

*Check against delivery*

**Committee on Enforced Disappearances**  
**Tenth Session**



**Opening Address by**  
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**Chief**  
**Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Section**  
**Human Rights Treaties Division**

**Geneva, 7 March 2016**

**Chairperson,**

**Distinguished members of the Committee,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to welcome you at this tenth session of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

### **10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention**

**Chairperson,**

**Distinguished Members,**

2016 is a year to celebrate. It marks the **10<sup>th</sup> anniversary** of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances which was adopted by the General Assembly in 2006, entering into force in 2010. It is also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the two human rights Covenants – the very basis for the United Nations human rights treaty system.

The adoption of this Convention was the result of a long journey, and sometimes bitter struggle, in which the families of disappeared persons and the international community embarked almost forty years ago. It developed and adapted international human rights law and international humanitarian law with a view to ensuring the effective protection of all persons from enforced disappearance. By doing so, it recognized the suffering of thousands of persons all over the world.

The outcome is a landmark and innovative treaty that for the first time codifies that: “No one shall be subjected to enforced disappearance” and highlights that no exceptional circumstances whatsoever may be invoked as a justification for such a crime. It calls on all States Parties to ensure that enforced disappearances constitute an offence under domestic law and significantly, states that the widespread or systematic practice of enforced disappearances constitutes a crime against humanity. The Convention affirms the right of victims – broadly defined as all those who suffered direct harm because of an enforced disappearance – to know the truth about the circumstances of an enforced disappearance and the fate of the

disappeared person and to claim reparation for the harm inflicted to them. These elements make the Convention of fundamental importance for the disappeared, their families, and society as a whole.

The **contemporary value** of the Convention has become evident thanks to the monitoring work carried out by this Committee and the continuing support of civil society. Far from being an instrument concerned only with tragic events of the past, the Convention covers new forms of enforced disappearances, such as secret detention; new perpetrators such as non-state actors; and new victims.

Thanks to your collaboration with Argentina, France, Japan and Morocco a **round table on the “Contemporary Challenges”** of the Convention will take place on Friday 11 March 2016 in the afternoon. In this regard, I am pleased to confirm that the Director of the Human Rights Treaty Division, Ibrahim Salama, will open the event.

I trust that the discussion during the panel will be helpful for your work. Panelists will discuss challenges relating to the punishment of the crime of enforced disappearance, state accountability and the involvement of non-state actors, and the fulfillment of the rights of the victims. Panelist will also debate on the need for coherence between the Convention and the international human rights law; the coordination with other bodies and mechanisms; and the collaboration with civil society. We look forward the outcome of what will certainly be an interesting and rich discussion.

In addition to this panel, the General Assembly in its annual resolution on the Convention has also decided to devote **one high-level plenary meeting** to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary during its 71<sup>st</sup> session in New York. The President of the General Assembly is charged with identifying the modalities for the event.

2016 also marks the **evaluation, by a conference of States Parties, of the functioning of the Committee**, in accordance to article 27 of the Convention. The Secretariat will assist States Parties in the organization of such conference. We will of course keep the Committee informed of preparations for the Conference of States parties as well as the General Assembly 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration as they come to light.

Chair, finally, I am pleased to note that on 8 October 2015, Italy ratified the Convention bringing the number of States parties to 51. The slow but steady increase in the number of States parties is of course a matter of satisfaction although we hope this will accelerate in the near future given the contemporary value of the goals and objectives of the Convention.

In concluding these remarks I wish you well for the work ahead of you during the forthcoming, challenging weeks. On behalf of the High Commissioner I would like to assure you of the Office's commitment to supporting your work.

**Thank you**