

Despite pandemic, countries must search for people who have been forcibly disappeared, say UN Experts International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances,

GENEVA (29 August 2020) - Countries must continue to search for victims of enforced disappearances even during COVID-19 pandemic, UN human rights experts said today.*

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Declaration for on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances, and the 10th anniversary of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons against Enforced Disappearances.

To mark International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances on 30 August, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances issued the following statement:

“States around the world must still act urgently to prevent and investigate enforced disappearances during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the search for the victims must continue without delay.

We are particularly alarmed about allegations of enforced disappearances received in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation is all the more worrying as the search and investigation into enforced disappearances are frequently being put on hold because of the restrictions introduced as a result of the pandemic. Victims are often being forgotten, and families are suffering, not knowing the fate of their loved ones. Search and investigation are continuing obligations that must be carried out, with health precautions being taken as necessary.

COVID-19 has also created new and concerning contexts for enforced disappearances. We have seen examples of compulsory quarantine in places of deprivation of liberty, during which families do not know the fate and whereabouts of their relatives. We underline the need for States to ensure families are promptly and systematically informed of any quarantines.

We are also concerned that the suspension of visits has in some cases led to a complete absence of contact between detainees and relatives or representatives, which is conducive to incommunicado detentions, and may lead to enforced disappearances. Continuous contact must be ensured, for example through phone calls or electronic means, and detention monitoring must continue. Alternatives to custody should be considered, and adequate health care and assistance provided.

We are also worried that the COVID-19 pandemic is an added threat to the health of those

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victims of enforced disappearances who are kept hidden in official or unofficial places of detention. We remind States that they must consistently register all detainees and provide up to date information as to their fate and whereabouts.

COVID-19 has created additional risks for migrants too. We issued a [joint statement on migration last year](#), and we now call for concerted efforts to ensure that the search and investigation into the disappearance of migrants continue, and that no State forcibly return or extradite a person to another State where he or she would be in danger of being subjected to enforced disappearance.

In the COVID-19 context, specific measures are also necessary to prevent enforced disappearances and to respect the rights of the victims. For example, States must guarantee that the relatives of people who have died as a result of COVID-19 can identify the remains, and that bodies are dealt with in line with their tradition, religion and culture.

We strongly reaffirm our support and solidarity with all victims of enforced disappearance, their relatives and those helping them in their daily struggle for truth and justice. In these times of crisis, relatives of disappeared persons must be further supported and empowered, and state institutions in charge of the search and investigation must fulfil their functions without delay. All this must be promptly and proactively addressed by States, including through the implementation of specific programmes to mitigate the multifaceted impacts of the pandemic. In that context, we renew our call for all States that have not yet done so to demonstrate officially their commitment against enforced disappearances by expeditiously ratifying the Convention and accepting the competence of the Committee to receive and examine individual and interstate complaints.”

ENDS

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