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United States Mission to the OSCE

On the International Day for the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

As delivered by U.S. Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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On August 30, we marked the International Day for 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 will resort to the enforced disappearance of their critics. Some of these 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 to wonder about their fate. Worldwide there are tens of thousands of unresolved enforced disappearance cases, some of which are decades old. The United States calls on countries to remove all obstacles to independent and transparent investigations into these cases so that those who have lost loved ones can finally learn their fate and those responsible can be held to account.

While we are concerned about all of those forcibly disappeared, I would like to take a moment to raise a few illustrative cases. We note the Prove They Are Alive campaign's August 30th statement, which expresses concern over a series of recent deaths of persons who were on their list of individuals who had disappeared and were allegedly held in Turkmen prisons. We join the Prove They Are Alive campaign in urging the Turkmen government to end this practice, to promptly disclose information about all prisoners, including those on the lists of disappearances compiled by non-governmental organizations, to inform families and the public whether each person listed is alive, and in case of deaths, to release their bodies for burial.

In Russia-occupied Crimea, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine reports there are at least ten cases of enforced disappearances perpetrated by the occupation authorities, or with their support or acquiescence, between January 2014 and May 2016. 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 investigations of the fate of these individuals. We call on Russian occupation authorities to bring the perpetrators in these cases to justice, including in the most recent case of Ervin Ibragimov, a Tatar activist who was abducted on May 24, and has not been seen since.

In our engagements around the world, the United States continues to raise with governments specific cases of enforced disappearances, and we will continue to do so at the most senior level.

In closing, let me say that on the occasion of the International Day for the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, we stand in solidarity with victims and families of those who have disappeared throughout the OSCE region, and around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.