

Minister for Europe praises work of Western Balkans Missing Persons Group

The Minister for Europe, Sir Alan Duncan, met with representatives of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) and the 'Missing Persons Group' in the margins of the Western Balkans Berlin Process Summit in Poznan.

The Missing Persons Group, comprising representatives of the domestic institutions responsible for missing persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, was established with UK funding support after the London Western Balkans Summit in 2018. It carries out work across the region to help solve 12,000 cases of persons still missing following the conflicts of the 1990s.

The group reported on its progress made over the past year to the Minister, including establishing operational groups to exchange information and to agree joint actions to resolve individual 'no name' cases, creating a landmark regional public database of active missing persons cases and identifying clandestine gravesites for future joint excavations. The Minister for Europe Sir Alan Duncan said:

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During the conflicts of 1990s, approximately 40,000 people disappeared in the Western Balkans, never to be seen again. Many of them were victims of ethnic cleansing and other atrocities: they were murdered and ended up in anonymous mass graves.

To this day, this remains a heart-breaking, agonising legacy of the conflict. But the region also has an incredible story to tell of accounting for those missing. To date, more than 70 percent of those reported missing at the end of the fighting in the Western Balkans have been accounted for. No other post-conflict region has ever achieved such a high rate of resolving missing persons cases.

There is still scope to do more: through the expert DNA technologies to improve identification, through encouraging public engagement in the search for information and most importantly through cooperation between institutions across the region, for example to uncover clandestine gravesites. The UK is doing everything to fund programmes and shape action, which can make a material difference to this painful legacy of the conflict.

The Minister met Berlin Process Foreign Ministers during the summit where he outlined the UK's enduring commitment to supporting reconciliation and regional cooperation. Prime Minister, Theresa May, will meet Berlin Process leaders on Friday where she will set out how the UK is implementing its pledge to double UK support to £80million and to double UK staff working on

security challenges in the Western Balkans region.

Further information