A Primer to International Forensic Investigations of War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity

"When I walked from my house I would walk past the open graves. The military were shooting people near our village and just dumping their bodies" - Yusuf Mohamed Duwali (Witness from Hargeisa)

In this seminar I will outline the different stages of an international forensic investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity. I will illustrate the different steps using the example of the joint investigation of the Peruvian Forensic Anthropology Team (EPAF) and the Somaliland War Crimes Investigation Committee (WCIC) into forced disappearances during the end of the Siad Barre regime in the 80’s. During the 80’s the Somali Armed Forces targeted civilians in the northwest of Somalia (today Somaliland) in order to quash the separatist Somali National Movement. More than 220 mass graves are known in Somaliland, with an estimation of 60,000 to 200,000 bodies.

International Forensic Investigations into crimes against humanity differ substantially from e.g. forensic investigations into homicides in the US or Europe, in terms of logistics, funding, working conditions, safety and aim. In this seminar, I will outline the different stages as well as their specifics.