

Practical Information

the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID)

in a nutshell

The WGEID, whose permanent Secretariat is based in Geneva (Switzerland), is made up of five independent experts. The WGEID holds *three regular sessions* during the year.

THE WGEID DOES NOT:

- directly investigate individual cases;
- directly adopt measures of protection against reprisals;
- establish individual or State responsibility in cases of enforced disappearance;
- judge and sanction;
- carry out exhumations;
- grant just satisfaction or forms of reparation; nor
- deal with disappearance perpetrated by non-State actors (e.g. rebel groups).

WHAT ARE THE WGEID'S PROCEDURES?

Urgent Appeals: The WGEID transmits directly (within **1 or 2 days** after receipt) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the country concerned, through the Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva, cases that occurred within the 3 months preceding receipt of the report. For cases that happened before the 3 said months (**standard cases**), the Group may authorize transmission to the government concerned, requesting to carry out investigations and inform it about the results.

General Allegations: allegations are formulated by relatives of disappeared people and NGOs with regard to existing obstacles in given countries to the implementation of the 1992 Declaration. Such allegations are transmitted to governments for their response.

Prompt Intervention for reprisals: the WGEID transmits to the government concerned information concerning cases of intimidation, persecution or reprisal against relatives of disappeared people, witnesses or their families or members of NGOs concerned with disappearances, calling on the government to take steps to protect all the fundamental rights of the persons affected.

Country Visits: upon previous consent by the relevant government, the WGEID can visit a country to assess the overall situation of disappearances. It will then release a report on such visit.

Annual Reports: the WGEID reports annually to the Human Rights Council on its activities, informing also on its communications with governments and NGOs, its

missions, all cases of disappearance received during the year, and the implementation of the 1992 Declaration.

All procedures of the WGEID are **free of charge**.

WHY SHOULD A CASE BE SUBMITTED TO THE WGEID?

The WGEID accepts cases from **any country in the world**. Further, it is *not necessary to exhaust domestic remedies before* submitting a case to the Group. Finally, international pressure may be a key factor in the solution of a case of disappearance or reprisal against people working on it.

IS THERE ANY DANGER IN SUBMITTING A CASE TO THE WGEID?

When submitting a case to the WGEID one can ask for **confidentiality**. This will ensure a certain level of protection and, in case of reprisals, one can send a prompt intervention letter to the WGEID (this is not a “life-jacket” but it has often played a significant role in the prevention of grave violations).

CAN AN INDIVIDUAL SUBMIT A CASE TO THE WGEID ALONE OR DOES HE OR SHE NEED ASSISTANCE?

The cases of disappearance can be submitted to the WGEID by relatives of disappeared themselves or by organizations acting on their behalf (with prior consent of the relatives). Whoever refers the case to the Group shall be able to **maintain the communication with it and to answer promptly** to requests of further information or clarification.

WHAT CAN NGOs DO BEFORE THE WGEID?

First, NGOs can inform on the existence and functioning of the WGEID and create awareness. Further, NGOs can assist relatives of disappeared people in submitting cases to the WGEID or in sending prompt intervention letters. They can also present general allegations and support relatives during country visits, organizing meetings with the WGEID.

IS IT DIFFICULT TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE WGEID?

Information to the WGEID shall be submitted in *writing* (preferably by fax or e-mail). Communications can be written in English, Spanish or French. To contact the WGEID

By e-mail: wgeid@ohchr.org

By Fax. +41 22 917 9006 (please, indicate: “For the attention of: WGEID”).

By mail: Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations, 8-14 Avenue de la Paix
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Please not that a case of enforced disappearance shall **always indicate:**

- 1) full name of the victim;
- 2) day, month and year of disappearance;
- 3) place of disappearance;
- 4) State or State-supported forces considered responsible;
- 5) information about any search which has been made, and,
- 6) identity of the person submitting the communication.

Most cases and replies are **reviewed at the session following their receipt**, if received in sufficient time before the session (at least one month before).

A case remains on the file of the WGEID until it is clarified (this may be for *several years*).

