



United States Mission to the OSCE

On International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry R. Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
August 31, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yesterday, we marked the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. The United States stands in solidarity with the men and women around the world whose own governments have abducted them and detained them in secret. In too many countries, repressive regimes confronted by citizens trying to hold their leaders accountable engage in the abhorrent practice of enforced disappearance. Some individuals who have disappeared at the hands of their governments are tortured and held for extended periods. Others are quietly killed with no official record of their deaths, compounding the grief of family and friends who are left in cruel uncertainty as to their fate. Worldwide tens of thousands of unresolved enforced disappearance cases are documented, some of which are decades old. The United States calls on countries to remove obstacles to independent and transparent investigations into these cases, so that those who have lost loved ones can learn their fate and those responsible can be held accountable.

While we are concerned about all of those who have been subjected to enforced disappearance by or with the support or acquiescence of their government, I wish to raise a few illustrative cases from the OSCE region. We note the "Prove They Are Alive" campaign's August 30 statement expressing concern over a series of recent deaths of persons who were on their list of individuals who had disappeared in Turkmenistan's opaque prison system. We join the "Prove They Are Alive" campaign and other delegations around this table in urging the Government of Turkmenistan to stop the practice of enforced disappearances; promptly disclose information about all political prisoners, including those on the lists of disappearances compiled by non-governmental organizations; inform the family of each person and the public whether the person listed is alive and his or her location; and in the case of the person's death, locate, respect, and return their remains to their family.

In Russia-occupied Crimea, civil society organizations continue to report on cases of conduct amounting to enforced disappearances conducted by the occupation authorities, or with their support or acquiescence. The victims are Crimean Tatars or other activists opposing Russia's occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea, which remains part of Ukraine. All of these cases remain unsolved, with the UN observing no notable progress in determining the fate of these individuals. We call on Russian occupation authorities to bring to justice all those responsible for the disappearances in these cases. This includes those responsible for the disappearance of at least 15 Crimean Tatar and Euromaidan activists who have never been

found. These cases include: Timur Shaimardanov, Seyran Zinedinov, Ivan Bondarets, Valery Vashchuk, Vasily Chernish, Islyam Dzhapparov, Dzhavdet Islyamov, and Erwin Ibragimov. We also call on Russian authorities to bring to justice those responsible for the disappearance of at least 6 Crimean Tatars who were later found dead. These include: Reshat Ametov, Edem Asanov, and Bilial Bilialov.

We are also deeply troubled by the long history of impunity for enforced disappearances in the Russian republic of Chechnya, the latest instances of which include the well-known cases of abduction and torture of gay men by local law enforcement, as well as the recently-reported mass abduction and summary execution of dozens of men arrested in a so-called “counter-terrorism operation” in January.

Likewise, we also reiterate the calls by the Geneva Co-Chairs and the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group for the respective sides to facilitate the return of missing persons.

In closing, on the occasion of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, we stand in solidarity with the victims and families of those who have been subject to enforced disappearance throughout the OSCE region and around the world, and call on all countries to put an end to enforced disappearances and hold accountable those responsible for this practice.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

###