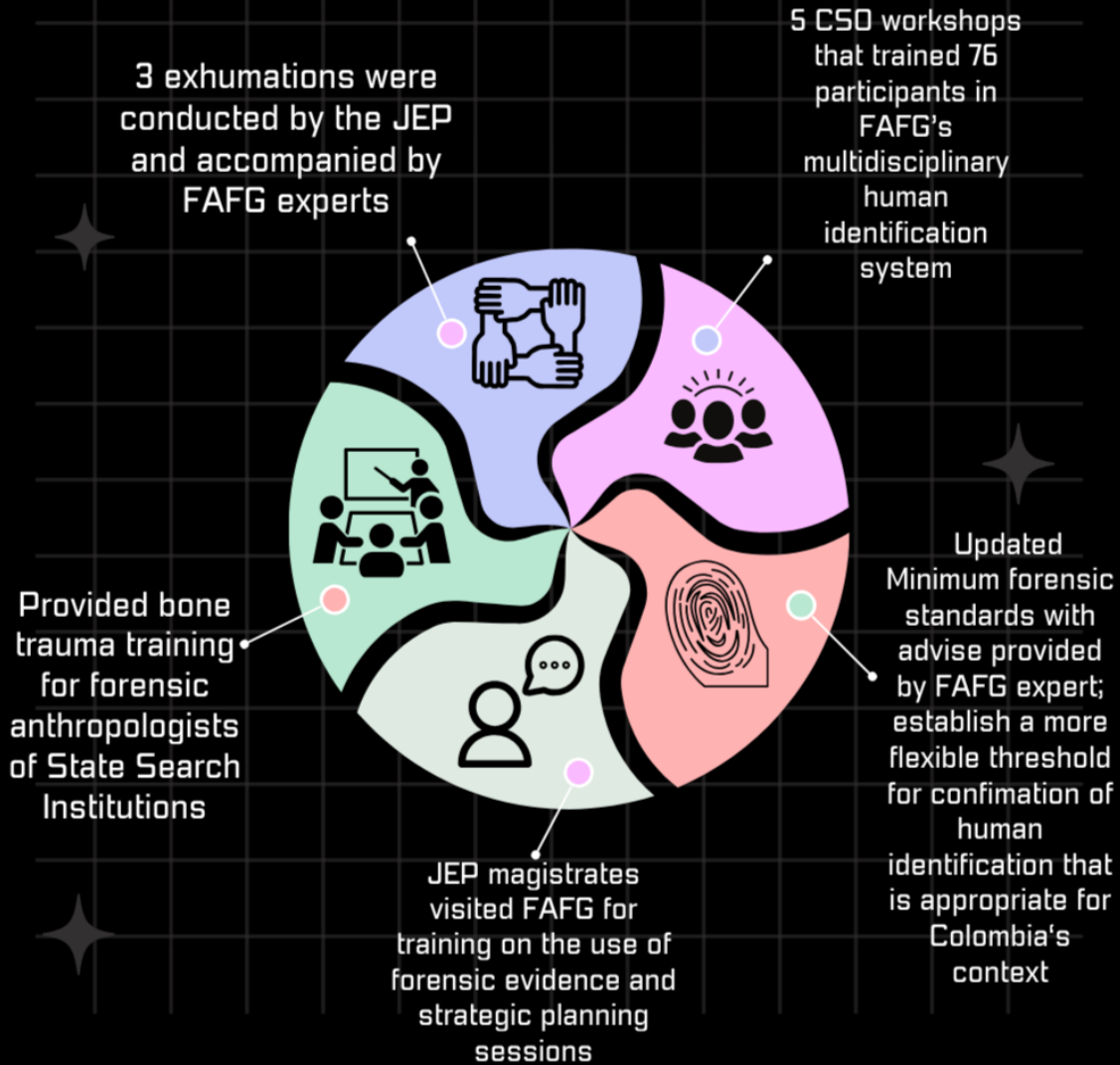
Forensic Assistance for the Disappeared in Colombia

Friends of FAFG and FAFG continue to provide technical guidance, offer forensic strategies, and accompany forensic processes in Colombia. During the last quarter of 2023, a key achievement was the conclusion of the process to update the Minimum Standards for Human Identification protocol. The process represented a logistical challenge in which FAFG led and consolidated the differing perspectives and organizational values of 15 different state institutions and civil society

organizations to reach a consensus on the new protocol which is significantly more flexible and appropriate for the Colombian context. During the presentation of the updated standards, FAFG's Director of Forensic Genetics Mishel Stephenson (pictured above) was invited to present FAFG's evaluation of the standards and its roles as a facilitator of the discussions and as a technical expert throughout the process.



YEAR IN REVIEW: COLOMBIA 2023



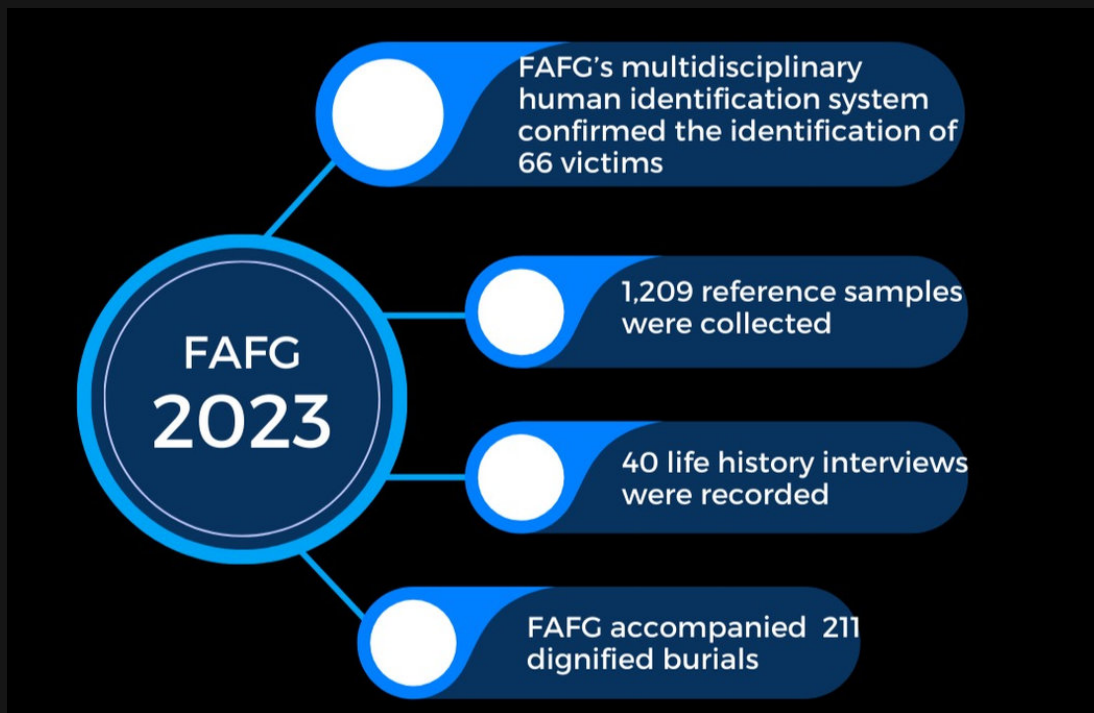
Additionally, in recent months FAFG accompanied 2 exhumations conducted by the Technical Forensic Assistance Group (GATEF) of the Special Jurisprudence for Peace (JEP) in Medellín and Marsella, Colombia (see photo below). The interventions led to the successful recovery of human remains corresponding to a minimum number of 65 individuals.



Forensics for Truth, Justice, and Memorialization

The Forensics for Truth, Justice, and Memorialization promotes transitional justice and accountability through forensic investigations with the active participation of victims' families. The past fall was a tumultuous time in Guatemala that affected the FAFG, civilians, and human rights defenders across the country, as the President-elect Bernard Arévalo faced a "legal coup" led by corrupt actors looking to keep him and the Semilla party from taking office. In protest of the failure to respect democracy, a National Strike lasted for 3 weeks in October and put FAFG's fieldwork on hold. Additionally, legal obstacles put in place by the Public Prosecutor's Office to bureaucratize cases from the Internal Armed Conflict have led to lengthy processing times to achieve permissions to exhume and return identified bodies to family members.

Despite these challenges, FAFG continued to move forward with investigations, achieving the following results in 2023:



Meanwhile, the FAFG is developing an online platform to showcase and share the San Juan Comalapa Memorial for Victims of Enforced Disappearance with a wider international audience. FAFG hopes to launch the website in the coming months. From October to December 2023, the Memorial hosted activities to celebrate Day of the Dead and visits from the students from the Rafael Landívar University's Quetzaltenango Regional Campus (see below picture), as well as the Forensic Academy V.



Global Forensic Academy

The **Forensic Academy V** took place in November 2023 and featured 13 participants from Algeria, Syria, Afghanistan, Gambia, Morocco, Philippines, Tunisia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka who traveled to Guatemala City for an immersive training on FAFG's multidisciplinary human identification approach (see photo).

Meanwhile the **Global Forensic Academy (GFA)** concluded its call for applications in December. Friends of FAFG and FAFG are



currently planning the two workshops in Guatemala (May and August 2024), and a 1-week joint workshop in Rwanda scheduled for fall 2024. As Friends of FAFG look forward to the new iteration of the forensic academy (GFA), we proceed with the lessons learned from the past 5 forensic academies. Friends of FAFG and FAFG were fortunate to receive 71 applications from 37 different countries for the upcoming academy. Thank you if you shared the application or applied!

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