

General allegation

116th session (10–14 September 2018)

Turkmenistan

16. The Working Group received information from the source concerning reported obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in Turkmenistan.

17. The source asserts that over the last 16 years, enforced disappearances into the prison system of Turkmenistan have been a systematic practice, and the number of verified cases of enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan's prisons as of September 2018 stands at 121. However, the list of victims of enforced disappearances known to the source is incomplete. According to the source's estimates, the total number of victims of enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan is in the order of hundreds, and some prisoners have been forcibly disappeared since 2002.

18. The source states that recently Turkmen authorities for the first time have allowed some individuals convicted in 2017 and forcibly disappeared in the prison system to see their families. Turkmen authorities have recently softened their position concerning the prohibition of handing over the bodies of deceased incommunicado prisoners to their families. Finally, they have been providing information to international organizations about some of the disappeared persons. However, the practice of this grave violation of human rights persists.

19. The source submits that many individuals were arrested in November and December 2002, tried in court in January 2003, and forcibly disappeared in the prison system in connection with the alleged coup attempt which took place on 25 November 2002. In addition, several arrests and trials as part of this case took place in the summer of 2003 and in 2005. So-called Novemberists were given sentences of between 12 and 25 years, and six were sentenced to life imprisonment, although life imprisonment is not a legal punishment in Turkmenistan's law. Allegedly, families of sentenced individuals have not heard from them since their trials.

20. Until 2016, when the bodies of two deceased were handed over to their families for the first time, the bodies of Novemberists who died in prison were not handed over to the families for burial, nor were the families informed of the deaths. The source reports that at least nine Novemberists are presumed to have died in prison.

21. The source alleges that the government refuses to provide any official information concerning the fate of all other Novemberists, including those whose prison terms ended in 2017.

22. The source further alleges that it is aware of 30 individuals who were accused of Islamic extremism, given sentences of mostly between 8 and 25 years, and forcibly disappeared in the prison system of Turkmenistan. In several cases, those given sentences of 2 and a half to 3 years of imprisonment on suspicion of extremism, were later re-sentenced to longer terms while in prison. Four of the prisoners belonging to this category, according to the source, died in prison.

23. Twenty-six individuals, the source asserts, were sentenced for economic crimes and abuse of power and forcibly disappeared in the prison system, as well. Thirteen of the disappeared in this category, according to the source, have died in prison.

24. Finally, the source maintains that among those forcibly disappeared are three civil society activists, including Ms. Ogulsapar Muradova who died in prison in 2006. On 6 April 2018, the United Nations Human Rights Committee found the Turkmen Government in violation of Ms. Muradova's rights, including the rights to life, to freedom from torture, to personal integrity, to a fair trial and to freedom of expression and called upon the government to conduct an impartial investigation into Ms. Muradova's case and provide full redress to her family members.