



**International Convention for
the Protection of All Persons
from Enforced Disappearance**

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Committee on Enforced Disappearances
Twenty-eighth session

Summary record (partial)* of the 512th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 17 March 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. de Frouville

Contents

Opening of the session

Adoption of the agenda

Tribute to victims of enforced disappearance

* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chair** declared open the twenty-eighth session of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances.
2. **Mr. Korkeakivi** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that the current global landscape was fraught with challenges that continued to highlight the urgency and necessity of eradicating the heinous crime of enforced disappearance. Enforced disappearance remained a pervasive violation of human rights and contributed to a climate of fear, despair and injustice. It was therefore essential to work towards the universal ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The ratification of the Convention by Poland during the intersessional period was a welcome development.
3. The first World Congress on Enforced Disappearances, which had taken place in Geneva in January 2025, had represented a pivotal step in global efforts to address enforced disappearance and to encourage ratification of the Convention. The Congress, which had been attended by over 2,000 actors from 118 countries, had resulted in the adoption of recommendations and the submission of pledges by States, regional and international organizations, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and professionals in the field.
4. The Congress had concluded with a call to action and the unveiling of key follow-up activities, which included the creation of a victim-led regional network in Africa, the organization of regular meetings of women involved in searching for victims of enforced disappearance and the creation of a global youth network against enforced disappearance. States were encouraged to use the extraordinary momentum created by the Congress to support the immediate implementation of those activities.
5. The event had also highlighted the importance of the voices of the family members of disappeared persons and the crucial role of women in addressing enforced disappearance. The fact that the Congress had been attended by twice as many female representatives of victims' organizations as male representatives reflected the disproportionate impact that enforced disappearance had on women. The consideration by the Committee of a draft concept note for the preparation of a general comment on women and girls and enforced disappearance, which was scheduled to take place during the current session, was more than timely.
6. In late 2024, the Committee had undertaken a two-week visit to Colombia, where the visiting delegation had met with representatives of 80 authorities, visited five detention centres and accompanied officials conducting operations in cemeteries containing unidentified bodies and in a crematorium. The corresponding visit report would be considered during the current session.
7. Since its twenty-seventh session, the Committee had registered 120 new requests for urgent action, bringing the total number of requests registered since 2012 to 2,003. Of those cases, 518 had been closed after the disappeared person had been located, with 410 persons having been found alive. At present, 1,481 cases remained open.
8. The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the status of the human rights treaty body system (A/79/336) highlighted the fact that, due to insufficient staff resources, the Committee was facing challenges in handling urgent action requests and ensuring follow-up in a timely manner. The ongoing liquidity crisis was also continuing to hamper the planning and conduct of the Committee's work. While OHCHR was doing its utmost to ensure that the Committee and the other treaty bodies could fulfil their respective mandates, it was likely that the liquidity crisis would continue for the foreseeable future.
9. The adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 79/165 on the human rights treaty body system in December 2024 had represented a milestone in the treaty body strengthening process. The resolution again invited the treaty bodies and OHCHR to continue to work to increase coordination and predictability in the reporting process with the aim of achieving a clear and regularized schedule for reporting by States Parties, and to increase their efforts to

further the use of digital technologies in their work. However, the resolution did not endorse certain detailed proposals submitted by the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies or allocate the resources necessary to implement them.

10. On Human Rights Day 2024, the Geneva Human Rights Platform, in cooperation with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, had organized an informal meeting of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies and focal points on working methods. The objective of the meeting had been to explore the latest developments in the treaty body system and to identify ways of improving the harmonization of procedures. The Chairs and focal points had also had an enriching exchange with the members of the Coordination Committee of Special Procedures, with whom they had shared practices on issues of common concern.

11. The prevention and eradication of enforced disappearance demanded unwavering commitment and concerted action. OHCHR would continue to support the Committee's work, which was at the centre of those efforts.

12. **The Chair** said that, regrettably, the global human rights situation was continuing to deteriorate. International law, which was the foundation of international peace and security, was contested, ignored or violated every day by major powers who were seeking to replace the rule of law with the maxim "might makes right". Human rights were the target of a particularly vicious rhetoric, according to which scientific facts were part of conspiracy theories, efforts to defend minorities against persecution were a form of intolerance, and hate speech, which often incited violence, was a form of freedom of expression. Such powers also claimed that they were the true defenders of human rights while portraying international law and justice as the cause of wars and labelling human rights defenders as "terrorists" or "enemies of the people".

13. Such misleading rhetoric had also been used to cover up cases of enforced disappearance. Disappeared persons were often stigmatized and portrayed as a nuisance or even as criminals to wider society while the members of their families involved in search efforts were often dismissed and denigrated. Enforced disappearance was again on the rise: it was therefore important to speak up, bear witness to past atrocities and highlight the risk of them happening again, and to continue to meet and organize.

14. The first World Congress on Enforced Disappearances had borne testament to the extraordinary strength and resilience of the global movement against enforced disappearance, which comprised the families of disappeared persons, international non-governmental organizations, regional human rights protection bodies and States. Their collective commitment was reflected in the results of the survey conducted by the Congress's organizers: 86 per cent of attendees had indicated that the Congress would have a direct impact on their work while 90 per cent had expressed their desire to contribute actively to the implementation of the priority actions identified during the event.

15. While the Congress had been a success, it must form part of an ongoing process. It was crucial for all stakeholders to act on their commitments and pledges over the course of 2025, including through efforts to accelerate the rate of ratification of the Convention.

16. The financial crisis engulfing multilateral organizations was also having an impact on the already beleaguered human rights protection system. The Committee's urgent action procedure was a lifeline for many victims but, given the meagre resources allocated to it, regular monitoring of the more than 2,000 cases now registered was almost impossible. The Committee hoped that adequate resources would be provided following the assessment, called for under the Pact for the Future, of the funding needed by the United Nations human rights mechanisms to fulfil their respective mandates.

17. The Committee's reporting procedure, under which States Parties were required to submit an initial report, update the Committee on action taken in follow-up to its concluding observations on that report and thereafter provide additional information only when requested by the Committee, allowed the Committee to focus on situations where its assistance was most urgently needed and thereby maximize the impact of its scarce resources. During the current session, the Committee would consider the initial reports of the Central African Republic, the Gambia and Malta, additional information submitted by Argentina, Belgium, Peru and Serbia, and information received from Panama on follow-up to the Committee's

concluding observations. Stand-alone requests for additional information had been submitted to Argentina and Peru in the light of recent developments there.

Adoption of the agenda (CED/C/28/1)

18. *The agenda was adopted.*

Tribute to victims of enforced disappearance

19. **The Chair** said that he was honoured to welcome Mr. Obeida Dabbagh to the meeting. Mr. Dabbagh would describe the fight that he had undertaken on behalf of his brother and nephew, who had been disappeared in the Syrian Arab Republic.

20. **Mr. Dabbagh** said that his brother Mazen, a high school academic adviser, and his nephew Patrick, a university psychology student, had been arrested in November 2013 by air force intelligence officers. What had started as a case of arbitrary detention had turned into a case of enforced disappearance and a nightmare marked by horrific torture, as later revealed in court documents and testimonies. In 2018, they had been declared dead by the Syrian regime, which had falsified their cause of death.

21. Back in November 2013, the family had started to approach Syrian, French and international authorities, sending letters to the President of France, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, members of parliament and human rights organizations. The family had also contacted the International Federation for Human Rights Leagues. In 2016, the family, in collaboration with that organization, had filed a criminal complaint in Paris, which had been a watershed moment, as doing so had allowed judicial officials in France to open an investigation and gather crucial testimonies, including from Syrian deserters. The investigation had led to the filing of criminal charges in March 2023 against three senior Syrian government officials for their role in the commission of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

22. His family had faced many obstacles – including reprisals in the Syrian Arab Republic for seeking information about the whereabouts of Mazen and Patrick, the Syrian regime’s attempts to extort money from the family, promising information or the men’s release in exchange for exorbitant sums, and the forced removal of Mazen’s wife and daughter from the family home in Damascus – but his commitment had never flagged. The fight for justice and against impunity for war crimes transcended his family. By initiating legal proceedings, he had hoped to obtain justice for Mazen and Patrick and to contribute to the global response to the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime.

23. The trial of the Syrian officials, which had taken place in France from 21 to 24 May 2024, had provided a ray of hope. Even though the officials had been tried in absentia, the trial had sent a strong message: impunity for crimes against humanity would not last forever. The three officials had been found guilty of crimes against humanity and war crimes and had been sentenced to life imprisonment. He hoped that the trial would inspire the families of other Syrian victims to pursue their quest for justice, despite the obstacles that they might encounter. He would continue to keep the memory of Mazen and Patrick alive, for them and for the thousands of Syrian disappeared persons.

24. After the fall of the Assad regime, it was hoped that the new authorities would address cases of enforced disappearance through transitional justice mechanisms. Those whose hands were stained with blood could not be allowed to escape justice. The truth must be established, justice must be served and reparation must follow. Only then could reconciliation be achieved and the repetition of such atrocities be prevented. As for his family, he hoped that they would soon find out where his brother and nephew had been buried so that they could recover their remains, inter them with dignity and finally mourn.

25. **Mr. Kanyongolo** said that he wished to express the Committee’s gratitude to Mr. Dabbagh for his testimony and his willingness to relive memories that must still be painful. His words served to remind the Committee of the weight of its responsibility to hold States accountable for fulfilling their human rights obligations and had raised important issues that the Committee must consider going forward. One such issue was the value of extraterritorial jurisdiction. In a world where many States were reluctant to ratify

international human rights treaties such as the Convention and refused to enforce human rights protections, the ability of courts of other countries to punish human rights violations was crucial, both as a practical matter and as an affirmation of the universality of human rights.

26. With respect to the case of Mazen and Patrick Dabbagh, it was important to note that the Syrian Arab Republic had not ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Security Council had not adopted a resolution referring the situation in the country to that court, and the Syrian justice system was lacking in both independence and accountability. The financial, administrative and political obstacles that prevented individuals from invoking extraterritorial jurisdiction must be addressed. Willing States, lawyers, civil society organizations and other stakeholders had a shared responsibility to maximize the human rights protections that could be extended to ordinary citizens, especially those of countries that lacked functional human rights protection mechanisms.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 10.50 a.m.