

Check against delivery

**Commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the International
Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced
Disappearance**



**Ibrahim Salama
Director
Human Rights Treaties Division**

Geneva, 11 March 2016

Excellencies,

Members of the Committee,

Colleagues and Friends,

I am honoured to be among you for this important occasion.

Ten years ago, the General Assembly unanimously adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, a landmark treaty which developed and adapted international human rights law and international humanitarian law with a view to protect persons from the crime of enforced disappearance.

The adoption of this Convention was the result of a long struggle over some forty years, led by both the families of disappeared persons and the international community. I would like to **honour today all those families** who suffered unspeakable pain in the search for their loved ones. In spite of this, many still managed to campaign for the hundreds of thousands who disappeared by founding associations, internationally recognised organisations and movements. It is, in many ways, thanks to them and their conviction that the Convention was adopted.

I would also like to **pay tribute to those States that have supported the Convention**, and notably to France and Argentina, who promoted the Convention during its negotiation and beyond. I thank them, together with Morocco and Japan, for having the initiative to organise this panel. And I would like to remember **Ambassador Bernard Kessedjian**, chair of the Open-Ended Working Group. Thanks to his resoluteness and excellent diplomatic skills, the working group drafted the Convention in less than four years.

Excellencies,

The Convention stems from the horrendous practices of the dictatorships in Latin America in the seventies and eighties. It is however a mistake to consider it a legal tool relevant only to past crimes or to geographically limited areas. Unfortunately, the scourge of enforced disappearance is widespread today.

Enforced disappearance appears in the context of internal conflicts, generalized violence and humanitarian crises as well as in the fight against organized crime and terrorism.

Enforced disappearances are carried out, not only by State actors but also by non-state actors such as paramilitary groups, militias and organized crime, with the connivance or tolerance by the State.

And many people can be victims of enforced disappearance, not only political opponents as was traditionally the case, but also civilian hostages in armed conflicts and migrants as they try to enter host countries.

This underlines the contemporary relevance of this Convention and the work of this Committee. The Convention's definition of enforced disappearance, the duties it places on the State to investigate enforced disappearance, including acts of non-State actors, and its protections from expulsion, refoulement, surrender or extradition of persons in danger of enforced disappearance, all demonstrate that this Convention is relevant to protect not only against past but also current manifestations of enforced disappearance.

I would like to conclude my remarks by calling for universal ratification and effective implementation of the Convention.

To date, only 51 States have ratified the Convention and only 19 have recognised the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive individual communications. And the Committee continues to receive an alarming, and exponentially increasing, number of requests for urgent actions to locate persons who disappeared in States parties. From 62 registered requests for urgent actions in June 2015 the number has raised to 286 to date. No valid grounds can justify such crimes, including State security.

I hope that the 10th anniversary of the Convention will be a springboard to achieve not only universal ratification but also universal respect for its principles over the next 10 years.

I look forward the interesting and rich discussion that will take place today and I am sure it will be of help for our future work.

Thank you.