**Response to Amina Janjua Masood**

CED opening session, 13 September 2021

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Dear Mme Amina Janjua Masood,

We all in the Committee on Enforced Disappearances listened with great attention and attentiveness to your words.

Thank you for sharing with us - and with all those following the session online - the horror and pain that you and your three children you have gone through since your husband was disappeared, when suddenly your family was torn apart, and when no one seemed to care about what happened, and when some even questioned if your story could be believed.

Your husband was forcibly disappeared 16 years ago, and for so many years, it has been impossible for you and your children to overcome the grief of not living with him anymore. Yes - this heinous crime of enforced disappearance does not allow for the family and those close to the disappeared person to get on with daily life. The need to continue the search, the uncertainty of what happened, where and in which condition he might be, and the need to know the truth about what happened and who is responsible for that – all this became central in your life.

Listening to you and how you transformed this shock and endless misery into a courageous and successful fight against enforced disappearances in your country deeply affects us. It is impressive how you have wisely and bravely taken the case of your husband out of the private sphere and joined forces with others who had suffered similar crimes. You brought this terrible human rights violation into the public domain in Pakistan, placed it in front of states institutions, and by doing so brought together a net of solidarity with other women and families that finally developed into your association “Defence of Human Rights”. And most of all, you and your colleagues managed to locate more than 1.300 disappeared persons. I assume you had to face a lot of threats and overcome a lot of fears on your way.

You have just shared a very personal and moving story with us. But more than that – you have also described what is so typical of countless other fates all over the world. The majority of forcibly disappeared are men, often the sole breadwinner of the family, which leaves women and children behind, with no income, no place to mourn, little or no social support, or even faced with social stigma. It is also common that women are the ones building networks with others affected, founding organizations, and fighting the political and legal fights, often without having ever learned how to do so. Like you, many – too many – victims and activists have to struggle for years before any change comes out. And, last but not least, you, the people in Pakistan, and victims in so many countries rightly have high expectations of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

Thank you for your concrete suggestions on what this Committee could do more to get States to ratify the Convention. The ratification and implementation of the Convention at national level should not be seen as an insurmountable burden by governments, but more as an actual support, as it helps to prevent and equally fight enforced disappearances. The report on 10 years of our Committee’s work is an excellent tool to show in detail how its work has developed. It can be used by ministries, civils society and judiciaries alike. CED will intensify its outreach to governments and the broader human rights movement in all regions of the world, with Asia being a particular challenge as only few have ratified the Convention so far. But let me be frank, the impact of a UN Treaty Body has its limitations. Essential for things to change is serious political will by the government to act, and the pressure for this has to come from within the society of the given country. I can assure you that we will get in touch with the Pakistani government. And already today I would like to invite the Pakistani government to ratify our Convention. This would match with and complement very well the drafting of the national Bill to criminalize Enforced Disappearances.

We thank you wholeheartedly that you found the time and energy to address our Committee. We sincerely congratulate you for your engagement and energy, for your tireless work to fight disappearances in your country and globally, and for not being discouraged by ignorance, false accusations and denial.

We all hope that the search for your husband will one day bring to light what really happened, as you and your children have the right to know the truth.