

Check against delivery

**First Conference of States Parties to the International Convention for
the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance**



Opening Statement by

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Palais des Nations

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues and friends,

I have the honour to declare open the First Conference of States parties to the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance and wish you all a warm welcome.

Enforced disappearance remains a serious human rights challenge of concern to us all. People are disappeared in too many countries, with the direct or indirect involvement of the State. In the context of internal conflicts, transnational organized crime, humanitarian crises and the struggle against violent extremism, we are seeing this old phenomenon revived as well as new patterns of enforced disappearance.

But we are also seeing new kinds of perpetrators – paramilitary groups, militias, organized criminal gangs and other non-State actors. And most disturbingly, all these perpetrators are targeting a much broader range of victims. In addition to political opponents, today’s victims include vulnerable people of every kind. Civilians are seized and detained or kept hostage by various fighting forces. Migrants, too, are extremely vulnerable.

Throughout the Syrian conflict, and across the country, reports of enforced disappearance have taken on a new magnitude. The recent capture of besieged and shattered areas of eastern Aleppo by pro-Government forces has again raised fears that many residents may have been seized and taken to locations unknown – a situation which could amount to enforced disappearance.

Clearly, although the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance has its roots in the horrific practices of Latin American dictatorships in the 1970s and 80s, it remains very relevant today. Provisions on investigations; non-refoulement and extradition; secret detention; urgent action and inquiries mean the Convention continues to be an innovative and versatile tool to prohibit, prevent and combat disappearance. The Committee on Enforced Disappearance, in its first five years of existence, has also built up a solid practice of guiding States and protecting victims.

And yet the Convention has not attracted the massive number of ratifications which it clearly merits. With only 54 States parties, it is deprived of the broad-based support it requires to meet the objective of preventing and eliminating disappearance. And it cannot meet the hopes and expectations of the families, such as the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who fought so hard for this Convention. This law is the fruit of their pain and their determination: we have a responsibility to them.

Excellencies,

Today, assembled in this room, are the representatives of States which have demonstrated their commitment to one of the bedrock principles of human dignity. No-one may be subjected to enforced disappearance; no-one may be held in secret detention. As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, I call on you, the States parties, to take action to achieve universal ratification for this essential legal instrument. Within your regional groups and in bilateral and international fora such as this Conference, I believe you have the power to achieve this goal. The time for this is now.

Excellencies,

The objective of today's Conference is to evaluate the Committee and decide whether it is appropriate to transfer its monitoring functions to another body. Without prejudice to your findings, allow me to place your discussions within a wider context. Each treaty body is part of a system, and state of that system affects each of its constituent elements.

Within our troubled global context, the treaty body system is needed, now more than ever. It offers a unique opportunity for global monitoring and expert advice in all parts of the world, geared towards the promotion of justice, the rule of law and development. Guidance from the treaty bodies allows every State to review its performance, coordinate across governmental entities, build dialogue with national institutions and civil society, and spark change at the national level. The system also gives voice to individuals who seek justice for perceived wrongs, a fundamental step in building resilient societies based on the rule of law.

The treaty body system needs to have the capacity to fulfil its functions if it is to be able to respond to the challenges of the contemporary world.

In 2014, the General Assembly adopted resolution 68/268 to strengthen the treaty bodies. Earlier this year, the Secretary-General presented his first report reviewing implementation of the resolution, setting out key recommendations to ensure an effective and relevant treaty body system in the future. The strengthening process has helped treaty bodies improve, to some extent, their responsiveness and increase visibility. It established a global capacity-building programme which is already bearing fruit. Yet the system is substantially under-resourced and requires more significant reform.

In 2020 – only three years away – the General Assembly will undertake a review of the treaty body strengthening resolution.

Beyond today's Conference, I hope you, as the creators and owners of this system, will seize this opportunity to act on the Secretary-General's recommendations in his report, and consider how to strengthen it further. I consider this to be a priority, and I have committed my Office to supporting the review process with a view to providing the most sustained, effective and efficient support to States and to people, everywhere.

I wish you well in your deliberations.

Thank you.