

**“Countering enforced disappearances today:
Sharing experiences and building strategies”**

100th Session of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances



**Welcoming remarks by Mr. Ivan Šimonović,
Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights**

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Friends and Colleagues,

This event marks the 100th session of the Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances.

I wish to thank the representatives of the Governments of Argentina and France for their support to today's event and their constant contribution to the fight against disappearances. They share this with all the delegations and civil society organizations who are present, showing their support for the Working Group, whose distinguished members are here with us today.

Among us here we also have many prominent panellists, including activists who have dedicated their lives to protecting human rights and to fighting enforced disappearances.

I would also like to particularly welcome Mr. Emmanuel Decaux, the Chair of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances. The Committee and the Working Group have established excellent cooperation and work closely together. This cooperation is of mutual benefit. It also benefits victims, as it strengthens the international machinery for the fight against enforced disappearances.

A few weeks ago, on 28 May 2013, a panel was held in the context of the second meeting of States parties to the Convention on Enforced Disappearances. It reflected a new approach taken by Member States to combine the election of new members of the Committee with a substantive agenda – it was a rich and moving panel discussion.

Today's event again places the issue of enforced disappearances on the agenda of the UN in New York. This is very welcome. It strengthens cooperation among the different UN stakeholders working in this area, and also gives visibility to this crucial issue in New York, as the centre of UN activities on peace and security. Without respect for human rights, including the prohibition of enforced disappearance, peace and security is impossible to achieve.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Moving now to the Working Group. Since more than 30 years, the Working Group has played a dual role – both on standard-setting and on individual cases.

Following the adoption of the 1992 Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances, the Working Group has provided a significant contribution to the development of the international legal framework on enforced disappearances through its monitoring mandate.

But even more importantly, the Working Group has offered a tool for families seeking assistance in determining the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared persons.

This is of crucial importance. I also know this all too well from my own region, the Balkans, where tens of thousands were reported missing during the war. There, enforced disappearances remain an open wound for relatives that are still waiting to learn the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones.

Enforced disappearances are not just a practice of the past. They still occur in many parts of the world. During my visits to the field I have been able to witness the cruelty of this crime and its dire consequences for the families.

So far, in total, the Working Group has engaged with Governments on almost 54,000 cases of disappearances from all over the world. For these victims, the Working Group remains a much-needed mechanism and, in some cases, the only hope they have to achieve truth, justice and reparation.

However, almost 43,000 cases remain outstanding. I encourage member States to cooperate with the Working Group to clarify them. Much more has to be done – both to seek the truth in these outstanding cases, but also to prevent new disappearances. We must devise ways to counter this heinous practice effectively.

The Working Group has chosen a fitting theme for this special event: *Countering enforced disappearances today: 'Sharing experiences and building strategies'*. This will be explored through two panels: one focusing on the achievements during these 100 sessions of the Working Group and the challenges ahead; and the second focusing on strategies to counter enforced disappearances today. I am confident that the discussion will provide a welcome opportunity to reflect together on how to counter and ultimately eradicate this horrendous crime.

Thank you.