

United Nations
Working Group on Enforced or
Involuntary Disappearances



Concept note

‘20 years of the Declaration: Looking Back and Looking Forward’

**Exploring best practices and challenges to protect women
from enforced disappearance and its impact**

The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie*, will host an event on women affected by enforced disappearances to mark the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, in Geneva on 30 and 31 October 2012.

This event will provide a valuable opportunity to discuss enforced disappearances from a gender perspective, in particular its impact on the promotion and protection of women’s rights. The event will bring together international experts on enforced disappearances and women’s rights; those who have been affected by enforced disappearances; representatives of civil society organisations working closely with the victims of enforced disappearances and their families, Government representatives, national human rights institutions and regional human rights organizations.

Background

‘I want to know where my son is, if he is alive or dead. I want them to finally tell me the truth about what happened, and if they killed him, I want to know where, when, why and who did it. Only the day they have responded to all those questions will I stop fighting.’¹

On 13 April 1977, fourteen mothers who were determined to find their disappeared sons and daughters marched in the Plaza de Mayo in the centre of Buenos Aires, Argentina. This event marked a historic development of the movement of women whose loved ones had been subject to enforced disappearances. The efforts of these women to find their disappeared relatives as well as the efforts of other committed human rights defenders brought international attention to the phenomenon of enforced disappearances. Thus, on 29 February 1980, the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (the Working Group) was established by Resolution 20 (XXXVI) to examine questions relevant to enforced or involuntary disappearances.

¹ Madre de la Plaza de Mayo (1983)

From its inception, the Working Group called for the development of an international instrument against enforced disappearances² and, in 1992, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances (the Declaration) by the Resolution 47/133. The Declaration is a fundamental tool in the fight against enforced disappearance setting forth minimum standards that all Member States of the United Nations are called upon to apply in order to prevent and address this practice. Initially, the core mandate of the Working Group was to work as a channel of communication between the families of disappeared persons and Governments to ascertain the fate and whereabouts of their disappeared family members. However, since the adoption of the Declaration, the Working Group has been entrusted to support and monitor States' progress in implementing the provisions of the Declaration.

To mark the 20th anniversary of the Declaration the Working Group has decided to hold an event to assess the impact of enforced disappearances on the human rights of women, and highlight the role of women at the forefront of the fight to prevent and eradicate the practice of enforced disappearances. Recognizing the 'ruinous consequence of enforced disappearances on family'³ and the special situation of vulnerability in which women are placed due to enforced disappearances, the Working Group has consistently raised concern over their plight. The situation of vulnerabilities of women as victims of enforced disappearances or as relative of disappeared persons was also reflected in Human Rights Council Resolution 10/10.⁴

Most recently, in its general comment on the right to recognition as a person before the law in the context of enforced disappearances,⁵ the Working Group recognized the suffering of the families of disappeared caused by socio-economic impacts of enforced disappearances of the 'family breadwinners'. The Working Group further recognized that 'special social support should be provided to dependent women.' The Working Group also observed that '[w]omen are particularly affected by enforced disappearances as the consequences at economic, social and psychological levels, are most often borne by them. If they are the victims of disappearance, they are particularly vulnerable to sexual and other forms of violence. In addition, as they are at the forefront of the struggle to resolve the disappearances of members of their families, they are subject to intimidation, persecution and reprisals.'⁶

The anniversary event

This anniversary event will serve as a platform to explore best practices and challenges to protect women from enforced disappearance and its impact. It will also provide an opportunity to continue the discussion on this issue initiated during the expert meeting on 'Gendered Impacts of Enforced Disappearance', which was held in Addis from 17 to 19 April 2012.

² E/CN.4/1985/15, para.302(c), Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, (23 January 1985)

³ Ibid.

⁴ A/HRC/RES/10/10. Adopted on 26 March 2009.

⁵ Adopted in November 2011 at the 95th session of the WGEID. See A/HRC/19/58/Rev.1, para.42.

⁶ See A/HRC/19/58/Rev.1, para.62.

The anniversary event will consist of a one-day thematic discussion (30 October) followed by a half-day open dialogue between the Working Group and representatives of States (31 October) to mark the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Interpretation will be provided in English, French and Spanish.

- **Objectives**

- ✓ Raising awareness on the Declaration for the Protection of All Persons Against Enforced Disappearance, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of its adoption.
- ✓ Identify challenges and best practices related to prevention, justice, truth and reparations for victims of enforced disappearance.
- ✓ Raising awareness on the specific issues related to women and enforced disappearances among all stakeholders, and encouraging Governments, civil society, NHRIs and regional human rights organizations to give more attention to these issues.

- **Date and venue**

The event will take place in Geneva at Palais des Nations, Room XVII on Tuesday 30 October 2012 from 10h00 to 13h00 and from 15h00 to 18h00; and Wednesday 31 October 2012 from 10h00 to 13h00.