

GENEVA (21 September 2020) - A group of UN human rights experts today called on the international community to strengthen cooperation to enable timely and effective investigations and prosecutions of those behind enforced disappearances, raising concerns about the multiplying effect of impunity.

“Impunity is a distinctive trait of most enforced disappearances, and it has a multiplying effect, generating additional suffering and anguish for the victims and their families,” Luciano Hazan, the Chair of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances*, told the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

“The international community should not be neutral in the face of such suffering, but rather strengthen cooperation efforts, increase the assistance available to victims, and pursue judicial investigations and prosecutions both at the local and international levels.”

Presenting the Group’s [thematic report](#) on standards and public policies for an effective investigation of enforced disappearances, Hazan stressed that an effective investigation of enforced disappearances must be prompt and include information about the fate and whereabouts of the victims, the circumstances of their disappearance, and the identity of the perpetrators.

“States must also guarantee the autonomy and independence of the authorities charged with the criminal investigation and prosecution, including of the judicial authorities,” he said.

Hazan added that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected enforced disappearances, not only creating new contexts in which these may occur, but also affecting how States respond to them. “The measures adopted to fight against the pandemic such as confinement or the re-deployment of security forces to control their implementation, obviously have affected the capacity of all actors to conduct search and investigation of enforced disappearances,” he said.

In this respect, Hazan referred to eight [Key Guidelines on COVID - 19 and Enforced Disappearances](#), issued last week by the Working Group, jointly with the Committee on Enforced Disappearances. “These guidelines aim to assist and guide member States in adhering to their international obligations related to enforced disappearance, during the COVID-19 pandemic,” he said.

The human rights expert also presented the Working Group’s [annual](#) report of activities, communications and cases; reports on country visits to [Kyrgyzstan](#) and [Tajikistan](#), and the follow-up report to the recommendations made during a past visit to [Turkey](#).

The presentation of the Working Group to the Human Rights Council coincided with the first day of the Working Group’s 122nd session, which is taking place remotely until 30 September. The five independent experts will meet virtually to examine more than 680 cases from 32 countries. A limited number of private meetings will be held with States and other stakeholders.

In continuing to mark the 40th anniversary of the Working Group in 2020, the expert group will co-convene with the Committee on Enforced Disappearances two [public webinars on the search and investigation of enforced disappearances](#) on 23 September (14h00 to 15h30 CEST) and 25 September (12h00 to 13h30 CEST). These will be webcasted through [UN WEBTV](#).

ENDS

*The [Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#) is comprised of five independent experts from all regions of the world. The Chair-Rapporteur is **Mr. Luciano Hazan** (Argentina) and the Vice-Chair is **Mr. Tae-Ung Baik** (Republic of Korea); other members are **Ms. Houria Es-Slami** (Morocco); **Mr. Bernard Duhaime** (Canada) and **Mr. Henrikas Mickevicius** (Lithuania).*

The Working Group was established by the then 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. It also provides assistance in the implementation by States of the [UN Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#) .

The Working Groups are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council’s independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms. Special Procedures mandate-holders are independent human rights experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. They are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.

Watch and learn more about the [history of the Working Group](#), and on [how to submit a](#)

[case](#) to the Working Group.

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