

Enforced disappearances: UN expert group concerned about the high number of recent cases reported

GENEVA - The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances* reviewed during its 103rd session more than one hundred newly reported cases and examined around 800 updates from governments and sources on previously accepted ones.

The Working Group examined 38 of these cases that have occurred in the last three months under its urgent action procedure. They concerned Bahrain, Cambodia, China, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, Syria, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. “We are especially concerned about the high number of recent cases reported to us. We urge the concerned Governments to swiftly and thoroughly investigate these cases in order to determine the fate and whereabouts of the victims”, observed the experts.

“This high number of recent cases demonstrates that unfortunately enforced disappearances are not an issue of the past but continue to be regularly used in many countries”. “We are particularly concerned about the increase of short-term disappearances in certain countries”, observed the experts. “We would like to remind all States that there is no time-limit for an enforced disappearance to occur, no matter how short it is”, the experts stressed.

In relation to outstanding cases, the Working Group emphasized the importance for States to provide substantive information thereon: “We encourage States to cooperate with us and provide detailed information to clearly establish the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared persons in order to clarify the cases”.

The experts met with family members of disappeared persons and non-governmental organizations. “Hearing the voice of the relatives of the disappeared and support them in the search for their loved ones is core to our humanitarian mandate”, the human rights experts said. They also held meetings with representatives of Governments to exchange views on individual cases and on the issue of enforced disappearance in general as well as with the President of the Human Rights Council and the Truth Commission of the Guerrero State in Mexico.

The group of independent experts also focused on specific country situations, in particular regarding the obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Declaration. Members also discussed their forthcoming and potential country visits, as well as future activities. The Working Group also adopted its annual report as well as the thematic study on the relationship between enforced or involuntary disappearances and economic, social and cultural rights.

The Working Group will hold its 104th session in Geneva from 15-19 September 2014.

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(*) The Working Group is comprised of five independent experts from all regions of the world. The Chair-Rapporteur is Mr. Ariel Dulitzky (Argentina) and the Vice-Chair is Mr. Osman El-Hajjé (Lebanon); other members are Mr. Olivier de Frouville (France), Ms. Jasminka Dzumhur (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Mr. Jeremy Sarkin (South Africa).

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The Working Group was established by the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1980 to assist families in determining the fate and whereabouts of disappeared relatives. It endeavours to establish a channel of communication between the families and the Governments concerned, to ensure that individual cases are investigated, with the objective of clarifying the whereabouts of persons who, having disappeared, are placed outside the protection of the law. In view of the Working Group's humanitarian mandate, clarification occurs when the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person are clearly established. The Working Group continues to address cases of disappearances until they are resolved. It also provides assistance in the implementation by States of the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. For more information, log on to: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disappearances/Pages/DisappearancesIndex.aspx>

How to submit cases to the Working Group?:

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/disappear/docs/Communication_form_E.doc

Read the Working Group's 2012 report to the UN Human Rights Council:

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A.HRC.22.45_English.pdf

Read the Working Group's post-sessional documents for 2013:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disappearances/Pages/Annual.aspx>

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