



General Forensics

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): Management of the dead under Islamic law

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ABSTRACT

Many civilisations and religions regard death as a transitional period, bridging one stage of life with another. Protecting the dead and thus ensuring that human remains are respected is essential to ensure dignity for all and to show respect for the feelings of loved ones who are still alive. Islamic law contains many rules to that effect, which must guide the actions of forensic specialists, including during armed conflict and other situations of violence. This paper looks at the humanitarian needs around the issue of the dead in conflict and emergency situations through the perspective of Islamic law.

Introduction

Religions, traditions and cultural practices influence the ways in which human remains are managed. In Islam, human dignity is a right given by God to all people, who are referred to in the Qur'an as God's successors on earth and entrusted with the responsibility of *'imrāh al-arḍ* (roughly translated, creating civilisation on earth). Regardless of whether they are dead or alive, the dignity and respect required includes the human body, created by God in the perfect shape [1]. In a Hadith (reported sayings, deeds and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad) narrated by his wife 'Āishah (d. 678), the Prophet Muhammad said that *"breaking the bone of a dead person is equivalent to breaking it when the person is alive"* [2–6]. This Hadith underlies the fundamental principle of respecting the deceased in Islam [7], and in one sense any crime committed against the deceased remains punishable in the same way as it was when the person was alive. Burying human remains is therefore one of the ways of ensuring the dignity and respect of the dead and respecting their living loved ones.

In some countries, there is a closer adherence to tradition and interpretation of scriptures which may impact on aspects of the management of the dead [8]. Previous texts by the authors have provided an in-depth overview of the Islamic law position on specific challenges and questions relating to International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to assist forensic specialists working within Muslim contexts [9,10]. This text, however, addresses several contemporary issues and challenges faced by forensic specialists pertinent to the management of the dead in Muslim contexts. These issues and challenges include the search for and

collection of human remains, the repatriation of remains and personal effects, quick burial, disposition of the deceased, collective graves, burial at sea, prohibition of mutilation, autopsy and the exhumation of human remains. The main objectives of this article are twofold: firstly, to give a brief overview of the Islamic law position on these specific questions and challenges, and secondly, provide advice, guidance or insights into how forensic specialists face and adapt to these challenges. This paper addresses the general aspects of Islamic law pertaining to the handling of the dead, however there are numerous variations in Islamic traditions throughout the World, and some specificities are not developed here.

Search for and collection of the dead

Searching for and the collection of human remains is a fundamental forensic practice and an obligation under the Geneva conventions [11–16]. In parallel, it is one of the first and obvious obligations in the process of respecting the remains of heroes/martyrs whose heroism and sacrifices ensured that Islam survived. Historically, Islamic rulings were driven by practical concerns. Respecting the human remains of the deceased necessitated giving them a decent burial in order to, first, prevent their bodies from being preyed upon by wild animals, and second, allow their families and loved ones to visit their graves. Such concerns remain relevant today.

Hadith collections and Sirah (biographies of the Prophet Muhammad) literature indicate that during the Prophet's lifetime on the battlefield, women provided inter alia the humanitarian acts and

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services given by health-care personnel and aid societies in contemporary armed conflicts. One of the roles included, in the words of al-Rubi' bint Mi'wwidh bin 'Afrā' (d. 665), "repatriating the injured and dead bodies back to al-Madinah" [17,18].

The quotation of the words of al-Rubi' showing that women took part in the evacuation of human remains of Muslims and the documentation of fatalities in every military engagement, particularly in the Sīrah literature, makes an important point. It shows that the search for and collection of dead bodies are essential actions that must be taken to ensure respect for the dignity of human bodies. For example, after the cessation of hostilities in the Battle of Uḥud in March 625, the Prophet Muhammad asked his companions to search for Sa'd ibn al-Rabi' (d. 625) to find out if he was among the fatalities or if he was still alive. In the same battle, the Prophet Muhammad searched for the body of his uncle Ḥamzah (d. 625) after the cessation of fighting [19]. The search for and collection of the dead during the Prophet's lifetime is documented in the available Sīrah literature because, firstly, it was much easier during this period compared to later periods in Islamic history since the size of the Muslim army and consequently its fatalities and casualties at the time were much smaller, and secondly, historians wanted to document everything that was reported about the life of the Prophet. The significance of documenting the Prophet's sayings, actions and tacit approvals, which all constitute the Sunnah (tradition) of the Prophet, is that it acts as the second source of Islamic legislation after the Qur'an. Therefore, the Sunnah shows that the search for, identification and collection of dead bodies among the Muslim army is an obligation for Muslims.

The search for loved ones (alive or dead) can generate anguish and suffering in the families, regardless of cultural, spiritual or religious affiliation. The feelings described by families are as if the missing individual is psychologically present within the family but not physically present due to the unknown proof of death or permanent loss [134]. This underlines the importance of searching for and collecting remains of individuals in order to not only uphold the obligations set forth by the Geneva conventions or the Islamic rules, but to elevate the suffering of the kinship.

Repatriation of the remains and personal effects of the dead

Burying the deceased is seen as a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*) in the Muslim community. The entire Muslim community will be guilty if a Muslim body is not buried [20], unless this was beyond their knowledge or capacity. This can be extended to the practice of returning the remains of Muslim soldiers from the battlefield to their families, with parties to conflict required to facilitate the return of remains (even those of the opposing party) [21]. There may be a request or an expectation by the family to repatriate the deceased to the families or where they originally migrated from [22,23]. However, repatriation efforts for Muslim individuals could be problematic due to the necessity for a quick burial and no embalming (perception of mutilation of the body) [24], compounded by the increasing pressure to immediately bury the deceased instead of repatriation [25].

Returning personal effects of the deceased is a long debated and seldom followed 'right', even if advised under IHL [13,14,21,26,27]. Practice indicates that the personal effects which can be returned include last wills, other documents of importance to the next of kin, money and all articles of an intrinsic or sentimental value [13,14,21,27,28]. However, under classical Islamic law, the property of a defeated non-Muslim enemy became war booty. In brief, one fifth of the booty is to be distributed to certain beneficiaries [29] and the rest is to be distributed to the army. Some Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī jurists give the ruler the freedom to return property to the defeated adversary. The general and strict rule is that the ruler is the one in charge of distributing the booty [30] and, therefore, it is prohibited for Muslims to take anything from the booty before it is given to them by the ruler; this constitutes an act of looting, which is a major sin/ crime in Qur'an 3:161 [31–33].

Quick burial

In Islamic law and Muslim cultures, respect is demonstrated by burying the deceased, with preference (or *mustahab*) for the deceased to be buried as soon as possible after death [34–38]. There is no specific indication on the time period between death and burial, however this can be dependent on several factors. Coincidentally, cremation is prohibited under Islamic law as it is considered a violation of the dignity of the human body [39–41].

A quick burial of the deceased is considered respectful [42] and is encouraged before the decomposition stage of putrefaction in order to preserve the dignity of the individual [43]. Decomposition of remains can be accelerated in countries with high temperatures, and other associated contributing environmental factors (e.g. humidity), and in situations where there is inadequate refrigeration or electricity – adding to the distress of the family and reducing the time between death and burial. As rightly noted by Gatrad, the greater the time period before burial of the deceased, the greater the distress and burden to the family [44].

However, there are documented situations where there can be a delay in burial and is encouraged. In historical cases of *almaṭ'ūn* (a plague-ridden person), *al-maflūj* (a hemiplegic person) and *al-masbūt* (a comatose person), some jurists advocated that Muslims wait for *ya'ūm wa laylah* (a day and a night) until the death of persons in such cases is confirmed [45,46]. Additionally, if the death is suspicious or due to criminal action, the burial is to be postponed until the body is examined (Autopsy) [47]. There are cases where burial can be delayed to retrieve items of interest from inside of the body [43], or to allow for the relatives of the deceased to travel (before onset of putrefaction) [48].

There are additional challenges encountered when the remains are unclaimed or unidentified. The pressure (religious, societal or cultural) to bury the deceased regardless of identification and prevent further decomposition is high. If burial of an unidentified or unclaimed individual occurs, families of the deceased risk being in pain for the rest of their lives due to being unable to identify and visit the graves of their loved ones.

To overcome these challenges, forensic practitioners can assist by providing resources and alternative options while engaging community leaders, religious leader and local authorities. Providing suitable refrigeration and electrical supply can provide additional time to examine the remains, allow for relatives to travel and delay the onset of putrefaction of the remains. In the case of unidentified remains, refrigeration and electricity can provide additional time to examine the remains and collect the necessary information for identification. Additionally, the remains can be buried in a clearly marked and recorded grave for future exhumation (if permissible) as outlined in the Management of Dead Bodies after Disasters field manual [11].

Furthermore, limbs of individuals (still alive or not) and body parts (including hair, fingernails and teeth) are to be buried to ensure totality of the individual after death [43,49–51]. There are some Muslim communities, such as those on Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, who bury their extracted teeth prior to death [52]. Additional limbs and body parts are to be buried next to or within the grave of the individual [53], although it is debated whether Islamic burial rituals are needed for these additions [54].

Final disposition of remains

Respect for the deceased and their graves, regardless of religion, is stipulated in the Geneva conventions, in the ICRC Customary Law Study and in Islamic law [13,15,28,55]. As previously stated, there is an obligation to search for, collect and bury the dead. This includes the repatriation of remains where applicable. However, in the case where a party does not bury its own dead, then it becomes the obligation of Muslim to attend to the dead. The Andalusian jurist Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), of the extinct Zāhirī school, justifies this obligation by

arguing that if Muslims do not bury the deceased of their enemy in this case, the bodies will decompose or be scavenged, which will be tantamount to mutilation, prohibited under Islamic law [56]. In addition, some jurists have also argued that burying the deceased of the enemy serves the *maṣlahah* (public interest) of the Muslims because it prevents harm to others [57,58] (public health grounds). This is probably based on the misconception that the bodies of the deceased can spread diseases that they previously did not have before death [11], on the misunderstanding of the epidemic.

As with other religions, the status of the dead can vary and this can be reflected in their burial practice [59]. Islamic law has developed detailed regulations regarding the final disposition of deceased Muslims, and has made a separate body of rules for the disposition of the *shahīd* (martyr, plural *shuhadā'*). Succinctly, classical Muslim jurists unanimously identify the martyr as one who dies in fighting against the *kuffār* (unbelievers) – precisely, non-Muslim enemy belligerents [60]. The majority of the jurists agreed that the same regulations that apply to martyrs apply in the case of inter-Muslim fighting such *bughāh* (armed rebellion) for example [61].

Contrarily, a Muslim who is killed by natural disasters, catastrophes, burned or drowned unrelated to conflict undergoes the ordinary process of final disposition as those who die in normal circumstances [62]. This is similar to an *al-murtath*, one who was injured in conflict but then lived a normal life before dying of the injury received in the war, undergoes the ordinary process of final disposition as those who die in normal circumstances [63].

Therefore, based on the process of handling the dead bodies of the Muslim martyrs in the Battle of Badr and the relevant reports attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, Muslim jurists agree that the following three rules should be observed exclusively in the case of martyrs;

First, with the exception of mainly Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. 712–713) and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), Muslim jurists agree that there should be no ritual washing for the body of the martyr [64]. This is argued for the practical rationale versus the theological rationale; martyrs of the Battle of Uḥūd were buried without the ritual purification because it was not practically possible to bring water from Medina to the battlefield in the desert for the large number of the deceased [65], while burying the martyrs in their blood is seen as a testimony to their great status and the sacrifices they made [66,67].

Second, there should be no shrouding of the martyrs, they should be buried in the same clothes they were killed in [64,68].

Third, no funeral prayer should be performed on the bodies of the martyrs [69,70].

Collective graves

Individual burials for bodies, with graves that are marked and maintained, are consistently recommended in forensic practice and stipulated in the Geneva Conventions [15,71–74]. Islamic law does not deviate from this recommendation, and stipulates that every individual should be buried in an individual grave [75–77].

Considerations for collective burials have been made under certain circumstances in both forensic practice and Islamic law, usually in relation to Mass Fatality events [71–73,78]. It was in the Battle of Uḥūd that Muslims suffered the highest recorded number of fatalities at that time in a single military encounter, and the Muslims told the Prophet Muhammad that it was difficult for them to dig individual graves for each of the seventy martyrs. Hence, the Prophet told them to dig deeper and bury two or three in each grave. Based on this precedent, Muslim jurists agree that collective graves are permitted in cases of necessity such as in armed conflicts and other situations of violence or natural disasters [79,80]. Another interpretation of permissible collective graves is that they are permissible after the previous bodies have become dust [42].

Collective graves for the deceased, usually from the same family, are common in many Muslim countries. This can be because of the shortage

of space available for graveyards and/or because of the unaffordability of building a grave for everyone [81]. It is worth adding here that there are different Islamic rulings [82] and regional, cultural and traditional practices throughout the Muslim world regarding the digging and/or building of graves and marking graves with the names of the deceased. For example, in some countries graves are built over the ground and marked with the name(s) of the deceased and date of death in order to identify the different bodies, which is permissible in Islamic law according to Fatwa 4341 given by the current Grand Mufti of Egypt on 7 March 2018 [83]. Nonetheless, in other Muslim countries, bodies are buried under the ground without the names of the deceased. Notably, collective graves, with limited possibility for traceability of the deceased, is a consistent challenge worldwide regardless of religious, spiritual or cultural context [73,78,84,85].

There is debate around the possibility of separate collective graves, which is dependent on the gender or religious alignment of the individual. It is argued that male and females should be buried in separate graves and if necessity dictates otherwise, classical Muslim jurists add that a barrier of dust should be placed between the bodies [75,86]. Meanwhile, Muslims and non-Muslims should be buried in separate graves where possible [87]. However, if the body of a dead child is found and their religious identity cannot be identified, the body should be buried in a Muslim grave [88].

Burial at sea

Deaths can occur at sea, however this can cause problems with the need for a quick burial under Islamic law. In the case of a death at sea, there has been deliberation between jurists on the different possibilities presented;

First, if the ship reaches the shore without advanced decomposition of the remains, burial should be postponed until the body can be buried in a grave [89–91]. This ruling is based on the case of Abū Ṭalḥah Zayed ibn Sahl ibn al-Aswad ibn Ḥarām, who died on board a ship at sea and his dead body was kept for seven days until the ship reached the first island where the body could be buried [90,92,93].

Second, if advanced decomposition will occur before the ship reaches shore, then it should be tied to pieces of wood and placed in the water so that it will float, and the waves will take it to the nearest shore. It is hoped that the location is inhabited by Muslims who will respect the deceased and honourably bury it.

Third, if the nearest shore is inhabited by enemies who may desecrate the remains, the remains should be tied to a heavy object and lowered into the sea [94].

In any case, whether the deceased will be buried at sea or not, the Islamic burial rituals must be performed in accordance with the rules set out above. There are cases of deaths at sea, for example on cruise ships, where the logistics of the medico-legal system will prevent the accepted scenarios above and instead a repatriation of the body is required before burial [24,95]. This results in large delays between death and burial or final disposition of the remains.

Prohibition of mutilation

Continuing the protection of the body as part of the respect for human dignity, under the Islamic law, mutilation of the dead, including non-Muslims, is prohibited [34]. Mutilation can be defined and perceived in different ways, here mutilation is any alteration to the body that is perceived as not allowed or authorised. There are many texts that explicitly prohibit the mutilation of remains, including animals, in Islamic law [96–100]. Although there are examples of mutilation recorded [101] and justified by *maṣlahah* (public interest) [102,103] (one example is Autopsy). Overall, it is accepted that mutilation of the dead is prohibited.

In the context of management of the dead, investigation and identification efforts can be impeded if human remains have been

mutilated, not to mention the psychological effect on kinship relations regardless of religious, cultural or societal affiliation [73]. Forensics specialists are to familiarise themselves with the Islamic law positions on the issues and challenges with which they are confronted in Muslim contexts and engage with jurists, so that they can better communicate their humanitarian and scientific messages and in most cases overcome those challenges.

Autopsy

Autopsy or post-mortem examination, is the dissection of the remains of a deceased individual for educational, scientific or medico-legal purposes (determining the cause of death). Although debated for the permissibility (or non-permissibility) under Islamic law, this practice is known in Islamic history [9,104]. The intention behind the identification process and conducting an autopsy on the deceased plays a significant role on whether the autopsy is allowed or permissible [105]. The Arabic word *tashrīh*, used for anatomy/autopsy, culturally and psychologically indicates in the mind of Arabic-speakers the act of cutting the body into pieces or at least cutting the corpse open in a cruel way. Based on the principle of *maṣlaḥah* (public interest) and the Islamic legal maxims *al-ḍarūrāt tubīḥ al-maḥẓūrāt* (necessity overrides the prohibition) and *ikhtiyār akhaf al-ḍararayn* (choice of the lesser of two evils), most Muslim jurists and major Islamic law and fatwa councils in many Muslim countries permit autopsies both for criminal investigations and scientific and educational benefits. It is still necessary to raise awareness in Muslim societies about advancements in forensic science and to correct misconceptions that post-mortem examination amounts to cruel mutilation of dead bodies [104].

It is understood that autopsy standards are variable depending on the country and medico-legal systems [106]. In some cases, autopsies can be carried out without consent from the family [107,108]. It is recommended that the religious needs of the family and/or the deceased must be communicated at the time of notification of death (quick burial, rejection of autopsy, etc) [107]. Additional logistical hurdles within the medico-legal system can add to the delay of burying the individual, which can be the emotional and psychological basis of rejecting an autopsy [43,109]. Considerations for autopsy could be to reduce delays prior/post autopsy, reducing the invasiveness of the autopsy, covering parts of the body that are not of interest in that moment, and conducting the autopsy only with the necessary practitioners in a private room [105,107,110]. Some cases require an external post-mortem examination even in the case of an objection to a full traditional post-mortem examination, which can still add to the delay in burial [107].

Alternatives to traditional post-mortem examinations (such as computed tomography, MRI or ultrasound) are increasing in popularity and usage in medico-legal systems [111]. Virtual post-mortem examinations provide a less invasive and potentially less time intensive approach that aligns with religious needs [112,113]. These virtual alternatives to traditional post-mortem examination should be prioritised over the traditional methods when utilised for religious or cultural reasons [105]. However, it is understood that not all facilities have this capacity or capability, especially in under resourced contexts where humanitarian issues may be a concern.

Depending on the medico-legal system and the complexity of the autopsy, virtual post-mortem examinations may not be sufficient enough for specific cases. There is a tendency to use both methods in conjunction, leading to virtual post-mortem examinations improving the quality of the post-mortem examinations [106,113]. With caution, virtual post-mortem examinations should only replace traditional post-mortem examination when consent is withheld for the traditional [112]. In the case of virtual post-mortem examinations replacing traditional post-mortem examinations, there is the possibility to not result in a diagnosis or lead to systematic errors in mortuary statistics [106]. The current Islamic position on autopsy and modern scientific

achievements can help in minimising the popular objection to post-mortem examinations in Muslim contexts.

Handling of bodies by the opposite sex

Throughout history, religious, cultural and traditional norms have shaped interactions between sexes. There are some conservative traditions and norms (on societal and individual levels) dictating interactions between sexes that may be contradictory or stricter than Islamic law. A notable challenge is the examination of patients by health-care professionals of the opposite sex, particularly when this involves touching the skin or uncovering the body. Practitioners should ensure the privacy of the individual to maintain their modesty, and allow for the preference of same sex physicians where possible [114]. Overall, understanding and respecting Islamic law, beliefs, traditions and norms are invaluable for better communication with individuals and their kinship [115].

Muslim medical professionals and Islamic law experts have been working together over the last few decades to respond to new medical issues and develop Islamic medical ethics [116–118]. The Majma' al-Fiqh al-Islāmī (Islamic Law and Jurisprudence Council) affiliated to the Jeddah-based Muslim World League issued Decree No. 85/12/d8 in its eighth conference, held in Brunei on 21–27 June 1993, stated the following;

First, Muslim female patients should be examined by Muslim female medical professionals.

If Muslim female medical professionals are not available, then the second allowance is by a trusted female non-Muslim medical professional.

Third, if there are no female medical professionals, a Muslim male medical professional should perform the examination.

Finally, if any of the above is not possible, a non-Muslim male medical professional should do the examination.

In case of examination by medical professionals from the opposite sex, the spouse or a *maḥram* (a relative with whom marriage is prohibited) should be present during the examination in order to avoid the prohibited *khalwah* (seclusion between a non-*maḥram* male and a female) [119,120].

The handling of the dead by forensic specialists of the opposite sex, in principle, follows the same Islamic position on the examination of patients by medical professionals of the opposite sex [110,121]. However, in cases where *al-ḍarūrāt tubīḥ al-maḥẓūrāt* (necessity overrides the prohibition) applies (lack of same sex practitioners), the recommended rules related to the sexes no longer apply, underlying the overall stance when it comes to Islamic management of the dead [114,122]. Accommodating and respecting Muslim religious and cultural needs without impeding on the work of forensic specialists.

Exhumation of human remains

Respect for the deceased is the underlying principle in both Islamic law and IHL [34]. This respect can include the interpretation of not exhuming graves (without necessity) and the association of the term *naḥsh al-qubūr* (exhumation of graves) to grave robbing [123]. Respect for the deceased is based on the interpretation of the law and jurists' description, therefore there are reservations and questions around the permissibility of exhumations [124].

There are situations where the exhumation of graves can be permissible due to previous examples of exhumation in Islamic law. According to a Hadith narrated by Anas ibn Mālik (d. 712), when the Prophet Muhammad arrived at Medina, he built a mosque in a place where some graves were exhumed and palm trees were cut down [125]. Furthermore, Jābir ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amr, one of the Muslims whose father was buried in a collective grave with the body of 'Amr ibn al-Jumūh ibn Zayd ibn Ḥarām al-Anṣārī in the battle of Uḥud, explains how much pain he was in because his father's body was buried in a

collective grave on the battlefield in Uḥud, about five kilometres from where he was living in Medina, and that he did not rest until his father's body was transferred after six months to an individual grave in Medina [126,127]. Finally, Shaykh Makhlūf, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, issued a fatwa permitting the transfer of human remains of "the last Ottoman sultan, 'Abd Al-Majīd, and his wife, who were embalmed and buried in France, to be buried in Egypt" [54]. These three cases of exhumation outline some of the possible instances in which exhumation of the deceased can be permissible under Islamic law.

There are additional examples of exhumations that may be permissible under Islamic law although deliberated on; religious purposes, civil liability cases, and public interest. There are certain instances where the individual can be exhumed for religious purposes and where exhumation can be rejected. One reason for exhumation is the burial of a body without ritual washing, however exhumations can be rejected for individuals who were not shrouded or funeral prayer was not performed [75,128,129]. In regards to civil liability, there is support from jurists to exhume individuals from graves who have valuable belongings buried with them (as it should be passed to the heir), a landowner asking for removal of grave from their property and the retrieval of a living foetus within the womb of the deceased (right of the living surpasses that of the deceased) [34,75,105,128,130,131]. Additionally, public interest calls for exhumation of graves when they have been compromised or to build public roads [132,133].

While exhumations can be permissible under Islamic law, as noted above, forensic practitioners should familiarise themselves with the religious, societal and cultural norms of their context. This will assist their ability to undertake informed decisions to ensure respect for the deceased.

Conclusion

Although it emerged over fourteen centuries ago, Islamic law still has an impact on the lives of hundreds of millions of the over 1.7 billion of today's Muslim population. As shown above, Islamic rules are still being revisited and deliberated by both local and international Islamic law institutions as well as Islamic law experts, and average Muslims are keen to learn about and follow Islamic law. Nonetheless, the legal, technical and specialised forensic expertise that institutions such as the ICRC have developed are indispensable for achieving the protection of the dead in contemporary armed conflicts in Muslim contexts.

As outlined in this article, there are some situations in which Islamic law and standardised forensic practice are in agreement. These situations include; the search for and the collection of the dead, final disposition, burial in individual graves, and the mutilation of the dead (not autopsy or embalming). If the forensic practitioners are in agreement with the community leaders, religious leaders and local authorities on the previously mentioned situations, no additional resources or compromises will be needed to carry out the standardised forensic practice.

However, the remaining situations outlined in this article are permissible under Islamic Law but pose some challenges in terms of logistics or require a deep understanding of the context. Overall, to overcome these challenges outlined, it is recommended that forensic practitioners can assist by providing resources and alternative options while engaging community leaders, religious leader and local authorities. Recommendations have been summarised below.

- The return of personal effects from the deceased have a different set of rules under Islamic Law depending on the context, this should be discussed at length with the community, religious leaders and local authorities to determine the most appropriate action for that context.
- There are some cases of collective graves due to a variety of reasons, and in this specific case, the grave(s) are to be marked and well documented with the name(s) of the deceased and date of death in order to identify the different bodies.

- The repatriation of remains, burial at sea and the concept of a quick burial require specific accommodations or resources that must be discussed with the community, religious leaders and local authorities. It is recommended that suitable refrigeration and electrical supply are supplied, to allow for additional processing time for the medico-legal system without the onset of putrefaction. While this may increase delays between death and burial or final disposition of the remains, it allows for standard forensic practice to not be impeded.
- For autopsy, the religious needs of the family and/or the deceased must be communicated at the time of notification of death (quick burial, rejection of autopsy, etc). It is recommended to reduce the invasiveness of the autopsy, covering parts of the body that are not of interest in that moment, conducting the autopsy only with the necessary practitioners in a private room, and providing alternative or additional options (external and/or virtual post-mortem examinations) if the traditional post-mortem examination is refused. While autopsies can be permissible or allowed for criminal investigations and scientific and educational benefits, it is possible that it can be refused regardless of if the recommendations were suggested to the family and community. Based on the medico-legal system and context, the traditional post-mortem examination may or may not be completed.
- The handling of the deceased by forensic specialists of the opposite sex follows the Islamic position on the examination of patients by medical professionals of the opposite sex, prioritising the examination of the body by same sex practitioners where possible.
- While exhumations can be permissible under Islamic law, forensic practitioners should familiarise themselves with the religious, societal and cultural norms of their context to determine if exhumations are possible in their specific context.

Conflict of interest

None. The authors whose names are listed certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organisation or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent/licensing arrangements) in the subject matter of the manuscript.

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