



## **Position Paper on the Definitions of Friction Ridge Opinions**

This document outlines recommendations from CanFRWG for the definitions of friction ridge comparison opinions. As well, it provides a recommendation for how to express an identification opinion.

### Definitions

CanFRWG endorses the following three friction ridge opinion definitions:

Identification: the opinion that two friction ridge impressions originate from the same source<sup>1</sup>.

Exclusion: the opinion that two friction ridge impressions did not originate from the same source.

Inconclusive: the opinion that two friction ridge impressions could not be identified or excluded.

CanFRWG recommends using three friction ridge opinions. Agencies can adapt the above definitions to better fit within their internal policies or standard operating procedures. The three opinion scheme outlined above is recommended over other friction ridge opinion schemes, such as the five opinion scheme currently in development by OSAC<sup>2</sup>. CanFRWG believes that the OSAC friction ridge opinions of 'support for same source' and 'support for different source' can be captured and properly articulated with an inconclusive opinion. As well, CanFRWG is concerned that the 'support for same source' and 'support for different source' opinions may be misunderstood and misinterpreted by a layperson trying to evaluate a fingerprint expert's testimony.

### Identification Opinion

CanFRWG endorses the following for expressing an identification opinion:

Based on my training, knowledge and experience, I formed the opinion that the fingerprint marked R#, located on the [description of item here] and the known impression of the [identified finger here] finger on the [insert standard here e.g. C-216] known standard bearing the name [name of accused] originated from the same source.

### Background

In Canadian practice, the term 'identification' was originally defined in 1959-60 by RCMP police officer R.A. Huber and republished in 1972 as follows: *"When any two items contain a combination of corresponding or similar and specific oriented characteristics of such number and significance to preclude the possibility of their occurrence by mere coincidence, and there are no unaccounted for differences, it may be concluded that they are the same, or their characteristics attribute to the same cause."*<sup>3</sup>

Over the years many Canadian Forensic Identification sections adopted SWGFAST guidelines that included the term individualization which was defined by SWGFAST in 2002 as: *"...when a latent print examiner,*

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<sup>1</sup>From [SWGFAST Document #19](#), *Standard Terminology of Friction Ridge Examination*, 'source' is defined as "An area of friction ridge skin from an individual from which an impression originated".

<sup>2</sup>Standard for Friction Ridge Examination Conclusions Ver. 1.0. **2018**. (Currently with a standards development organization)

[https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/2020/03/23/OSAC%20FRS%20CONCLUSIONS%20Document%20Template%202020\\_Final.pdf](https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/2020/03/23/OSAC%20FRS%20CONCLUSIONS%20Document%20Template%202020_Final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Huber, R. A. The Philosophy of Identification. *RCMP Gaz.*, **1972**, pp. 9-14.

*trained to competency, determines that two friction ridge impressions originated from the same source to the exclusion of all others.”<sup>4</sup>*

The discipline has transitioned away from expressing opinions using language that implies absolute certainty such as “to the exclusion of all others” in part due to the constructive criticism of Dr. Simon Cole. As a result of emerging research SWGFAST developed a new definition in 2011 defined as: “... *the decision by an examiner that there are sufficient features in agreement to conclude that two areas of friction ridge impressions originated from the same source. Individualization of an impression to one source is the decision that the likelihood the impression was made by another (different) source is so remote that it is considered a practical impossibility.*”<sup>5</sup>

The 2012 NIST Latent Print Examination and Human Factors report suggested that “...*an identification decision suggests a substantial enough similarity that, based on the examiner’s training and experience, the examiner believes that the two impressions originated from a common source.*”<sup>6</sup>

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) included the following statement on their Friction Ridge Comparison Reports: “*Limitations: It is acknowledged that no scientific basis currently exists to support an individualization to the exclusion of all other persons*”, to prevent overstating the evidence in court.

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<sup>4</sup>SWGFAST, Friction Ridge Examination Methodology for Latent Print Examiners Ver. 1.0. **2002**  
[http://clpex.com/swgfast/documents/methodology/Friction\\_Ridge\\_Examination\\_Methodology\\_for\\_Latent\\_Print\\_Examiners\\_1.0.pdf](http://clpex.com/swgfast/documents/methodology/Friction_Ridge_Examination_Methodology_for_Latent_Print_Examiners_1.0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>SWGFAST, Standards for Examining Friction Ridge Impressions and Resulting Conclusions Ver. 1.0. **2011**  
[http://clpex.com/swgfast/documents/examinations-conclusions/111026\\_Examinations-Conclusions\\_1.0.pdf](http://clpex.com/swgfast/documents/examinations-conclusions/111026_Examinations-Conclusions_1.0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> NIST, Latent Print Examination and Human Factors: Improving the Practice through a Systems Approach. **2012**  
<https://nvlpubs.nist.gov/nistpubs/ir/2012/NIST.IR.7842.pdf>