

Presidential Address – IAFOCON 2025

Opening – IAFOCON 2025

विद्या ददाति विज्ञानं, न्यायो धारयति जगत् ।

“Knowledge gives rise to Science; Justice sustains the World.”

This timeless call from the **Hithopadesa**, captures the very spirit of IAFOCON 2025, reminding us that Forensic odontology is not a solitary pursuit—it is a collective journey. It unites science with service, justice with law, identity with humanity and India with the world.

Distinguished dignitaries on the dais, dignitaries off the dais, special guests and invitees, treasured national and international guest speakers, IAFO EC and members, Deans and heads of Departments, faculty delegates, dear students and other attendees,

Namaskar.

It is with immense joy and gratitude that I welcome you all to **IAFOCON 2025!**

We are especially privileged to host IAFOCON for the **first time in Gujarat**, at the **National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU)**, the very heartbeat of forensic sciences in our country. Its stature as the world’s first and only university dedicated exclusively to forensic sciences makes it a befitting platform for this event. NFSU sets benchmarks in education, research and innovation, nurturing the next generation of justice-delivery experts. It is truly a delight to have this auspicious event here.

This year’s IAFOCON 2025, is India’s 22nd national and 2nd international conference in collaboration **with the International Organisation of Forensic Odonto-Stomatology (IOFOS)**. This collaboration is not merely symbolic. It signifies that India is at the centre of global forensic odontology.

On Behalf of IAFO, I am deeply honoured to extend a most heartfelt welcome to our distinguished Chief Guest of the day, (Prof) Dr. Manik Saha, Hon’ble Chief Minister of Tripura and to our esteemed Guest of Honour, Shri Manoj Agarwal, DGP-CID. Your dignified presence here today has added immense prestige to this occasion and has made this day a truly historic one for the entire forensic odontology fraternity.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all our esteemed members of the **conference organizing team** – Our respected Patron-in-chief, Dr. J. M. Vyas, Hon’ Vice-Chancellor, Pof. Dr. Junare Campus Director, Shri. C. D. Jadeja, Executive Registrar, Prof. Dr. G. Rajesh Babu, Dean, School of Medico-Legal Studies, Organizing Co-Chairs – Dr. Rakesh Yadav Sir, Associate Dean and Dr. Bhoomika Patel, Our organizing secretary – Dr. Hardi Mendpara, Scientific Chairperson – Dr. Dhvani Patel and Scientific Co-Chairpersons, conference treasurer and other dedicated faculty and student members of NFSU whose tireless and meticulous efforts made this event possible. I also **warmly welcome my IAFO family**—our Executive Committee members, past and present- **my true backbone of strength.**

Our theme this year is “**Advancing Forensic Odontology: From Theory to Reality.**” And truly, there could not have been a more urgent, more relevant time for us to reflect on how far we have come, and where we are headed.

Our Journey as IAFO

Has been long. When IAFO began in 2000, we were just a handful of pioneers—small enough to fit into a single operatory room. I remember my friend teased me back then – “A forensic Odontologist – are you going to examine ghost teeth?” Today we are dental detectives - decoding hidden clues in teeth that survive fire, water, catastrophic accidents and time, turning them into evidence that can stand in court, to help the law uncover the truth. For over two decades, IAFO remained at about 500 life members. Yet in the past two years alone, we have welcomed more than 100 new members, now standing at **687 and counting**—a milestone that reflects the growing recognition of forensic odontology in India’s medico-legal framework.

We are no longer the footnote in medico-legal textbooks—we are **frontline responders in times of crisis**, but our strength is drawn from a deeper legacy. Our civilization long recognized the power of teeth in human identification. **Ancient texts spoke of *danta lakshana*—the individuality of dentition.** In modern times, landmark cases proved how a tooth or bitemark or a dental filling/prosthesis can be the key to justice. Since then, forensic odontology has grown into an indispensable pillar of justice.

Everyone calls DNA the gold standard—but in disasters, **DNA may be gold, but enamel shines bright when everything else fades.** I often tell my students and patients to “value your tooth more than a diamond.” To me, a tooth is like the **black box of an airplane**—it endures the harshest conditions, often outlast fire, water, and time and preserves the DNA, the truth, even beyond death.

In the aftermath of the recent airplane crash, forensic odontology stood alongside with DNA and forensic medical experts. One of our members mobilized 50+ undergraduate students of dentistry to assist the DVI team, performing post-mortem dental charting and extracting third molars for DNA when long bone samples were inadequate. Another area of emphasis in identification of charred victims is particularly children, where antemortem dental records may be unavailable in children, post-mortem dental charting—through eruption patterns, mixed dentition (combination of both baby teeth + adult teeth), number of teeth present, and enamel defects—helps estimate age and narrow down the pool of identities to be matched enabling more efficient DNA profiling, thereby saving both time and cost. Where antemortem records exist, AM/PM comparison bridges uncertainty and brings closure.

This is not just science—it is service to humanity.

And it is this very conviction that moved us, as an association, to reach out at the highest level. I sent an **appeal request to our Honourable Prime Minister** on behalf of all 680+ members, urging that forensic odontology be formally integrated into India’s disaster response protocols. Because every filling, every crown, every tooth is not just medical—it is personal. It is identity. And **identity is dignity.**

That is why **our duty does not end at theory—it must extend into action.** And it is through the activities of IAFO that we translate this vision into practice.

Through the Indian Board of Forensic Odontology (IBFO), we have trained and certified over 200 Fellows in the field, equipped with skills in DVI, age estimation, child protection, and bite mark analysis to meet their medico-legal responsibilities. I sincerely thank all IBFO faculty who have dedicated themselves to this rigorous training, shaping the next generation of forensic dentists.

For the first time, in April 2024, IAFO launched the **student research and faculty travel grants** supporting young scholars in their research work and enabling international representation at Forensic conferences. In the past two years, our members have delivered various lectures both within the country and overseas, conducted workshops, and extended patronage to CDE programs and police trainings across the country—spreading awareness of our science. *[One such notable mention is a capacity-building workshop Organized by our President IAFO in collaboration with Panineeya Institute of Dental Sciences & Research Centre on the 29th July 2024 for Police Personnel at Telangana State Police Academy, Himayat Sagar, Hyderabad, with the support of my entire team, particularly our President-Elect – Dr. Ashith B. Acharya and Joint Secretary – Dr. J. Augustine, who went the extra mile and who trained over 600 police personnel on the role of forensic odontology in crime scene evidence preservation and interpretation for medico-legal jurisprudence].

*(This last section was excluded from the presidential address and requested to be inserted in the annual secretary's report, which is to be circulated to all members.)

While our activities over the past reflect the strength of our association, the real essence of a conference lies in its scientific deliberations. IAFOCON 2025 is no exception—our program has been carefully curated to bring the best of theory and practice to every delegate.

Yesterday's pre-conference workshops brought theory to life, from dental age estimation and courtroom preparedness to disaster site identification. They highlighted teeth as both genetic archives and environmental timelines, carrying crucial evidence across generations. I express my gratitude to our eminent pre-conference course conductors for the success of the courses.

From Karnataka to Goa, from Gujarat to Rajasthan—our own national experts bring the depth of Indian forensic science to this stage, bridging theory and reality.

And from Norway to Nepal, from Peru to the UAE, our eminent keynote speakers remind us that forensic odontology has no borders. Their topics span the entire spectrum, proof that our science is as global as it is local. We thank each of you for coming here and enriching our conference with your insights and we are truly fortunate to learn from such diverse forensic experiences. Also, we anticipate our **Young Leaders Symposium** showcasing to us that the future of forensic odontology is not tomorrow—it is already here.

As IAFO expands through training and collaborations, India has witnessed a forensic revolution. With the introduction of the three new criminal laws—**Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)**, **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)**, and **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA)**—forensic science has been given unprecedented importance in criminal justice. What was once optional is now mandatory, calling forensic odontology to step up—not as silent witnesses, but as active participants in justice. **Laws alone cannot deliver justice—it is how we, as professionals respond that will define the future, and it is upon us to chart the course:** — and that brings me to:

Our Roadmap for the Future – From Theory to Reality: Let us look at the steps we must take together-

1. Build a National Dental Record Database –

Without it, our science is crippled. Every clinic, every hospital, every dental college must contribute. Every dental visit should leave a secure digital footprint. This will be the backbone of human identification in both crimes and disasters.

2. Integrate FO into Disaster Protocols –

Forensic odontology must be made a formal part of NDRF and MHA disaster response teams, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with DNA, fingerprint, and forensic medicine experts in every DVI. A forensic odontologist must be mobilized and deployed in every such crisis.

3. We should Collaborate Across Disciplines –

A disaster belongs to no single speciality! It is a call for all humanitarian disciplines to come forward and help. No odontologist alone can solve DVI. We must walk hand in hand with forensic medicine, anthropology, DNA and the police. This is investigative collaborative science.

4. Strengthen Training & Academia -

Expand IBFO-certified training, establish FO cells in state forensic labs and teaching institutions, and promote interdisciplinary collaboration.

5. Embrace Digital Tools & AI -

Artificial intelligence can match ante-mortem and post-mortem dental data faster than human eyes. From AI-powered dental matching to digitization of dental records at the grassroots, we must pioneer technologies that make identification faster, more accurate, and universally accessible.

By actively strengthening these protocols, what is already in place, and implementing those in progress, it will **enable us to move decisively toward the Vikshit Bharat 2047 that we have envisioned for our Nation and ourselves.**

On this note, I conclude and on behalf of IAFO, I wish you all a good conference.

Thank you one and all.

Jai Hind.