



INTERNATIONAL COALITION
AGAINST ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Statement

International Day of the Disappeared

International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED)

30 August 2021

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, in its 2020 Report, has, from the time of its inception, recorded 46,271 outstanding cases from 92 states. The global magnitude has prompted the United Nations to officially recognize 30 August as the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances.

Amidst the rising COVID-19 cases around the world and the destructive consequences the pandemic is causing humanity, the International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED), along with families, individuals and groups who remain persistent in their search to ascertain truth and hold to account perpetrators of the act of enforced disappearance, remembers all victims of enforced disappearances especially today. First commemorated by the Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared-Detainees (FEDEFAM), the 30th of August is also being commemorated by sister-organizations of families of the disappeared worldwide. The global scope of the crime of enforced disappearance and its severity facilitated the sprouting of organizations of families of victims. Through their persistent struggle, the United Nations was prompted to establish a human rights treaty with an independent monitoring body, i.e. the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

The rights the *desaparecidos* that are being violated are multiple. Enforced disappearance violates their right to life, liberty, protection before the law and protection from other cruel, inhumane treatment and punishment. Enforced disappearance also victimizes the families, relatives and friends of the victims, likewise considered by the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance as victims.

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance is an insistence of the indispensable struggle against forgetting. While the treaty does not have very explicit references to memory, it insists in the imperative of reconstructing the historical memory of the disappeared. It deals with the past in order to deal with the envisioned future – a world without disappeared people.

This year's theme, "**The Struggle Against Forgetting,**" aptly reminds us of the essential role of commemorations in the continuing search for truth and justice for the disappeared. In our memories, the images of our missing loved ones and friends remain vivid. They are the source

of both our inspiration and strength. At times these memories bring us courage when all seems lost. Our memories of them carry us forward - linking the atrocities of the past, to the needs of the present and onwards to the future that we envision to be free from the scourge of enforced disappearances. The memory of the disappeared and victims of other forms of human rights violations should be written in the histories of the countries where the violations were committed and where historical revisionism attempts to deprive people, especially the young, of the atrocities of the past.

As expressed by one of us, Maria Adela Antokoletz, Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora in Argentina:

"We relatives of disappeared persons have had a terrible experience when it became apparent that our beloved ones were no more and would never again be with us. What we perhaps did not know was that no identity is defined forever. Our own identity as relatives would be changing as we receive new experiences. And what brings us to those experiences is memory.

"So, memory and identity: the two sides of the coin.

For example, in ancient times, some families were ashamed of disappearances. They thought "What crime will my son/daughter/sister have committed?". The passage of time brought to them more balanced reasons: the victims were not guilty; the perpetrators actually are!"

Each commemoration reminds us that while remembrance the very foundation and therefore, essential to our campaign, mobilizing to create and reinforce systems to prevent enforced disappearance, it is necessary to guarantee that it will no longer be repeated.

"Forgetting is rejecting our own identity; forgetting is to renounce the meaning our life has; forgetting is to make our beloved ones disappear again," Maria Adela concluded.

In this context, we recognize the efforts of local, regional and global civil society organizations in the campaign to engage legal systems within states to enact pieces of legislation that will acknowledge enforced disappearances as a heinous crime and impose sanctions on the perpetrators. We also acknowledge the expressions of solidarity and support we received from States for the signing and ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Already, since the establishment of its monitoring body of this treaty, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, the body already received more than 1,400 urgent action cases. This urgent action procedure is a part of its competence that is intended to save lives. While celebrating these victories, we must, however, acknowledge the fact that much remains to be done in achieving universal ratification and implementation. To date, we only have 64 states parties and 94 signatories, figures that are far from universal ratification much-needed in this phenomenon of global magnitude.

As the world rapidly responds to the pandemic, we, the survivors, families and advocates against enforced disappearance will continue to persist to ensure that cases will be treated with utmost urgency. We are vigilant of the need for the issue not be sidelined, and for the search for truth, accountability and justice never to be forgotten. We take this opportunity to urge States to implement the Key Guidelines on COVID-19 and Enforced Disappearances jointly approved by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearance.

Mandated to campaign for the universal ratification and implementation of the International Convention on Enforced Disappearances, the ICAED calls all states not yet parties to the Convention to ratify it without delay. It further calls on signatory states that have not yet ratified the treaty to expedite the process of ratification. Moreover, it calls on states parties that have not yet recognized the competence of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances to do it without further delay.

In conclusion, we borrow the words of Edita Burgos, mother of disappeared activist in the Philippines, Jonas Burgos: *“ We will keep the memory of our disappeared alive forever. Forgetting them is allowing the perpetrators to achieve their goal in erasing our loved ones from this earth. By continuing their advocacy, we relive their memory. The disappeared shall live forever.”*

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