



NACIONES UNIDAS
DERECHOS HUMANOS
OFICINA DEL ALTO COMISIONADO

Colombia

**For the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances
Sunday 30 August 2015**

“Time is of the essence” – UN experts call for global rules for the immediate search of the disappeared

GENEVA (28 August 2015) – *Two United Nations expert groups on enforced disappearances call on States to establish and activate protocols for the immediate search of disappeared persons across the world.*

Speaking ahead of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, on Sunday 30 August, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances urge Governments to activate all means of search of disappeared persons in a systematic way, including through the establishment of protocols.

“Over the last year, we have been working on 246 recent cases of enforced disappearances perpetrated all over the world - a clear indication that this heinous practice is still used in a number of countries. These cases are nevertheless only the tip of the iceberg of thousands of cases which are never reported either because of fear of reprisals or because the security conditions do not allow doing so.

The lack of resources and the insufficient awareness of existing international mechanisms are other reasons why many cases of enforced disappearances are never reported to the United Nations.

Following the activation of the urgent actions procedures by the Working Group and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances over the last year, 13 disappeared persons were found alive, in detention, and sadly two were found dead.

These procedures can make a difference for the relatives in despair:

‘I would like to inform you that due to your constant intervention and monitoring of the situation, XX was released by his abductors. Words cannot express how grateful we are to the Working Group and I request you to personally convey my indebtedness to every member of the group.’

‘Thanks for reading my messages and for taking them into account. I finally have the impression that someone is listening to me and paying attention to the case of my son,’ wrote the mother of a disappeared person.



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'I would like to inform you hereby that because of the impact of strong support and concern shown by your office, xx and xx were safely released.'

'The letter of the Committee was received two weeks ago. A few days later, [the authorities] came to visit us to inform about the investigation and invited us to take part to it. It is the first time after so many months that we have the impression that things are moving again,' wrote jointly the mothers of two disappeared persons.

The experience and use of the tool of urgent actions by the Committee and the Working Group show that in the case of enforced disappearance time is of the essence. The hours and days that follow a disappearance are crucial to find the disappeared person alive. The actions taken in the immediate aftermath of a disappearance cannot be left to hazards but have to be systematized in protocols that permit the immediate activation of all means at disposal for the search of the disappeared.

These protocols for the search of the disappeared need to be established in all States - irrespective of the number of enforced disappearances - and have to presume, at least initially, that the disappeared person must be searched alive.

We call upon governments to take action as soon as a case of disappearance is reported to the authorities and all necessary measures to seek and find the disappeared person and to avoid irreparable harm.

We equally urge governments to guarantee the full protection from all forms of reprisals of those who report cases of enforced disappearances, the authors of the urgent actions requests, the witnesses, the relatives of the disappeared persons, their defence counsels, and all persons taking part in the related investigations.

We also encourage all those whose beloved ones have disappeared, as well as those acting on their behalf, to make use of the tool provided by the urgent action procedures* of the Working Group and of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances."

(*) How to submit urgent actions:

To the Committee on Enforced Disappearances:

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CED/C/4&Lang=en

for enforced disappearances occurring in States parties to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

To the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances:

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disappearances/how_to_use_the_WGEID.pdf

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(*) NOTE TO EDITORS: *During the past year, the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances transmitted 151 requests for urgent actions by family*



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members of disappeared persons. During the same period, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances received 103 requests for urgent actions, out of which 95 were registered, bringing to a total of 126 registered urgent actions for cases of enforced disappearances occurred in States parties to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance since the entry into force of the Convention.

For more information, log on to:

Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances:

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

Committee on Enforced Disappearances:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CED/Pages/CEDIndex.aspx>

Read the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CED/Pages/ConventionCED.aspx>

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