

Check against delivery

Committee on Enforced Disappearances
Fourth Session



Opening Address by
Mr. Gianni Magazzeni
Chief
Americas and Europe and Central Asia Branch

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Chairperson,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, I would like to welcome you at this fourth session of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances. As this is the first time that we meet officially, I would like to greet you all and stress the importance of legal frameworks providing clear international standards that can help member states to deal with the issue of enforced disappearances at the national level. I work in the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division as head of the Americas, Europe and Central Asia Branch and as such, cannot highlight more the relevance of counting with both standards and recommendations by treaty bodies to effectively promote and protect human rights on the grounds.

Members of the Committee,

The establishment of the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights** 20 years ago, greatly enhanced OHCHR capacity to support country based engagement and national processes of implementation. Today, OHCHR is present in some 58 countries with country offices, human rights components of UN Peace Missions, Human Rights Advisers within UNCTs and regional or sub-regional offices covering even a larger number of countries. In addition to Governments, Parliaments, Judiciaries, NGOs, OHCHR works closely also with independent and effective NHRIs, especially those that comply with the Paris Principles.

The **Human Rights Council** has added new vigour to international action for the promotion and protection of human rights through responses to emergency situations, the setting up of Commissions of Inquiry or country based action. Its **Universal Periodic Review** process successfully concluded its first round last year, after an unprecedented examination of the human rights situation in all 193 UN Member States, and every State, without exception, actively participated in the process. The reviews provide clear guidance on action required by each country in order to comply with its international legal obligations and political commitments.

Implementation of the recommendations resulting from the human rights mechanisms represents a critical dimension for OHCHR field-work worldwide. In this context, it is important to emphasize that a number of countries have taken the following steps in order to ensure timely and effective implementation of recommendations received from the HR system: a) Have set up a senior level coordination mechanism of implementation led by the Government with the active participation of all relevant government ministries, state entities, the Ombudsman or NHRI, and civil society organizations; b) Have holistically clustered the recommendation by themes - making use of the Universal HR Index gathering all recommendations emanating from the UPR, treaty bodies and special procedures as a basis for

detailed prioritized national action plans with well-defined activities, responsible national actors, benchmarks and specific time frames for implementation (and would reflect those commitments in their national development plans so that the required resources would be available); and c) Have brought international partners, donors, the international community, including regional organisations and the UN system more closely together in assisting the country in the implementation of these key priority human rights actions.

These steps have also opened renewed opportunities for UN Country Teams to integrate, in close collaboration with OHCHR, all recommendations from international human rights mechanisms into such processes as the CCA/UNDAF and national development plans. They have also laid the ground for much closer collaboration with other key actors, such as Regional Organizations, the World Bank as well as bilateral donors, so as to support national human rights priorities.

Through our field presences, the High Commissioner is spearheading coordinated efforts within UN Country Teams and in partnership with other regional organizations and bilateral donors to cluster and prioritise recommendations from all human rights mechanisms, including those to come from the Committee of Enforced Disappearances, so as to reflect them into national human rights action plans and possibly also into national development plans. In this connection, I am pleased to inform you that on 8 March 2013, the planning Minister of Ecuador explained in details in a side event at the Human Rights Council plans by the Government of Ecuador to ensure a human rights based approach in development planning. I encouraged the Minister to make sure all recommendations from UN Treaty Bodies – representing their legal obligations - as well as those from Special Rapporteurs and the political commitments made through the UPR are taken into account in that process.

Even before the entry into force of this particular Convention, enforced disappearances themselves have been both of great concern to the Office, and an issue being closely followed up by field presences. Many societies have at different times in history experienced this scourge; in particular, during the 1970s and the 1980s, a number of Latin American countries witnessed systematic patterns of enforced disappearances. Unfortunately, we can still see some disturbing developments favoring impunity for past crimes in this and other regions, as well as contemporary cases of enforced disappearances. For example, OHCHR field presences in Guatemala, Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries continue to follow up on recent paradigmatic cases, monitoring and playing an advocacy role before the authorities and other relevant stakeholders. Contemporary cases of enforced disappearances have been particularly acute in Mexico where the responsibility of the State has been diverted by attributing the origin of the vast majority of cases to organized-crime struggles and also by making no-clear distinction nor keeping accurate records between enforced disappearances and analogous cases. The role of the OHCHR field presences in the country has been of great value in raising awareness on the relevant international standards and on the

Convention. In addition, legislation against enforced disappearances has been promoted by country offices.

Chairperson,

From the outset, this Committee has been exemplary, in its support for the treaty body strengthening process, promptly endorsing the Dublin II outcome and the High Commissioner's report on this issue. On her behalf, I would like to thank you for that.

I would like to update you on the General Assembly's intergovernmental process on the strengthening of the treaty body system. During the General Assembly session last year, the co-facilitators of the intergovernmental process, the Ambassadors of Indonesia and Iceland, were re-appointed. They have expressed their intention to finish the process by May following a series of informal consultations which have already commenced.

The latest round of informal consultations took place in New York on 19-20 February. A number of issues were discussed, including documentation and conference services, the simplified reporting procedure, webcasting and videoconferencing, and the nomination and election process. Importantly, the co-facilitators repeatedly stated that any savings made in the final outcome should be reinvested in the treaty body system and capacity development. The next informals will take place from 11 to 17 April and my colleagues will ensure that you are fully updated of the proceedings.

As you know we are now at a crucial moment in the negotiations on this process, in particular regarding the discussion on the cost review of the treaty body system. The co-facilitators of the inter-governmental process requested OHCHR to produce a paper on the actual costs of the system in 2012 and on the requirement to clear the current backlogs of reports and communications. The co-facilitators have circulated the paper to States ahead of the informal consultations which will start in New York in few days so that informed decision can be made in many areas which will directly affect your work and determine the future of the treaty body system.

I note that you will meet with the co-facilitators next week while they are in Geneva and I am sure that they will very much appreciate to receive your input and hear directly by the members of the committees the challenges that they face due to financial constraints. I encourage you in these discussions.

Ibrahim Salama, has specifically asked me to thank you for taking part in the survey that was sent last December related to your satisfaction with the Secretariat's support. Forty-five out of 172 experts completed the survey which, given the busy end-of-year period, was a quite a good response rate. The Division was pleased that 83.7 percent of respondents rated Secretariat support either satisfactory or very satisfactory. A similar survey will be sent out at the end of this year and we hope that as many of you as possible will provide us with this important feedback.

You have by now received a survey which invites you to contribute to OHCHR's planning process. As you will know, since 2006, OHCHR has formulated a management plan to cover a two-year cycle. From 2014, the cycle will be for a four year period and preparations have already begun to identify thematic priorities and field deployment needs with meetings last month in Guatemala City and Belgrade with colleagues from all our 20 field presences in the Americas, Europe and Central Asia regions. Three further regional consultations are being convened in Addis Ababa, Tunis and Bangkok in the course of this month. I encourage you to participate in the survey so that we can benefit from your insights and fully take into account the Committee's priorities as we plan our work.

In concluding these remarks I wish you well for the work ahead of you during the forthcoming weeks and for your first interactive dialogues with States which will represent a significant step in the actual implementation of the Convention. I would like to reassure you about the commitment of the High Commissioner and her staff to provide the support necessary to accomplish your work not only while you are in Geneva but inter-sessionally as well.

We are committed to do so as one Office, making full use of all the tools available to the High Commissioner, including its field presences especially with respect to follow up action at the national level to your recommendations. Let me assure you also of the support of our desk officers and heads of field presences in connection with necessary country-based information, especially before the list of issues is finalized, in close cooperation with Ibrahim and his staff.

Thank you.