

*Check against delivery*

**Committee on Enforced Disappearances**

**Twelfth Session**



**Opening Address by  
Mr. Simon Walker  
Chief**

**Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Section  
Human Rights Treaties Branch**

**Geneva, 6 March 2017**

Chairperson,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I declare open and welcome you to the twelfth session of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances. Since our last meeting, there have been some important developments concerning the Convention and the Committee. Allow me to provide you with a brief update.

The end of 2016 marked the evaluation by the First Conference of States Parties of the functioning of the Committee. The outcome was very positive and the **Committee was confirmed as the monitoring body** of the Convention 51 States parties were present and 22 of them took the floor, together with representatives of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of civil society. They all expressed praise for the efficiency and dynamism of the Committee while some States parties offered constructive criticism. I am pleased to note that you will discuss these issues under the item methods of work.

The commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention continued this year with a **high-level plenary meeting** of the General Assembly on 17 February. Your Chair, Mr. Corcuera, delivered a statement during the plenary meeting and also addressed an expert panel in the afternoon together with Mr. Decaux, with the Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance and with other speakers.

In his video message the High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed his firm belief that the work of the Committee has had a significant preventive effect. Notwithstanding, the practice of enforced disappearance is not decreasing – it is morphing. In the context of migration, internal conflict, transnational organized crime, humanitarian crises and the struggle against violent extremism, we are seeing new and alarming patterns of enforced disappearance. Against this background the High Commissioner called on all States to recognise the contemporary value of the goals and objectives of the Convention and set the bold goal of **doubling ratifications of the Convention in the next five years**.

It is very encouraging to note that the High Commissioner's call was promptly sized by the Ministers of Argentina and France and by many other dignitaries present in the room who are organising sensitisation campaigns targeting signatory States that have also accepted in the Universal Periodic Review the recommendation to ratify the Convention.

In this context, I am pleased to note that since the last session four States, namely the Central African Republic, Switzerland, Seychelles and the Czech Republic, ratified or acceded the Convention bringing the number of States parties to 56. The slow but steady increase in the number of States parties is of course a matter of satisfaction, although we hope

that the call by the High Commissioner will significantly accelerate this trend in the near future.

With a view to amplifying efforts by States, OHCHR will support the campaign to increase ratifications and improve the visibility of your work. Ms. Nicoleta Panta, our new communication officer, is currently developing a communication plan for a ratification campaign under the banner of “Stand up for someone’s rights”, OHCHR’s main communication campaign for 2017. You will meet with her so that we can share your thoughts on the design of the campaign.

Chairperson,

Distinguished Members,

In August 2016, the Secretary-General issued his first biennial report on the status of the treaty body system which shows that the measures taken in resolution 68/268 have allowed the treaty body system to address some of its most pressing challenges. On the basis of the report, later this year, the General Assembly will decide whether or not to grant the necessary resources for the amended meeting time in 2018 - 2019 which results from changes in the system's workload. For this Committee, this will mean **an additional week of session in the next biennium**.

A specific issue facing this Committee is the ever growing number of requests for urgent actions. The Secretary-General devoted a special chapter to urgent actions in his report to the General Assembly and stressed that the staffing resources provided for urgent actions, among other activities, have proved insufficient to support your work in this area.

It has become clear that States are unwilling to allocate additional regular budget funding for urgent actions prior to the review of the General Assembly resolution on treaty body strengthening in 2020.

In this regard, I hope that the Committee will develop a reflection of its own for a more sustainable treaty body system system as we lead up to the 2020 review.

Chairperson,

Distinguished Members,

Finally, I would like to **bid farewell and pay tribute to those members who will be leaving the Committee** at the end of June: Mr. Mohammed Al-Obaidi, Mr. Luciano Hazan, Mr. Juan-José Lopez Ortega and Mr. Kimio Yakushiji. Members and friends, you have all left an indelible mark on the Committee and on the development of international human rights law. We are proud of your achievements and I have no doubt that you will continue to build on these achievements with your ongoing contributions to human rights. On behalf of the Secretariat, I wish you luck in your new pursuits and hope that your time here has enriched your personal and professional lives.

In concluding these remarks I wish all members 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