

1<sup>st</sup>

**WORLD  
CONGRESS ON  
ENFORCED  
DISAPPEARANCES**

15&16  
JANUARY  
2025

Geneva, Switzerland

---

REPORT

---



# CONTENTS

---

## Introduction

## Overview

## Official **opening** ceremony

## Panels

1. **The fight against impunity: ensuring international **accountability** of perpetrators of enforced disappearance**
2. **Connecting victims and CSOs to **United Nations mechanisms**: how to foster effective engagement**
3. **Advocacy towards **ratification**: successful strategies**
4. ****Empowering victims** of enforced disappearance: guaranteeing their rights and providing multifaceted support**
5. **Legal tools against impunity: understanding and exercising **universal jurisdiction****
6. **The role of **art** in the struggle for justice**
7. **Strengthening **search** processes: key lessons and pathways for effective search**
8. ****Children** as victims of enforced disappearances**
9. **Enforced disappearance in the context of **migration****
10. ****Protecting** victims, human rights defenders and professionals, including lawyers and journalists**

11. **The case for ratification and implementation of the International **Convention**: why all States are concerned – A learning exchange**

12. **The impact of enforced disappearances on **women****

## Workshops

1/ **Work on **regional roadmaps**: identifying key priorities**

2/ **Setting up an international **youth network**: kick off session**

## **Closing** ceremony: call to collective action

## Thank You

## Participating Civil Society Organizations

## Annexes

## Partners

# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>ACHRP</b>          | African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights  |
| <b>AFAD</b>           | Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances  |
| <b>CED</b>            | United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances  |
| <b>CED Convention</b> | International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance   |
| <b>CEDI</b>           | Convention against Enforced Disappearances Initiative  |
| <b>CSOs</b>           | Civil society organizations  |
| <b>CTI</b>            | Convention against Torture Initiative  |
| <b>ECHR</b>           | European Court of Human Rights   |
| <b>FEDEFAM</b>        | Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Detained and Disappeared Persons   |
| <b>FEMED</b>          | Euro-Mediterranean Federation against Enforced Disappearances  |
| <b>IACHR</b>          | Inter-American Commission on Human Rights  |
| <b>ICAED</b>          | International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances  |
| <b>ICC</b>            | International Criminal Court   |
| <b>IIIM</b>           | International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 |
| <b>IIMP</b>           | Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic   |
| <b>NHRIs</b>          | National Human Rights Institutions   |
| <b>OHCHR</b>          | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  |
| <b>PACE</b>           | Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe  |
| <b>UJ</b>             | Universal jurisdiction   |
| <b>UN</b>             | United Nations   |
| <b>WGEID</b>          | United Nations Working on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances   |



Link



*"This First World Congress is a testament to our collective determination to address, prevent and eradicate this profound violation of multiple human rights. (...) We know that international efforts can make a difference. I urge us all to join forces, share knowledge and lessons, and strengthen cooperation and political commitment to tackle this dreadful crime."*

**Keynote Remarks by NADA AL-NASHIF**  
United Nations Deputy High Commissioner  
for Human Rights

*"We were able to experience this extraordinary Congress together. Bringing so many people together, with so many painful experiences, so many courageous commitments, from all corners of the world, reflects a richness, a diversity, an intensity of participation that is quite remarkable. That in itself is a success. This collective mobilisation must be sustained and multiplied."*

**Closing address by EMMANUEL DECAUX**  
CEDI President and  
former Chair of the United Nations Committee  
on Enforced Disappearances

*"The World Congress on Enforced Disappearances was important to me as a daughter of a victim because it validated our pain and struggles on a global stage. It connected me with others who share the same grief, reminding me that I am not alone. Most importantly, it renewed my hope that through collective voices, we can demand truth, justice, and an end to enforced disappearances. My father's absence is a wound time cannot heal, but his memory fuels my fight for justice. Every story I amplify, every truth I seek, is a promise to him and to all victims that they will never be forgotten."*

**AYESHAH JAMMEH**  
Programs Officer at the Gambia Center  
for Human Rights Violations,  
Member of the Reparations Commission,  
Member of CEDI Advisory Board

*"As the world reels from a series of blows to the rule of law and global and domestic human rights protection systems, this conference focused the minds of all participants on the real task at hand: finding the disappeared and learning their fate, holding perpetrators to account, and providing redress for survivors or the loved ones of the disappeared. The conference succeeded beyond expectations, demonstrating that confronting the alarming trend of authoritarianism against human rights and the rule of law requires uniting victims, civil society, governments, and multilateral organizations to advance human rights."*

**SANTIAGO CANTÓN**  
Secretary General of  
the International Commission of Jurists

*"It is our collective responsibility to do all we can to universalize the Convention. This Convention provides all States with the means to put an end to this practice through measures of prevention, protection and to fight against impunity. We owe it to the victims and their families. These despicable acts, which deprive individuals of their loved ones and plunge communities into uncertainty and pain, have no place in our societies."*

**ISABELLE ROME**  
Ambassador at Large for Human Rights  
for France

# INTRODUCTION

*By Grażyna Baranowska, Vice-Chair of the United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) and Olivier de Frouville, Chair of the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED)*

The fundamental goal of the World Congress was to gather, for the first time ever, all actors committed to the fight against enforced disappearances at the global level: States – parties or not parties to the UN Convention, associations of families of the disappeared and survivors, international organizations, international NGOs, academics and others...

Never before has there been such an opportunity for all those sharing the same concerns and objectives to exchange their experiences, coordinate their actions and develop common strategies.

Thanks to the co-organizers of the Congress, and to the full commitment of all partners, the challenge was fully met. The results of the Congress went in fact beyond our initial expectations. The figures were amazing: 620 participants in presence and 1392 attendees online, from 118 countries, 301 civil society organizations, including 82 victim-led organizations, 76 State delegations attending... these figures and features are worth recalling, because when the CEDI, the Committee, the Working Group and the sponsoring states initiated this back in 2022, we would have never imagined such an attendance and such an impact.

The panels provided a wealth of information, but also a unique opportunity to share experiences, while the parallel meetings and workshops enabled all the actors to develop common strategies for the first time in so many years. In a

particularly troubled time, all participants were touched by the commitment of the speakers, and the strong emotions generated throughout those days.

The plight of enforced disappearances was high on the agenda in the beginning of the 1990s especially during the negotiation of the Convention until its entry into force, from 2003 to 2010. But then the level of attention declined, as reflected in the lower rate of ratification of the Convention from 2017. This was in sharp contrast with the levelling up of the number of missing persons in the world, and among them of persons victims of enforced disappearances in very diverse contexts: "classical" enforced disappearances in the context of internal crisis, violent repression of opposition movements, the fight against terrorism or situations of non-international conflicts; but also new forms of enforced disappearances, with those occurring in the context of migration or connected to human trafficking, disappearances perpetrated by criminal organizations, sometimes with the complicity of official authorities, and also the so-called 'short-term' disappearances used more and more to repress peaceful assembly and freedom of expression and create a chilling effect among the civilian population.

Both the Working Group and the Committee were able to perceive this new wave of enforced disappearances through the reports and cases they received in the framework of their procedures. Also, through the review of country situations and visits, both bodies were able to

understand the extent to which associations of families of the disappeared and survivors felt left alone and in need of more support and solidarity.

In 2023, the international community showed unprecedented attention and care for victims of enforced disappearances by creating a new type of organisation, namely the Independent Institution on Missing Person in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP), specifically designed to facilitate the search for, and clarification of, the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons in Syria, and to provide adequate support to victims, including survivors and the families of those missing.

This is a major step for Syrian victims, but also for other victims all around the world as, beyond the Syrian situation, it could serve as a laboratory for new methodologies and approaches aiming at tackling the plight of enforced disappearances. But it certainly must not hide the dire reality that most of the families around the world, in many other countries, are still facing when trying to claim for truth, justice and reparation at the domestic level.

The World Congress aimed at giving a voice to all victims. During the opening ceremony, it became hard not to recall Julio Cortazar's word, at the outset of another conference, in Paris, 1981 when he spoke of 'the invisible presence of thousands of disappeared (...) in this room where they are not, where they are evoked as a theme of work (...) we must feel them present and close, sitting among us, looking at

us, talking to us. The mere fact that there are so many relatives and friends of the disappeared among the participants and the audience makes this innumerable multitude gathered in silent testimony, in implacable accusation, even more perceptible.'

Although the Congress fulfilled many expectations, it also gave rise to some disappointments, as it proved materially impossible to listen to all those present, to give them the space and time to speak and to do all that needed to be said and done. Hence, the call for a Second World Congress which clearly emerged very early on in the event.

The 15 UN experts on enforced disappearances – the 5 members of the Working Group and the 10 members of the Committee – have been involved from the very beginning in the process that led to the World Congress. We have discussed the concept and the feasibility, praised the creation of CEDI, and have been immediately associated with the organization as members of the board. We also followed the regional consultations that allowed to frame a first draft of the plan of action and to imagine a sketch of the program of the event. We also joined together – with the kind assistance of the Geneva Human Rights Platform – to reflect upon and give our input on the draft action plan and the program during a private seminar held in September 2024. Finally, both bodies have participated to the Congress itself, which was a fantastic opportunity to make contacts but also to explain both the possibilities and the limitations of our procedures, and how we can practically contribute and assist States and families in their endeavour to eliminate the scourge of enforced disappearances.

In this respect, we pledge to do our utmost to:

- promote the adoptions of legal frameworks and public policies conducive to the prevention of enforced disappearances in all countries,
- assist States and all other actors in dealing with enforced

disappearances, based on the rights of victims and societies to truth, justice, reparation, guarantees of non-repetition and memorialization,

- respond effectively to urgent situations current practices of enforced disappearances, through urgent actions and humanitarian procedures, but also through calls on states to fight against impunity and punish all perpetrators

At the end of the Congress, both the WGEID and CED were pleased that many of the key action points met their concerns and could ultimately increase their impact. Overall, more networks are needed – in Africa, but also among young defenders. And the universal ratification of the Convention needs to be achieved through a strong promotional campaign in the coming years.

In an even more dangerous world, we must return to the basics and the foundations of the post-World War II order, remembering why 'the peoples of the United Nations' reaffirmed their 'faith in fundamental human rights'.

There is no place in this world, for our children and for future generation for enforced disappearances. In the end, we need to pledge to remain faithful to Cortazar's oath:



*“We must maintain in a stubborn present, with all its blood and ignominy, what we are already trying to push into the convenient land of oblivion. We must continue to consider as alive those who are perhaps no longer so, but we have an obligation to reclaim them, one by one, until the answer finally brings the truth that we now seek to evade.”*

# OVERVIEW

*A multi-actor platform for cooperation and collective action*

**620**  
participants  
in person

**1392**  
attendees  
online

**301**  
civil society  
organizations,  
including  
82 victim-led  
organization

**118**  
countries

**23**  
partners

**76**  
State  
delegations

**16**  
pledging  
States



**Pledges** submitted by States, regional and international organizations, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions, and professionals.

# 2 CEREMONIES, 12 PANELS, 2 WORKSHOPS, 1 RECEPTION OVER 2 DAYS

## The disappeared and their families at the centre

The event highlighted the centrality of the voices of survivors and their families, including the crucial role of women in addressing enforced disappearances. This was reflected in the number of participants representing civil society organizations, including victim-led organizations.

125 speakers and moderators, 77 from civil society, including 29 family members and survivors. 78 were women (62%). Among representatives of victim-led organizations, there were twice as many women (107) as men (52), a reflection of the disproportionate impact of enforced disappearances on women and of their leading role in the struggle for truth and justice.

## Voices from the world

Participants came from all regions of the world. Europe was the most represented region, with 37% of participants, followed by the Americas (21%), Asia-Pacific (13%), MENA (13%) and Africa (8%).

Amongst the 125 speakers and moderators, 56 (45%) came from Europe, 26 (21%) from the Americas, 15 (12%) from Asia-Pacific, 14 (11%) from Africa, and 13 (10%) from MENA.



## Key action points

Recommendations for action were identified throughout the various sessions. The event concluded with a call to action and unveiling of key follow-up activities:

- Support the creation of a victim-led regional network in Sub-Saharan Africa
- Organization of regular meetings of women searchers
- Reporting on the sessions of the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances
- Promotion of ratification of the International Convention
- Strengthening the capacity of CSOs to engage with UN mechanisms
- Support the creation of a global youth network against enforced disappearances

These initiatives were suggested during pre-Congress regional consultations and represent a commitment to the fight against enforced disappearance.

# OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY

---

*The official opening ceremony was marked by a call for strengthened cooperation amongst all actors involved in the fight against enforced disappearances. Tribute was paid to the victims and to their families for their perseverance and resilience. A minute of silence was dedicated to the memory of all the disappeared.*

**Moderation by two members of CEDI Advisory Board:**

**Olivier de Frouville**, *United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances*

*(CED), Chair, France*

**Mandira Sharma**, *Senior International Legal Adviser at the International Commission of Jurists and CEDI Advisory Board Member, Nepal*





## Opening address

In his opening address, Emmanuel Decaux, CEDI President and former Chair of the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances, paid tribute to victims of enforced disappearances and to their families. He pointed out that the Congress formed part of long-term efforts to recognize enforced disappearance as an autonomous crime and recalled the objective of universal ratification and effective implementation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Against a backdrop of international crises and armed conflicts, the need for all actors to join forces to strengthen humanitarian protection and criminal accountability was highlighted.



## Keynote address

Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights also paid tribute to the victims and echoed the call to join forces to address, prevent and eradicate this profound violation of multiple human rights. The Deputy High Commissioner underscored four crucial areas for action: 1. Ensure that the rights and voices of victims and survivors remain at the core of all efforts; 2. Efforts within and between countries to tackle impunity; 3. Improve reliable data gathering on disappeared people; 4. Universal ratification and effective implementation of the Convention.



## Powerful and humbling testimonies

Family members of disappeared persons took centre stage. Swastika Mali from Nepal, Aksinia Bobruiko from Ukraine, Paulo Estrada from Guatemala, Nassera Dutour from Algeria and Ayeshah Jammeh from The Gambia shared details of their personal journey, how their lives were turned upside down when their loved one was forcibly disappeared, the multifaceted impact the disappearance has had on themselves and on their communities. In powerful, awe-inspiring testimonies, they also explained how they became searchers, how they found the strength to reach out to people in a similar situation and how they came to be activists. Their voices underscored their resilience as well as the crucial role they play in the pursuit of truth and justice.

Nassera Dutour from Algeria has been searching for her son, who was forcibly disappeared by State agents, since 1997. She contributed to unite families of the disappeared in Algeria into the Collective for the Families of the Disappeared in Algeria (CFDA). The Collective received the International Catalan Institute for Peace's Peace in Progress Award in 2019. She is the co-founder and current President of the Euro-Mediterranean Federation Against Enforced Disappearances (FEMED).

*"My energy comes from the many faces of mothers, sisters, wives, daughters of the disappeared, men as well, passing before my eyes, every second of my life. We don't speak the same language but we understand each other because I know how it feels. My energy comes from the will to combat this injustice and powerlessness."*

*"The United Nations mechanisms bring comfort to families. They know that there is a case file here in Geneva, that is the live memory of our children. It makes the families proud because they feel that they have done something, even if they have not found their child."*

Ayeshah Jammeh's father and aunt – relatives of former dictator Yahya Jammeh – were forcibly disappeared in The Gambia in 2005. Ayeshah co-founded and works as a Programme Officer at the Gambia Center for Victims of Human Rights Violations. She hosts the Victim's Podcast, which she created, to amplify the voices of victims and raise awareness on transitional justice in her country. She was nominated for the Activist of the Year in Africa 2024. Most recently, she was appointed to serve as commissioner on The Gambia's Reparations Commission, which is mandated to oversee the identification and reparation of victims of human rights abuses during the Jammeh regime.

*"From a victim I became a voice. I felt my story was powerful because there was this notion in my country that Yaya Jammeh was not killing his relatives. Sharing my story inspired a lot of victims to come out and join the fight for justice and accountability in The Gambia."*

*"I created the Victims' Podcast. It gave a platform to victims and civil society organizations to speak about their story. You can always go back and listen to the stories of victims because we cannot just forget about them"*

---

Nassera Dutour from Algeria has been searching for her son, who was forcibly disappeared by State agents, since 1997. She contributed to unite families of the disappeared in Algeria into the Collective for the Families of the Disappeared in Algeria (CFDA). The Collective received the International Catalan Institute for Peace's Peace in Progress Award in 2019. She is the co-founder and current President of the Euro-Mediterranean Federation Against Enforced Disappearances (FEMED).

*"My energy comes from the many faces of mothers, sisters, wives, daughters of the disappeared, men as well, passing before my eyes, every second of my life. We don't speak the same language but we understand each other because I know how it feels. My energy comes from the will to combat this injustice and powerlessness."*

*"The United Nations mechanisms bring comfort to families. They know that there is a case file here in Geneva, that is the live memory of our children. It makes the families proud because they feel that they have done something, even if they have not found their child."*

---

Aksinia Bobruiko from Ukraine was confronted with the issue when her mother was forcibly disappeared for 44 days in 2024 after she was arrested in the Russia-occupied city of Melitopol in the Zaporizhzhia region.

*"When my mother was disappeared I felt empty with my pain. After three or four months I thought that I should do something. I found someone, we spoke and she explained to me step by step how to make more connections and find other relatives from the group "Civilians in captivity" and they told me how we could help each other to bring our relatives home". "It is so important to help each other and work together. This is my main message."*

---

Paulo René Estrada Velásquez is the son and nephew of disappeared persons registered in the military intelligence document known as 'Dossier de la Muerte o Diario Militar'. Paulo is a plaintiff and petitioner in the same case at national and international level. He is co-founder of the judicial observatory 'Truth and Justice in Guatemala', which monitors and analyses cases of transitional justice and criminalization in Guatemala. He is currently President of the Association of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA) and is also a member of victims' organizations in Mexico and Canada.

*"I belong to the second generation of searchers in Guatemala. Through encounters, we have managed to get children and grandchildren interested in the search and to promote their active participation. When one searches, they feel a certain degree of reparation, even though they don't find. Finding other people allows us not to lose hope and keep searching. The intergenerational exchange is very important for the children and grandchildren to be able to keep searching because life is not eternal, and we will always miss our relatives."*

# Multi-actor support

## Congress partners

The Congress partners expressed support for the initiative and the ongoing efforts to combat enforced disappearances. They reaffirmed their commitment to sustaining their support and engaging in related activities.

Various issues were highlighted, including the fight against impunity, the need to support victims and their families, the need to universalize the Convention, the link between the search for the disappeared and peacebuilding, the link between enforced disappearance and torture, the need to enhance cooperation amongst involved actors to address this issue effectively.

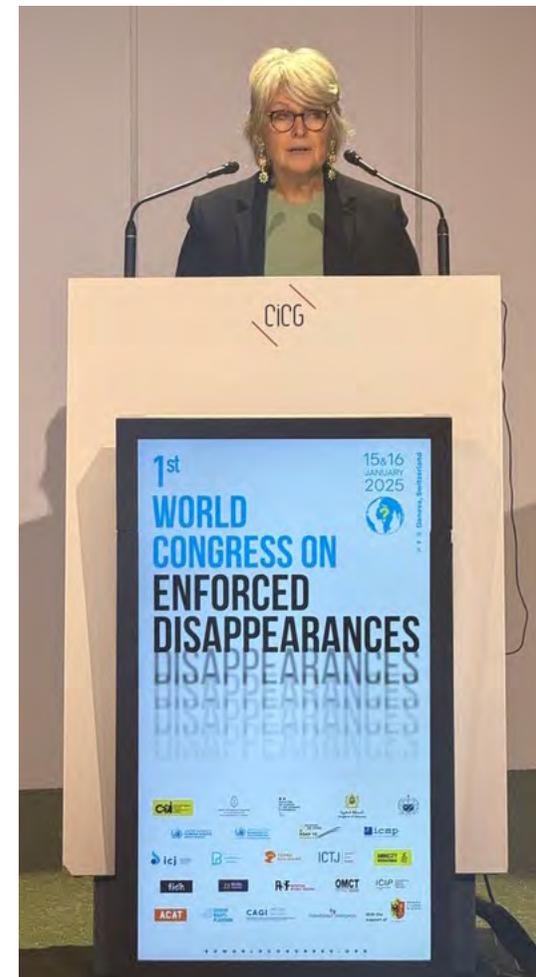
## Pledging States



16 States announced substantial **pledges**, starting with Poland following its very recent ratification of the Convention, bringing the number of States parties to 77. In addition, voluntary commitments were presented by Armenia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, France, The Gambia, Germany, Luxembourg, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Sudan and Uruguay.

### Pledges included:

- Supporting the universalization of the Convention
  - Recognizing and advocating for the recognition of the competence of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive individual and inter-State communications
  - Incorporating the standards of the Convention into national legislation
  - Developing a national action plan
  - Promoting civil society and victim participation in processes that affect them
  - Empowering victims and their families, promoting their participation in relevant processes, including search processes
  - Strengthening search processes
  - Awareness-raising and capacity-building, including through training activities
  - Supporting regional and international mechanisms mandated to combat enforced disappearances
  - Supporting the creation and/or strengthening of victim-led regional and international solidarity networks
- Enhancing regional and international cooperation, including through experience-sharing



---

## Regional human rights organizations

Representatives of regional human rights institutions presented their work and reaffirmed their commitment to preventing and addressing enforced disappearances. Representatives of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe and of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe addressed the issue of the execution of judgements of the European Court of Human Rights related to enforced disappearances and pledged to promote the ratification of the International Convention.

The Representative of the African Commission of Human and Peoples' Rights emphasized the necessity of a collective and inclusive approach to combat enforced disappearances involving United Nations human rights treaty bodies, regional organizations, States, and victims, and called for strengthened cooperation.

The Representative of the Inter-American Commission mentioned three urgent preoccupations: disappearances in the context of organized crime; impunity and increasing negationist tendencies; the necessity of intersectional connections to address this phenomenon.

---

## National human rights institutions

The President of the National Human Rights Council of Morocco presented pledges related to the strengthening of the national legal framework, the identification of victims, including through DNA testing, and memorialization.

The Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of The Gambia committed to continue engaging with governments, civil society, and international partners to ensure that victims' rights are prioritised and that the recommendations of the Truth Commission are fully implemented by conducting awareness campaigns, providing legal and policy advice, and monitoring compliance with human rights obligations.

# PANELS

---



# 1. THE FIGHT AGAINST IMPUNITY : ENSURING INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY OF PERPETRATORS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE



*This session was sponsored by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ).*

## Moderators

**Sandra EPAL-RATJEN**, International Commission of Jurists,

International Advocacy Director, France

**Ian SEIDERMAN**, International Commission of Jurists, Senior Legal and Policy Director, USA/Switzerland

• **Ana SROVIN CORALLI**, The Geneva Graduate Institute, PhD Student and Teaching Assistant, Slovenia

• **Eugénie VENDROUX**, Université of Paris 2 (Panthéon-Assas), PhD Student and Teaching Assistant, France

• **Kate VIGNESWARAN**, International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Director, Global Accountability Initiative, Australia

## Panelists

• **Reed BRODY**, International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Commissioner, USA

• **Ward FERDINANDUSSE**, Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor's Office, Deputy Prosecutor, The Netherlands

• **Olivier DE FROUVILLE**, United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), Chair, France

• **Nazhat Shameem KHAN**, International Criminal Court (ICC), Deputy prosecutor, Fiji (video)

• **Ilya NUZOV**, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) (Global Initiative Against Impunity member), Head of the International Justice Desk

• **Robert PETIT**, International, impartial and Independent Mechanism – Syria (IIIM), Head, Canada

*This session was dedicated to existing and emerging mechanisms at the international level for holding perpetrators of enforced disappearance accountable. Panelists explored the reasons why the crime of enforced disappearance remains widely unprosecuted and presented related recommendations. The contributions highlighted the need for legal harmonization and adequate legal frameworks as well as robust regional and international cooperation to prosecute enforced disappearance cases and provide justice and reparation to victims.*



## The insightful presentations addressed the following themes:

### • **Persisting challenges to prosecution and investigation**

Panelists examined challenges to ensuring accountability, including gathering and providing evidence for a crime that is secretive by nature, the lack of cooperation and political will from relevant State authorities, the fear of reprisals of investigating, prosecuting, and judicial authorities, their lack of awareness regarding the specificity of enforced disappearance and its complex nature, and difficulties in securing jurisdiction, including extraterritorial jurisdiction.

### • **The need for legal frameworks that recognize enforced disappearance as an autonomous and continuing crime**

Panelists reviewed existing legal frameworks at the national and international levels.

In countries where enforced disappearance is not criminalized as an autonomous offence, using alternative



offences prevents its prosecution as such as it does not take into account the specificity and complexity of the crime and affects the severity of penalties. Similarly, enforced disappearance should be considered a continuing crime, i.e. so long as the fate and the whereabouts of the person have not been clarified, to ensure that prosecution is not limited by statutes of limitation or de facto impunity, such as fear of reprisals or lack of independence and impartiality of the judiciary.

### • **Coexisting definitions and approaches: international criminal law and international human rights law**

The definitions of enforced disappearance as provided by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and by the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances differ on three elements: the intent of the author, the duration of the disappearance and the link with State agents. Both definitions can be found in the case law of hybrid and international tribunals and mechanisms. However, there is no agreement on a single, unified definition. Domestic tribunals are also confronted with the same issue.

### • **The crucial role of victims and CSOs**

Victim involvement and advocacy, including personal efforts by survivors and family members, is crucial in documenting cases and pushing for accountability. Victim-centred approaches have proved essential to achieving justice as their lived experiences inform the justice process.

### • **Successful cooperation**

Creativity and adaptability are essential in designing legal frameworks for hybrid tribunals and international mechanisms. Building coalitions among victims, civil society, and States at the regional and at the international level enhances the chances of success in achieving accountability and justice regarding cases of enforced disappearance and other international crimes, such as the creation of hybrid and international tribunals.

## Recommendations for action

### • **Strengthening national legal and institutional frameworks**

- Enforced disappearance should be recognized as an autonomous and continuing crime, and its definition consistent across jurisdictions and tribunals
- The possibility to exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction should be provided in domestic law
- More resources should be allocated to prosecutorial units with jurisdiction over enforced disappearances and to NGOs that work to promote accountability
- Training of prosecutors, judges and lawyers should be provided to enhance their awareness of the specificity of the crime of enforced disappearance

### • **Guaranteeing victim engagement**

- Victims should be supported to allow them to bring their case to justice: legal support to document and build their case, psychological support, and financial and administrative support to access the country where proceedings take place
- CSOs who support victims should also be supported

### • **Promoting consistency across international standards**

A collective reflexion is necessary on how to promote the relevant treaty provisions to achieve accountability in cases of enforced disappearance and how to promote consistency across international standards, for example regarding the definition of enforced disappearances in international criminal law and in international human rights law.

### • **Fostering cooperation**

Coalition amongst victims, civil society, and States at the regional and at the international level should be built and supported to promote the creation of international accountability mechanisms and the development, ratification and implementation of relevant standards, such as the CED Convention and the draft Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Humanity.

*“Enforced disappearances have and continue to be addressed by both domestic courts and international tribunals and mechanisms. But the processes have met numerous challenges, and impunity remains the norm rather than the exception around the world.”*

**Ian Seiderman**

*“Donde están importa, pero quien lo hizo también. Where they are matters, but who did it as well.”*

**Ana Srovin Coralli**

# 2. CONNECTING VICTIMS AND CSOs TO UNITED NATIONS MECHANISMS : HOW TO FOSTER EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

## Moderator

**Wilder TAYLER**, *Institución Nacional de Derechos Humanos y Defensoría del Pueblo (INDH), Director and Referent for the search for the detained-disappeared, Uruguay*

## Panelists

- **Juan Pablo ALBÁN ALENCASTRO**, *UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), Member and Rapporteur, Ecuador*
- **María Isabel CRUZ BERNAL**, *Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México, Spokesperson – Asociación Civil Sabuesos Guerreras, Founder and President, Mexico*
- **Ana Lorena DELGADILLO PÉREZ**, *UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID), Member, Mexico*
- **Juan Carlos GUTIÉRREZ CONTRERAS**, *IDHEAS – Litigio Estratégico en Derechos Humanos A.C. (IDHEAS), Legal Director, Mexico*
- **Gabriela GUZMÁN**, *UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID), Executive Secretary, Mexico*
- **Maximilian MURCK**, *Coordinator, UNFPA Human Identification Programme, Mexico*

• **Jean-Jacques NGANYA**, *Pax Christi Uvira, Director, Democratic Republic of the Congo*

• **Albane PROPHETTE-PALLASCO**, *UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), Executive Secretary, Ecuador/France*

• **Yelyzaveta SOKURENKO**, *Human Rights Centre ZMINA, Head of the war crimes documentation department, Ukraine*

• **Alexis THIRY**, *MENA Rights Group, Legal Advisor*

• **Morris TIDBALL-BINZ**, *UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Chile*

• **Hélène TIGROUDJA**, *UN Human Rights Committee, Member and Special Rapporteur on New Communications and Interim Measures, France*



**This session aimed to provide a space for civil society organizations who support families and document cases of enforced disappearance to directly exchange with several United Nations bodies: WGEID, CED, Human Rights Committee and Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions. The discussion centred on how to encourage the reporting of enforced disappearance cases to UN mechanisms and more broadly on the contribution of victims and CSOs.**

## Key issues raised included the following :

### •Victim and CSO crucial contribution to UN mechanisms

Panelists from UN mechanisms highlighted the crucial contribution of victims and CSOs, “the engine” of their work. Victims and CSOs can contribute to the work of the relevant UN bodies in different ways: by documenting and submitting individual cases, submitting information in alternative reports, or during meetings, be they online, during sessions or during country visits.

### •Challenges

Different types of challenges were mentioned, including the lack of awareness from victims and CSOs about available mechanisms, their procedures and engagement modalities. CSOs supporting families also raised the need to manage their expectations regarding procedures that span over several years and frustration stemming from the lack of information and updates on their case. The risk of reprisals for engaging with UN mechanisms was raised as an additional challenge.

For their part, the UN mechanisms pointed out the lack of cooperation from certain States as a major challenge to carrying out their mandate, providing information to victims on their cases and undertaking country visits.

### • Resource constraints

The lack of resources was repeatedly highlighted by UN mechanisms and CSOs as the main challenge. On the one hand, CSOs need adequate resources to support families and help them provide their crucial input to UN mechanisms. On the other hand, UN mechanisms need adequate human, technical and financial resources to carry out their mandate effectively.

### • Coordination and complementarity amongst bodies

The WGEID and CED, the two UN specialized bodies on enforced disappearances, coordinate to ensure complementarity and efficiency. Coordination also exists with other UN human rights bodies. For example, the Human Rights Committee cross-references and follows upon the recommendations formulated by other treaty bodies or special procedures, including CED and WGEID.

### • Impact on the ground

Success stories of collaborative engagement were shared to show the impact of UN mechanisms’ work on the ground. In Mexico, over 450 individuals have been located thanks to CED urgent action procedure – a procedure aimed at locating and protecting a disappeared person – and strategic local measures supported by the UN. Besides, the UNFPA human identification programme, which implements CED recommendation to establish a system of fingerprint matching, has increased the capacity of local authorities to process digital fingerprints and achieved outstanding results

## Recommendations for action

### • Facilitating CSO and victim participation

- UN mechanisms should develop and widely disseminate material and guidance on how to engage with UN mechanisms in as many languages as possible
- CSOs and victims should not hesitate to use available mechanisms and reach out to them to register cases or requests meetings, including online
- When a State will not accept a State visit, academic institutions could invite relevant bodies to allow them to exchange with local actors.

### • Building the capacity of local actors

CSOs and local actors should make the most of the mechanisms’ diverse and extensive expertise and not hesitate to request capacity-building workshops, either in the field or online.

### • Providing adequate resources

CSOs should be allocated adequate resources to contribute to the work of the UN mechanisms effectively. Likewise, the relevant mechanisms should be provided with the human, technical and financial resources commensurate with their mandate and workload.



*“The role of families and civil society is fundamental. Please, use us! You are the engine of our work.”*

**Ana Lorena Delgadillo Pérez**

*“International and Ukrainian human rights organizations should ensure that victims have access to such mechanisms and be provided with full and understandable information about how they function. It is also important to ensure that victims’ expectations are met with capabilities of such mechanisms.”*

**Yelyzaveta Sokurenko**

*“When you register a case, be it with the Working Group or with the Committee, we cannot expect an immediate result, but what is absolutely key is that all the names remain for history and for the future and for the construction of a positive outcome. The fact that a case is registered gives hope for the future.”*

**Albane Prophette-Pallasco**

# 3. ADVOCACY TOWARDS RATIFICATION : SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES



*This session was co-sponsored by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and ACAT-France.*

## Moderator

**Carin BENNINGER-BUDEL**, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), Deputy General Secretary, The Netherlands

## Panelists

- **Mohammad ASHRAFUZZAMAN**, Odhikar, UN Representative, Bangladesh
- **Fatima BARKAN**, Délégation Interministérielle aux Droits de l'Homme, Secretary General, Morocco
- **Raphaël CHENUIL-HAZAN**, Ensemble contre la peine de mort (ECPM), Executive Director, France
- **Mary Aileen DIEZ-BACALSO**, International Coalition Against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED), Honorary President – FORUM-ASIA, Executive Director, Thailand
- **Constantinos EFSTATHIOU**, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Deputy Representative, Cyprus
- **Solange MOUMÉ ETIA**, ACAT-France, Programmes and Advocacy Director, France

- **Gayethri PILLAY**, Convention Against Torture Initiative (CTI), Head of Secretariat, Seychelles
- **Idrissa SOW**, African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), Chair of the Working Group on Death Penalty, Extra-Judicial, Summary or Arbitrary Killings and Enforced Disappearances in Africa, Senegal

*This panel explored advocacy strategies to make progress towards the goal of universal ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (CED Convention). With 77 States parties as of December 2024, adherence to the CED Convention is not as high as other international human rights treaties, such as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT Convention) which has been ratified by 175 States.*

*Panelists discussed strategies tailored to diverse political and social contexts to increase the number of States parties to the CED Convention.*

## Common issues across the interventions emerged:

### • The crucial role of victims and civil society

Victims' voices remain the most compelling tool for advocacy, offering authenticity and urgency to the call for ratification, as proven by the collaborative drafting process of the CED Convention. Its provision stems from the experience of the disappeared and their families. Civil society and victims' organization raise awareness about enforced disappearance and the importance for all States to adhere to the Convention through their documentation, campaigning and advocacy activities at the national, regional and international level.

### • Regional trends and context-specific approaches

Contextual strategies are essential, leveraging local knowledge and addressing political priorities. Progress has been achieved in Africa through initiatives like the African Commission's [Guidelines](#) on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances in Africa, enforcement remains limited due to the lack of dedicated widespread ratification. In Europe the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has been advocating for ratification by its Member States in a [recommendation](#). The experience of the Convention against Torture Initiative ([CTI](#)) shows that promoting dialogue at the regional level on issues of common interest has yielded positive results, including in the Middle East and North Africa.

### • Diplomatic engagement

Peer-to-peer engagement, exemplified by CTI, has proven an effective strategy to promote ratification of the CAT Convention. Bilateral and multilateral platforms enable States to learn from each other and build trust. Experience also shows the importance of addressing States' concerns and misconceptions, emphasizing that technical support is available, but also highlighting the benefits of the ratification and the process itself, such as the opportunity for consultation with citizens and civil society.

### • Fostering partnerships and collaboration

Alliances and partnerships, such as civil society and victim coalition or groups of friendly States and experts, have proven instrumental in promoting ratification of human rights instruments. Collaboration amongst the relevant mechanisms at the national, regional and international, and between the mechanisms and other actors – NHRIs, CSOs, States – has also been decisive to secure advances in terms of ratification and implementation of human rights instruments.



## Recommendations for action

### • Strengthening and supporting victim and civil society participation

- Strengthen and support coalitions that amplify victims' voices
- Enhance advocacy through storytelling and strategic media use

### • Replicating successful strategies for diplomatic engagement

- Combine bilateral and multilateral diplomacy
- Address States' concerns and misconceptions about ratification
- Highlight the benefits of ratification
- Communicate modalities of support and technical assistance available through the UN and other actors
- Foster platforms for experience-sharing on ratification challenges and benefits

### • Developing and implementing context-specific strategies

- Ratification efforts should take into account ongoing priorities, such as the ratification of other treaties or transitional justice processes, to align with States' pre-existing commitments.

### • Building and strengthening alliances

- Identify and mobilize "friends" of the Convention at the national level (in parliament and government), regional and international level (international coalition, "Group of friends", "Core States")

### • Encouraging and strengthening cooperation

- Promote collaboration at the national, regional and international level amongst and between relevant mechanisms and actors, through experience-sharing and joint activities.
- Strengthen cooperation amongst all actors through platforms such as this congress.

*“Victims’ stories are the most powerful basis for campaigning for the ratification of the Convention.”*

**Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso**

*“The Guidelines [on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances in Africa] complement the International Convention. Every time we promote the Guidelines, we take advantage of this opportunity to promote the universal ratification of the Convention.”*

**Idrissa Sow**

# 4. EMPOWERING VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE : GUARANTEEING THEIR RIGHTS AND PROVIDING MULTIFACETED SUPPORT

UN VOLUNTARY  
FUND FOR VICTIMS  
OF TORTURE  
ROAD TO  
REDRESS.



*This session was sponsored by the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT)*

## Moderators

**Jens MODVIG**, United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT), Chair of the Board of Trustees, Denmark

**Angkhana NEELAPAIJIT**, former Member of the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) and family of victim, Thailand

## Panelists

• **Semina ALEKIC**, President of the Coordination of Associations of Families of the Missing in Bosnia and Herzegovina

• **Hala AL-KARIB**, Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA), Regional Director, Sudan

• **Leeladavi ANANDA NADARAJAH**, Families of the Enforced Disappearances in Sri Lanka, Senior Activist cum Leader, Sri Lanka

• **Maria Adela ANTOKOLETZ**, International Coalition against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED), President – Federación Latinoamericana de Asociaciones de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos (FEDEFAM), Executive Secretary – Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora, Vice-President, Argentina

• **Elba BENDO**, European Human Rights Advocacy Centre (EHRAC), International Advocacy Lawyer, United Kingdom

• **Najla FADHEL**, Abductees Mothers Association, Founder and active member, Yemen

• **Sushanty GOBALAKRISHNAN**, Embassy of Switzerland in Sri Lanka, Senior National Programme Officer, Sri Lanka

• **Elma MAJSTORIC**, International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), Senior Officer, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with Semina ALEKIC, President of the Coordination of the Associations of Families of Missing Persons in Bosnia

• **Amina MASOOD JANJUA**, Defence of Human Rights and Public Services Trust (DHR), Chairperson – Asian Federation Against Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), Council member, Pakistan

• **Annah MOYO-KUPETA**, Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), Executive Director, South Africa

*This session included insightful contributions from family members as well as organizations and institutions who support them in their quest for truth, justice and reparation. Panelists addressed the provision of legal and psychosocial support, victim and family participation, and network-building. Various contexts were presented, including the overlooked enforced disappearance of women in war-torn Sudan.*

*The interventions highlighted the key role played by family members who search for their loved ones, not only within their family, but within their community and society as a whole.*

## Common themes emerged:

### • Gender dimension

The disproportionate impact of enforced disappearances on women and girls was examined both in their roles as family members left behind and as individuals subjected to disappearance themselves. In closed societies, the associated social stigma and the “burden of shame” contribute to the isolation of affected families, complicating efforts to provide legal and psychosocial support.

### • From victim to activist: the empowerment cycle

Around the world, women searchers embody the movement against enforced disappearances through their courage and resilience, which reinforces the importance of collective action and serves as a source of inspiration to others.

Providing legal, mental health and psychosocial support services to women while they seek truth and justice leads to their empowerment, allowing them to play a leadership role and, in turn, to support, train, and empower others.



### • Active family engagement

Panelists shared concrete examples of the successful active involvement of family members in legal proceedings, search and identification processes and legislation drafting, shedding light on their essential contribution to achieving truth and justice and to designing adequate legal frameworks.

### • Tailored, holistic approaches to victim support

The importance of tailored, trauma-informed, holistic approaches to providing support to victims, be it legal or psychosocial, was repeatedly emphasized. Enforced disappearances cause prolonged trauma, as families live in limbo, oscillating between hope and despair.

Legal proceedings, search, memorialization and advocacy activities, while empowering, can also trigger trauma as victims and families relive their experiences. Holistic support ensures that victims and family members can actively participate in relevant processes while reducing retraumatization. Such support is also crucial to prevent intergenerational trauma. Best practices were shared, such as providing support that is tailored to women, men and children. Additionally, building community resilience ensures that there is a support network for victims to rely on, given the continuing nature of the trauma related to enforced disappearance.

## Recommendations for action

### • Adopting victim-centred

- gender-sensitive, trauma-informed, holistic approaches
- Gender-sensitive approaches should be adopted when addressing enforced disappearances, including integrating gender perspectives in relevant processes: search and identification, legal proceedings, drafting of legislation, provision of support.

- The provision of mental health and psychosocial support services should be institutionalized and integrated into legal, social and justice mechanisms to minimize retraumatization.

- Similarly, legal representation for victims should take into account the trauma resulting from enforced disappearance, ensuring that legal practices are structured to minimize retraumatization. This includes building trust and support networks for victims beyond the scope of legal proceedings.

### • Promoting the active engagement of family members

Efforts should focus on promoting the active involvement of family members at every step of the processes that affect them: search and identification, judicial, legislative and other relevant processes to ensure that those align with their rights.

### • Awareness-raising and education

Raising awareness about enforced disappearance is essential to inform communities about the concept, available support and existing processes to search for the disappeared and seek justice and reparation.

### • Building and supporting strong networks

Given the specificity of enforced disappearance as a continuing human rights violation and the long-term struggle of families for truth and justice, strong networks, including the existing family-led networks at the national and international levels, should be supported.

*“The active involvement of families is crucial in achieving truth and justice.”*

**Elma Majstoric**

*“When the families [of women and girls in Sudan] realize what happened, they would rather claim that their daughters, wives or sisters are dead rather than admitting that they have been taken”.*

**Hala Al-karib**

*“While families look for truth and justice, we have to make them mentally fit to carry on the struggle. They are converted into leaders and they become role models. We give them practical training for their capacity-building so they become psychologists, they become the care-providers and the trainers for others.”*

**Amina Masood Janjua**

# 5. LEGAL TOOLS AGAINST IMPUNITY: UNDERSTANDING AND EXERCISING UNIVERSAL JURISDICTION



*This panel was sponsored by the Paris Bar Association.*

## Moderator

**Anne SOULÉLIAC**, Barreau de Paris, Director of International Affairs, France

## Panelists

- **Grażyna BARANOWSKA**, UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID), Vice-Chair, Poland
- **Clémence BECTARTE**, FIDH Litigation Action Group, Coordinator, France
- **Obeida DABBAGH**, family member, Syria
- **Mazen DARWISH**, Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), President, Syria
- **Philip GRANT**, TRIAL International, Executive Director, Switzerland
- **Luciano HAZAN**, former Member of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) and of the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) – Federal Public Defender's Office of Argentina, Head of the Program against Institutional Violence, Argentina

- **Andreas SCHÜLLER**, European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), Director of the International Crimes and Accountability program, Germany

*This session aimed to explore universal jurisdiction (UJ) as a tool to combat impunity. Panelists commented on several ongoing and concluded cases concerning enforced disappearances. The discussed proceedings took place in various countries, including Argentina, Switzerland, France, and Germany regarding crimes committed in Belarus, The Gambia, Syria, Ukraine. Discussions explored the evolution of UJ, practical solutions, and the balance between pursuing local justice mechanisms and resorting to UJ as a last measure.*



## Common themes :

### • A timely moment for universal jurisdiction and enforced disappearance cases

There appears to be a significant moment for UJ in the context of enforced disappearances. In Switzerland, ongoing proceedings concern the very first UJ case related to enforced disappearances. In France, a groundbreaking judgment was issued in 2024, and in Germany, the law on enforced disappearances was recently amended. These developments indicate that now is an opportune time to discuss and advance UJ proceedings concerning enforced disappearances.

### • Legal and procedural challenges

The session highlighted challenges in applying UJ to enforced disappearances, such as the lack of a clear and consistent legal definition of enforced disappearance across jurisdictions. Aligning definitions would ensure consistency across international and national legal systems in addressing such cases, which often suffer from definitional ambiguities. Additionally, legal frameworks need to provide the possibility to exercise UJ.

Securing evidence, especially in cross-border contexts, represents another hurdle, as exemplified by the Harauski case in Switzerland involving a Belarussian military officer.

### • The crucial role of families and civil society organizations

The panel clearly demonstrated the critical role of civil society organizations, victim groups and families in initiating UJ cases, collecting evidence, locating suspects, supporting families and advocating for justice, particularly in the absence of State action. However, the discussion also emphasized the need to advance efforts to ensure the formal recognition of families' rights within UJ proceedings. Moreover, discussions highlighted the ongoing necessity of civil society's advocacy and support in such cases, stressing the importance of providing adequate financial and legal resources to facilitate their pursuit.

### • Raising awareness about UJ and enforced disappearances: opportunities and risks

As there are still very few examples of UJ proceedings dealing with enforced disappearances, raising awareness remains crucial. Affected families, who often provide critical testimonies that initiate and sustain proceedings, need to be informed about the possibilities of UJ but also about the risks. While UJ provides an avenue for justice, victims must be informed about its limitations and the potential outcomes, the risks of reprisals and potential threats, as well as the psychological toll it places on them.

Besides, legal professionals including judges, prosecutors and lawyers responsible for such cases must understand the unique nature of enforced disappearances.

### • The necessity of international cooperation

For UJ proceedings to be effective, mutual cooperation between countries is essential, as shown in cases in Syria and Ukraine. Typically, there is no access to the country where the enforced disappearances occurred, but other countries or institutions might possess relevant information. A notable example is the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), which collects and provides evidence to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria since March 2011. This mechanism supports prosecutions worldwide, helping to advance cases, including those related to UJ.

### • Narratives about enforced disappearances

While panelists highlighted the challenges related to the UJ proceedings discussed, these cases have succeeded in creating a space to reveal the truth about enforced disappearances in the respective countries. Enforced disappearances are inherently conducted and maintained in secrecy. UJ proceedings provide a platform to bring attention to these acts, even when they are still denied in the countries where they were committed.

## Recommendations for action

### • Adopting clear legal frameworks

One of the key recommendations emerging from the session is the urgent need for States that have not done so yet to criminalize enforced disappearance in line with the CED Convention definition, adopt consistent legal definitions of enforced disappearance across jurisdictions and provide the possibility to exercise universal jurisdiction. The international community, particularly through UN bodies, can contribute to updating and harmonizing the legal frameworks governing enforced disappearance cases under UJ.

### • Ensuring family and civil society participation and providing related support

- Civil society organizations and victim groups play a critical role in initiating UJ cases and supporting families and should therefore be provided with the necessary financial and legal resources.

- Families should also be provided with adequate support, which implies granting access to the prosecuting country, offering interpretation services and providing psychological support.

### • Raising awareness of legal professionals

Judges, prosecutors and lawyers working on enforced disappearance cases should be provided with specialized training on the complexities of enforced disappearances and UJ and its impact on families involved in the proceedings.

### • Strengthening international cooperation

International collaboration should be strengthened to share evidence and best practices and allocate sufficient financial and human resources to support UJ prosecutions, including through the establishment of specialized units. Civil society efforts should also be supported with the necessary financial and human resources as well as expertise.

*“Universal Jurisdiction is a powerful tool to fight impunity, but without clear definitions and proper resources, its potential is severely limited.”*

**Philip Grant**

*“The most important thing for me was justice. I won the case for my brother, for my nephew, through this resounding trial. This is a case that concerns tens and tens of thousands of disappeared Syrians. Perseverance and obstinacy paid off in the end, otherwise we would never have won our case.”*

**Obeida Dabbagh**

# 6. THE ROLE OF ART IN THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

ICTJ | Justice  
Truth  
Dignity

*This panel was sponsored by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ).*

## Moderator

**Fernando TRAVESI**, International Center for Transitional Justice,  
Executive Director, Colombia

## Panelists

- **Mahmoud ASWAD**, Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (LDHR),  
Syria
- **Ahmad Sheikh SIDI**, Center for Civil Society and Democracy  
(CCSD), Syria
- **Yasamin KAVIRATNE**, Amnesty International, Regional  
Campaigner, Sri Lanka
- **Sirra NDOW**, African Network against Extrajudicial Killings and  
Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED), Founder and Country Director  
for the Gambia, The Gambia
- **Elena ABOU DEHEN**, Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped  
and Disappeared in Lebanon (CFKDL), Field Coordinator, Lebanon
- **Wadad MOURAD HALWANI**, Committee of the Families of the  
Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon (CFKDL), President, Lebanon

- **María Alejandra DÍAZ CASTRO**, Colectivo Buscadoras Guanajuato,  
Partnerships and Communications, Coordinator of the project  
«Recetario para la memoria Guanajuato», Mexico
- **Evelina GUZMÁN**, Colectivo Buscadoras Guanajuato, Mexico

*This session explored ways in which art contributes to justice by breaking the silence of untold stories, providing victims with alternative forms of expression, sensitising societies to issues related to past violence, justice and reform, galvanizing people to challenge authorities and demand justice and change, and building a collective memory that is conducive to healing and non-repetition of past human rights violations. Panelists presented their victim-led art projects from various parts of the world: an award-winning animated film exposing the impact of enforced disappearances on families in Syria, a virtual museum on enforced disappearance in South Asia, Memory House in The Gambia, a book of short stories by 15 women relatives from Lebanon, and a book of favourite recipes of forcibly disappeared persons in Mexico by their loved ones.*



## The rich and diverse contributions addressed the following key issues:

### • Art as a way of reaching out to broad audiences and engaging young people

The art works discussed in this event showed that art can be used as a tool to reach wide audiences such as policymakers and young people, conveying impactful messages and tearing down language or cultural barriers between communities affected by enforced disappearances. While traditional advocacy methods may be met with indifference, art can serve as a way to revive spirits and circumvent censorship barriers. For instance, “Tomorrow, We Continue” animation form allowed the victim to tell their story while preserving their anonymity, while the book Windmills of our Hearts, was written partly in an attempt to reach policymakers through art, who have been actively avoiding other forms of protest.

### • Art as a form of preserving memory

While enforced disappearance is a crime that may continue for decades, art allows the memory of the disappeared person to remain present in collective memory. For example, at ANEKED victim-led Memory House in The Gambia, families of disappeared persons contributed their personal objects to a public exhibition to tell their stories. Similarly, the book Recipes for Memory, a book of the favourite recipes of forcibly disappeared people in Mexico, uses food to highlight the disappeared people’s daily interests, to humanise them, and ensure they are present culturally even if not physically.

### • Art as an awareness-raising and educational tool

The presented art projects played a crucial role in raising awareness about enforced disappearances, particularly in regions where authorities deny such crimes, instead asserting that individuals left voluntarily. These projects not only challenged such narratives but also helped victims recognize that others in different regions were experiencing similar struggles. Additionally, art serves as an educational tool in initiatives that encourage younger generations and students to conduct research, document the stories of the disappeared, and actively engage in the fight against this crime.

### • Art as a tool for international cooperation and solidarity

Art can build bridges communities and strengthen human rights advocacy by fostering collaboration and solidarity. For example, Amnesty International’s Virtual Museum on Enforced Disappearances in South Asia not only sheds light on this often-overlooked issue but also serves as a platform for human rights advocates in the region to share their experiences, learn from one another, and collaborate on joint initiatives.

## Recommendations for action

### • Supporting victim-led artistic initiatives for memorialization and advocacy

Victim-led art projects that preserve the memory of the disappeared and raise awareness about enforced disappearances should be supported, as well as collaboration between artists, human rights organizations, and affected communities.

### • Engaging young people through educational programmes

Victim-led educational initiatives should be supported to ensure that future generations are aware of enforced disappearances and contribute to preventing such crimes. Educational institutions should integrate art-based projects on enforced disappearances into their curricula at all educational levels in an age-appropriate manner.

### • Ensure Family Participation in Storytelling

Families should be at the centre of memorialization efforts to tell the stories of their loved ones, ensuring their voices are heard in artistic and advocacy projects.

### • Leveraging digital media and technology for awareness and coordination

Digital platforms, social media, and technology should be used to amplify the voices of victims’ families and reach broader audiences, especially young people, and strengthen coordination amongst networks to facilitate collaboration.

*“The ‘never again’ mantra really must be maintained through the young people, passing it on to them, and passing it on to the next generation.”*

**Sirra Ndow**

*“This book has placed the disappeared under the limelight again, has given a new life to the issue. It has allowed us to get into universities and schools where the book has been discussed.”*

**Wadad Mourad Halwani**

# 7. STRENGTHENING SEARCH PROCESSES : KEY LESSONS AND PATHWAYS FOR EFFECTIVE SEARCH

---

## Moderators

**Carmen Rosa VILLA QUINTANA**, United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), Member and former Chair, Peru

**Wilder TAYLER**, Institución Nacional de Derechos Humanos y Defensoría del Pueblo, Director and Referent for the search for the detained-disappeared, Uruguay

• **Karla QUINTANA**, Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP), Head (Mexico)

• **Fadwa MAHMOUD**, Families for Freedom, Co-founder, Syria

• **Yolanda MORÁN**, Buscando Desaparecidos México (BÚSCAME), Director, Mexico

## Panelists

• **Federico ANDREU-GUZMAN**, Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ), Director of Litigation and Legal Protection, Colombia

• **Raquel CARDENAS**, Senior Prosecutor of Lima – Human Rights Subsystem of the Office of the Attorney General of the Nation, Coordinator, Peru (video)

• **Luis FONDEBRIDER**, Forensic Anthropologist – Former Director of the ICRC Forensic Unit – Former President of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), Argentina

• **Emmanuel JOOF**, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of The Gambia, Chairperson, The Gambia

---

**This session was dedicated to search processes and to families' inalienable right to know the truth regarding the circumstances of the enforced disappearance, the progress and results of the investigation and the fate of their loved ones. Panelists from various regions of the world shared their insights as experts and as family members involved in search processes. The session included powerful testimonies from women searching for their loved ones, lessons learned and recommendations regarding the following main issues:**

## Key issues raised

### • Coordination between search and criminal investigation processes

This panel examined how search efforts can be effectively integrated with criminal investigations to ensure a holistic approach to truth and justice. States have a dual obligation (1) to search for and locate the disappeared and (2) to investigate, prosecute, and punish those responsible. These obligations are distinct yet interconnected. The search process can yield information relevant to criminal investigations, and vice versa. Additionally, comparative experiences demonstrate the need for better coordination between judicial and extrajudicial processes to optimize outcomes.

### • The crucial role of families

Families have the right to take part in search processes. Moreover, their participation is essential to inform the search for their loved ones. Their knowledge is unique and crucial to such efforts.

Experience also shows the power of collective family efforts in achieving breakthroughs, for example in advocating for legislative changes, the establishment of regional identification centers, conducting mass forensic identification or their role in the establishment of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP).

### • Challenges regarding the institutionalisation of the search

Based on their experience, panelists highlighted various challenges regarding the development of search processes and capacities. These include: the separation of search and identification processes; data collection and centralization to avoid fragmentation, data management and protection; the coordination between search and judicial institutions; limited, short-term resources whereas the search for the disappeared is a long-term endeavour.

### • The contribution of forensic anthropology and related challenges

Forensic contributions to search processes include providing evidence for criminal investigations, identifying remains, and ensuring their dignified handling to families. However, capacity gaps remain in most countries. The number of forensic experts is far from sufficient. 13 countries only have an experience longer than 10 years in this area in the whole world, including 7 in Latin America and 4 in Europe.

Other related challenges include science limitation, for example due to natural conditions making it impossible to find the remains, or the difficulty to trace family members to collect DNA samples, especially across regions and borders.

## Recommendations for action

### • Ensuring meaningful family participation

Families should be involved at every stage of the search and judicial process, but also in the development of related public policies, legislation and mechanisms. This means that families should be involved in decision-making i.e., not only to provide DNA samples or be relegated to a symbolic role.

### • Encouraging and supporting collaborative efforts-

Families and relevant authorities should listen to each other and cooperate. Families should unite to amplify their voices.

More generally, alliances between international, regional, and national organizations are essential to foster dialogue and collective efforts. Enforced disappearance is a worldwide phenomenon, and best practices should be shared to address this scourge effectively.

### • Strengthening legal and institutional framework

Legal and institutional frameworks should be strengthened for States to be able to protect all persons from enforced disappearance. This implies adopting adequate legislation and processes that follow a comprehensive, victim-centred approach.

Identification and search processes should be integrated rather than separate.

### • Filling capacity gaps

Training and resources should be provided to develop forensic capacity, especially in under-resourced regions (Africa, Asia and the Middle East).

Partnerships between national and international forensic institutions should be expanded and strengthened to exchange experience and knowledge.

Specialized training should also be provided to relevant officials and professionals, including the media who report on search efforts, to raise awareness about enforced disappearance and its impact on families.

### • Strengthening data management and information sharing

Centralized and secure databases to compile and manage data on disappeared persons should be set up and international protocols developed for sharing sensitive information while protecting victims' privacy.

Families should have access to information and receive regular updates on their cases, reducing their reliance on ad-hoc efforts.

*“The relatives are the ones who know how to search. They have learned how to search.”*

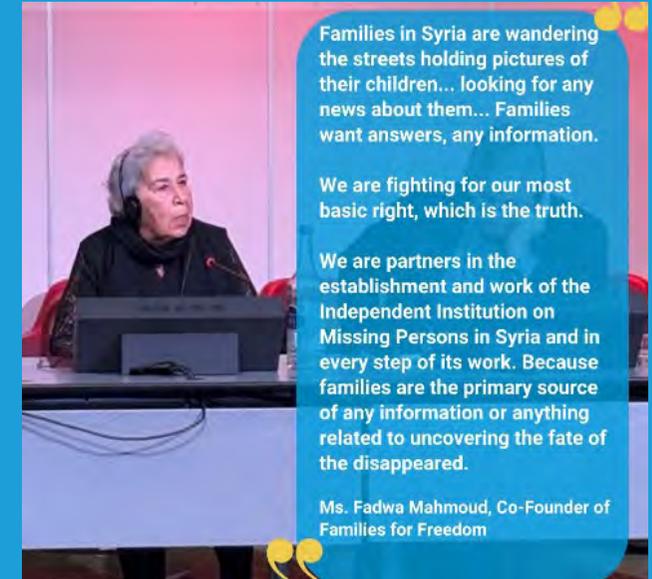
**Federico Andreu-Guzmán**

*“Search without justice is impunity. Justice without search is inhumanity.”*

**Carmen Rosa Villa Quintana**

*“Families’ union is and remains the strongest and most efficient tool. Let today be the beginning of a big bonfire to put an end to indifference. May it move consciences and wills to bring back our children and relatives. Because they were taken away alive and we want them alive.”*

**Yolanda Morán**



# 8. CHILDREN AS VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

## Moderator

**Grażyna BARANOWSKA**, UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID),  
Vice-Chair, Poland

## Panelists

- **Swastika MALI**, Advocacy Forum-Nepal, Paralegal, Nepal
- **Ismail Moussa ISMAIL**, Eritrean Coordination for Human Rights, Eritrea-United Kingdom
- **Mariela SR-Coline FANON**, Fondation Racines Perdues-Raíces Perdidas, President, Belgium-Guatemala
- **Martin MOZE**, H.I.J.O.S. (Hijas e hijos por la identidad y la justicia contra el olvido y el silencio) – Red por el derecho a la identidad Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo Barcelona, Coordinator, Argentina
- **Maria Giovanna BIANCHI**, psychoanalyst and psychotherapist, Italy

*This session included powerful testimonies from panelists who were affected by enforced disappearances as children. They shared their personal experiences, family histories, and expertise on the subject.*

*Children can become victims of enforced disappearances in three distinct ways: first, when they themselves are forcibly disappeared by State forces, second when they are born in captivity, and third, when their family members are subjected to enforced disappearances.*

*The contributions clearly demonstrated that guaranteeing the rights of children who are victims of enforced disappearances requires a comprehensive, integrated approach. The panelists shed light on various regions and contexts, while highlighting recurring patterns and similar challenges worldwide.*



## Some of the common threads included :

### • **The continuing nature of enforced disappearances and transgenerational impact**

The ongoing nature of enforced disappearances means that their impact persists into adulthood for those who were victims as children. This can take various forms. For examples persons who were raised outside their biological families might struggle with identity and family relationships. Providing space and support for these individuals is crucial. Professional psychological assistance is often unavailable in many contexts, but many victims have found comfort through connections with others in similar situations.

### • **The need for tailored support**

Children who are victims of enforced disappearances often face unique legal, socio-economic and psychological challenges. As families often struggle to provide evidence of the disappearance, children may face difficulty in gaining legal recognition, including issues with citizenship, accessing financial resources and property, or education. Additionally, they frequently encounter discrimination and stigma, particularly in countries where the disappearance of a family member carries social shame. Addressing these issues requires tailored support programs.

### • **The cross-border nature of enforced disappearances**

In some contexts, such as illegal international adoptions, enforced disappearances can involve actions across national borders. In such cases, addressing the plight of affected children and their biological families—including establishing the children's fate—requires international cooperation. To date, most efforts in this area have been led by victim-driven organizations.

### • **The crucial role of DNA testing**

DNA testing remains an essential tool for determining the fate and whereabouts of children forcibly disappeared by State forces or born in captivity. Broad and accessible DNA programs are crucial in contexts where children have disappeared, as they can reunite families and provide critical answers to families seeking closure.

## Recommendations for action

### • **Establishing adequate legal frameworks**

Governments should establish legal frameworks to ensure that children of the disappeared can assert their rights and have access to citizenship, property, social services and education. These frameworks should provide legal recognition and eliminate bureaucratic barriers.

### • **Providing comprehensive and tailored support**

Children of the disappeared should have access to targeted support programmes tailored to their specific situation. This includes with safe spaces to share their experiences is crucial. Governments and NGOs should offer specialized mental health care and peer support services, helping children cope with trauma.

### • **Helping children know the truth**

Broad DNA programs should be accessible to help children know the truth and reunite them with their families.

### • **Strengthening international cooperation**

International cooperation is essential to guarantee the rights of children affected by enforced disappearances. States, international organizations, and NGOs should collaborate to develop strategies for accountability and prevention.

*«Giving people the platform to share their stories is powerful, but the biggest challenge is breaking the silence that surrounds the victims.»*

**Ismail Moussa**

*“The [United Nations human rights experts’ Joint] statement on illegal intercountry adoptions should be applicable to States because for us, it is unthinkable to have silence as the only response.”*

**Mariela SR/Coline Fanon**

# 9. ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF MIGRATION



This session was sponsored by CCFD-Terre Solidaire.

## Moderator

**Charlotte BERTAL NASSER**, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, Europe and Syria  
Partnerships Manager, France

## Panelists

- **Ana ENAMORADO**, Red Regional de Familias Migrantes (ReReFaMi), Coordinator, Honduras/Mexico
- **Eulàlia FIGUERAS CIVIT**, International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Migration Law Specialist, Spain
- **Gustavo GALLÓN GIRALDO**, Permanent representative of Colombia to the UN and other international organizations, Colombia
- **Milica KOLAKOVIC-BOJOVIC**, UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), Vice-Chair, Serbia
- **Barbara LOCHBIHLER**, UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), Member, Germany
- **Helena MALENO GARZÓN**, Caminando Fronteras, Founder, Spain
- **Gordana VUKAŠIN**, KlikAktiv, Project Manager, Serbia

This session focused on the growing trend of enforced disappearances in the context of migration, which prompted the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances to adopt its first General Comment on the matter. Panelists discussed key migration routes leading to the Global North, including the journey from South to Central America toward the United States, crossings from Africa to Europe via the Mediterranean or Atlantic routes, and movement through the Balkans into Western Europe. The discussion examined the factors contributing to enforced disappearances of migrants and explored responses from various stakeholders to address this critical issue.



## Common themes

### • Contributing factors

Panelists mentioned factors that contribute directly or indirectly to the enforced disappearance of migrants, such as the lack of safe and regular migration routes, immigration detention at borders, “pushbacks”, increasingly militarized State policies and border management, and discrimination against migrants.

### • Heightened challenges for migrants and their families

Migrants are in a vulnerable situation due to their irregular administrative situation. They are exposed to multiple rights violations, may be targeted by local authorities or human traffickers in departure, transit and destination countries.

For their families, undertaking search and identification of their disappeared loved one in a foreign country is challenging on multiple levels: they need visas to access the country, resources to travel and stay in that country, support to navigate a different administrative and legal system to request information, file a case, there may be exposed to security risks, discrimination, etc.

### • Essential support from CSOs and international organizations

CSOs and international organizations such as IOM and ICRC support migrants along the journey by providing shelter, legal and psychological assistance. They also provide support to families in their search and identification efforts, share information, raise awareness about dangerous journeys and about.

### • Adequate legal and institutional framework

Some States have adapted their legal and institutional framework to address this issue. Best practices include the coordination between the relevant entities (judiciary, forensic unit, police, Interpol), establishing registers, developing an application to register cases, providing support to families searching for their loved ones.

### • Prevention efforts

Irregular and dangerous migration routes increase the risk of enforced disappearance for migrants. The need to provide legal regular pathways to migration was repeatedly highlighted. Organizations such as the IOM also provide guidance to States on how to manage their borders and carry out search and rescue operations in line with international standards to prevent the disappearance, including enforced disappearance, of migrants.

### • Building multi-actor partnerships

Enforced disappearance of migrants is a cross-thematic issue that often intersects with irregular migration, human trafficking, and other human rights violations. As such, it requires concerted efforts to avoid fragmentation of initiatives.

CSOs, international organizations such as IOM and ICRC, and relevant UN human rights bodies, including CED, WGEID and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of migrants play a key role in giving visibility to the issue and remind States of their international legal obligations.

## Recommendations for action

### • Strengthening national legal and institutional frameworks

In line with CED [General Comment N°.1](#) on enforced disappearances in the context of migration, States should:

- Develop and adopt national and regional rights-based migration policies
- Foster access to legal and regular migration
- Train law enforcement and border officials on the rights of migrants at borders
- Prohibit secret and incommunicado detention of migrants
- Establish registers of migrants
- Build the capacity of consular services to address families' claims in countries of origin and to coordinate with countries where migrants are forcibly disappeared.

### • Strengthening support to families and their participation

- Mechanisms should be established to support relatives and witnesses, such as providing visas to enable them to exercise their right to truth and justice, including to participate in the search and identification process
- Affected families and CSOs should play a more central role in the development of migration policies and other relevant processes, such as search and identification of disappeared migrants.

### • Fostering cooperation and coordination

- Encourage regional and international cooperation between States, including information sharing on best practices, forensic identification and data sharing, prosecution of related crimes such as human trafficking
- Foster coordination amongst all actors to avoid fragmentation of initiatives amongst national authorities, the UN system, other international organizations, NHRIs, CSOs, media, and academia, with the objective of capitalizing on each other's expertise and strengths.

*“The hardest thing is crossing that border to go and search in a foreign country. I was forced to leave my country and move to Mexico, start a new life from scratch and learn, find Mexican families of the disappeared, initiate the search and request that Mexican authorities listen to me and launch an investigation. Without a visa, mothers from Central America cannot move to Mexico, we have neither the resources nor the knowledge to search and to request that the State finds our disappeared loved ones.”*

**Ana Enamorado**

**Honduran mother whose son disappeared in Mexico**

# 10. PROTECTING VICTIMS, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND PROFESSIONALS, INCLUDING LAWYERS AND JOURNALISTS



This session was co-sponsored by the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), the Global Initiative Against Impunity (GIAI) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

## Moderator

**Jimena REYES**, International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH),  
Director, Americas, France

- **Graciela MARTINEZ GONZÁLEZ**, Amnesty International, Senior Campaigner, Spain
- **Andrea TORRES BAUTISTA**, Fundación Nydia Erika Bautista, Founder, Colombia

## Panelists

- **Mortaza BEHBOUDI**, Journalist, Afghanistan/France
- **Antoine BERNARD**, Reporters sans frontières (RSF), Director of Advocacy and Assistance, France
- **Daouda DIALLO**, Collectif contre l'impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés (CISC), Secretary General, Burkina Faso
- **Linda EKHOLM**, European External Action Service – Human Rights Division (EEAS), Policy Officer, Finland
- **Violetta FITSNER**, Memorial Human Rights Defence Centre, Head of Advocacy, Russia
- **Anitha GATERETSE**, Tournons La Page-Burundi, Coordinator, Burundi (video)

This panel examined challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations for protecting at-risk individuals, including human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists who are targeted for their work.

It also addressed the threats faced by families of the disappeared and those who support them. Panelists, including victims of enforced disappearance, human rights defenders, lawyers, a journalist, and support organizations from various regions, shared powerful testimonies and experiences. Their contributions exposed the significant obstacles to both physical and legal protection for victims and those assisting them, while also offering key lessons and recommendations for improving protection efforts.



## key lessons and recommendations for improving protection effort :

### • Deteriorating security contexts and methods of repression

Against a backdrop of rising conflicts and shrinking civic space, the presentations highlighted the deteriorating security contexts in which enforced disappearances are perpetrated and people targeted, including human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists.

Panelists shared firsthand accounts of methods of repressions they had faced, such as judicial harassment with the criminal prosecution of human rights defenders and lawyers, and extrajudicial repression, including physical attacks, threats and intimidation.

### • Structural challenges

At the structural level, challenges primarily stem from systemic impunity, which is largely due to weak legal and institutional frameworks, the absence of comprehensive

legislation—particularly regarding the criminalization of enforced disappearance—barriers to accessing truth and justice, and insufficient resources to support victims and individuals at risk.

Addressing impunity and fostering accountability and justice should be universal priorities as they are essential for effective prevention and protection measures. A notable positive example is Colombia's 2024 Law on the Protection of the Rights of Women Searchers, the first legislation of its kind globally. This law provides comprehensive recognition of the work and rights of women engaged in the search for their disappeared loved ones.

### • Holistic approach to protection

Victims of enforced disappearances explained how their families, colleagues and community had been affected by their enforced disappearance, the long-term impact it had had on themselves, on their close ones and on their rights: physical and psychological consequences of the disappearance and torture, denial of access to a lawyer and to information, violation of economic and social rights. Moreover, post-disappearance support and protection are crucial, including in exile to prevent transnational repression..

### • The power of public information and collective mobilization

Shared experiences show that public information and collective mobilization save lives. The decisive intervention of the diplomatic community, international governmental and non-governmental organizations (the European Union, OHCHR, international NGOs such as Amnesty International, FIDH or Reporters Without Border) has been instrumental in victims reappearing, securing releases and supporting families.

## Recommendations for action

### • Addressing systemic issues

Strengthening legal frameworks at the national, regional and international level is key to the protection of the disappeared, their families, legal representatives, human rights defenders and journalists. This includes:

- Strengthening and supporting accountability mechanisms and those that assist the disappeared and their families at the national, regional and international level, including the relevant United Nations mechanisms, and strengthening the protection of individuals who face reprisals for engaging with those mechanisms
- Providing technical advice to governments on the ratification and implementation of the International Convention
- Providing training to human rights defenders, lawyers and relevant officials on how to address enforced disappearance cases at the national and international level.

### • Providing holistic support

To provide adequate answers to the many challenges identified, the contributions highlighted the need to adopt a holistic approach that:

- Encompasses the disappeared but also their close ones
- Includes physical and legal protection
- Extends to the post-disappearance period, for example with the creation of an emergency fund for the rehabilitation of victims
- Extends beyond borders in exile. In that regard, relocation possibilities and emergency visas should be granted, but also long-term residence permits to resume professional activity.

### • Strengthening networks and mobilization

Victims and human rights defenders' networks and alliances should be encouraged and supported, including politically and financially. The mobilization of the diplomatic community and media should also continue and expand to draw attention to specific cases and secure victims' protection.

*“We must continue to defend the values and principles of justice. No matter who is involved or where the injustice comes from. We must denounce it. It is important to defend justice because everyone benefits from it.”*

**Daouda Diallo,**  
forcibly disappeared in Burkina Faso  
for his work as a human rights defender

*“Media intervention is crucial. It saved my life.”*

**Mortaza Behboudi,**  
forcibly disappeared in Afghanistan  
for his work as a journalist

# 11. THE CASE FOR RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION : WHY ALL STATES ARE CONCERNED – A LEARNING EXCHANGE

*This session was co-hosted by CEDI Core States: Argentina, France, Morocco and Samoa, and moderated by Isabelle Rome, Ambassador at Large for Human Rights for France.*

## Representatives of the following States took the floor:

- |              |              |                |
|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| - Argentina  | - France     | - Morocco      |
| - Bangladesh | - The Gambia | - Samoa        |
| - Belgium    | - Mauritania | - South Africa |
| - Denmark    | - Mexico     | - Spain        |

## Other speakers included:

- *Parliamentarians for Global Action Representative*
- *UN Committee Against Torture Vice-Chair*
- *UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances Executive Secretary*
- *Luciano Hazan, former Member of the UN Committee and Working Group on Enforced disappearances*
- *Morris Tidball-Binz, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions*

*During this session, States shared their experiences in ratifying and implementing the Convention, highlighting challenges and best practices.*

*The contributions demonstrated that by fostering collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and technical support, progress towards universal ratification and effective implementation can be achieved, contributing to global efforts to end enforced disappearance.*



## Benefits of ratification :

### • Speakers highlighted some of the benefits of being a party to the Convention:

- Strengthen the national legal and institutional framework
- Contributing to the global fight against impunity and demonstrating solidarity, even in countries without a history of enforced disappearance
- Enhancing international cooperation and mutual legal assistance under key provisions of the Convention, to address situations where perpetrators flee to a non-State party to avoid prosecution or if a national disappears in a non-State party. International cooperation represents a huge potential as well as a necessity and the Convention needs to be universal for it to deploy its full potential.

### • A collective effort

The fight against enforced disappearance requires a global collective effort, even in States that have no history of enforced disappearance. Platform such as this Congress, but also the Universal Periodic Review, provide opportunities to encourage States to adhere to the Convention. Moreover, the participation of all stakeholders is essential to inform both the ratification and the implementation process, including parliamentarians, victims, CSOs and NHRIs.

### • Beyond ratification: effective implementation

Ratification is not an end in itself. Several States shared their experience of implementing the Convention through legislative and institutional reforms, but also building their capacity in terms of search and identification, thus “improving” their national legal and institutional framework.

### • Successful technical support

Several States offered technical assistance regarding the ratification and implementation of the Convention, while others shared their positive experience of benefiting from technical support from their peers or other institutions, such as the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI). Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) supports individual members of parliament in amending domestic laws, in close collaboration with CSOs in the concerned countries.

OHCHR, with the CED and WGEID, is always available to answer specific questions or organize bilateral meetings, online training sessions on ratification and implementation.

[A Practical Guide](#) to becoming a party to the Convention is available online. The Treaty Body Capacity Building [Programme](#) is also available to provide technical assistance.

Other special procedures of the Human Rights Council, such as the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, can play a facilitator’s role and cooperate with States towards implementation of the Convention.



## Recommendations for action

### • Raising awareness

- Enhance efforts to raise awareness about what enforced disappearance is and make the case for the universal ratification and effective implementation of the Convention
- Highlight the benefits of adhering to the Convention and joining the club of States parties

### • Leading by example

States parties should lead by example and mobilize other States in their respective regions to adhere to the Convention.

### • Learning exchanges and technical support

- Organize learning exchanges to encourage non-States parties to ratify the Convention and address their concerns, and for States that have recently ratified to support them in their implementation efforts.
- Enhance and disseminate widely communication about technical support, its availability and modalities.
- Encourage States to request the technical assistance on offer from peers, OHCHR, the relevant UN mechanisms, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and initiatives such as CTI and CEDI.
- Strengthen support for these mechanisms and initiatives to allow them to provide technical support

### • Ensuring an inclusive process

Involve all relevant stakeholders in ratification and implementation processes, including victims, civil society and NHRIs.

### • Making the most of available platforms

Take advantage of every opportunity to promote the ratification of the Convention, including the UPR and other international fora.

*“Bangladesh ratified the Convention in three weeks. This is an indication that, if there is a political will, anything is doable, while following all the domestic procedures. Victims, families, witnesses are starting to speak out. It is creating a new culture in society which will go along with preventing the recurrence of enforced disappearance.”*

**Tareq Md. Ariful Islam,**  
**Permanent Representative of Bangladesh**

*“We look forward to the dialogue with the Committee and when we have been through our process, we will be very happy to share our experience with other States. Equally, in the spirit of this learning exchange, we are very interested in listening to the experience from those who have very recently delivered their report and been through this initial exchange following ratification.”*

**Lars Volck Madsen,**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark**

*“The ratification marked a turning point in The Gambia’s history as it underscored our collective resolve to confront and address these great violations, ensuring they are never repeated. The fight against enforced disappearances requires a collective global effort. On behalf of The Gambia, I urge all States that have not yet done so, to take the critical step of signing and ratifying the Convention, because by doing so we reaffirm our shared humanity and our determination to eradicate the suffering caused by this heinous practice. Together, we can build a future where enforced disappearances are consigned to history and human dignity is protected.”*

**Bafou Jeng,**  
**Permanent Mission of The Gambia**

*“We were fortunate enough that two EU countries – France and Germany – who had ratified before us shared their expertise. Later on, we were also able to share our experience with other EU States.”*

**Véronique Joosten,**  
**Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium**

# 12. THE IMPACT OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES ON WOMEN



*This session was sponsored by the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP).*

## Moderator

**Sabina PUIG CARTES**, *International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP), Spain*

## Panelists

- **Asmaa AL-FARRAJ**, *Families for Freedom, Coordinator of the UK Team – Syrian Council for Change, Member, Syria*
- **Edita BURGOS**, *Free Jonas Burgos Movement, Chairperson – Karapatan Alliance for the Advancement of Rights, Vice-Chair – International Coalition against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED), Secretary, Philippines*
- **María Isabel CRUZ BERNAL**, *Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México, Spokesperson – Asociación Civil Sabuesos Guerreras, Founder and President, Mexico*
- **Sirra NDOW**, *African Network against Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED), Gambia Country Director, The Gambia*
- **Carmen Rosa VILLA QUINTANA**, *United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), Member and former Chair, Peru*

*The panel included powerful testimonies from women searchers from different parts of the world who shared their personal experience as family members engaged in the search for their loved ones. The contributions highlighted the multidimensional impact of enforced disappearances on women's rights, the challenges they face in their pursuit of truth and justice, but also the collective dimension of their struggle and their contribution to building peaceful societies.*



## The following common themes were addressed:

### • Multifaceted impact on rights

Through personal experiences, panelists shed light on the multidimensional impact of enforced disappearance on their rights, including the legal and administrative hurdles due to the lack of legal recognition and a “certificate of absence” of the disappeared, the economic hardship when the breadwinner disappears, the social stigma associated with a disappearance, or the impact on their health because of the stress and trauma due to the uncertainty of not knowing what has happened to their loved one and why.



### • Disproportionate risks and necessary protection

Women searchers, particularly those from marginalized communities, bear a disproportionate impact on their rights and face many challenges. They often endure victim-blaming and stigmatization. The importance of creating safer spaces for women to engage in these efforts without fear of revictimization was highlighted. The testimonies also revealed the kind of abuse women searchers are subjected to: insults, harassment, intimidations, threats, sexual violence. Some of them are even forcibly disappeared or killed for asking questions about the fate of their loved ones.

### • Women searchers as leaders and peacebuilders

Panelists underscored the leadership role that women take on following the disappearance of a loved one, for their family, in the broader community and society as a whole. Women searchers often become breadwinners and care-providers for their family. Beyond their close circle, women have always been at the forefront of the fight against enforced disappearances. Most victim-led organizations are led by women. Despite facing immense personal challenges, women find solidarity and strength through shared experiences. This collective resilience plays a critical role in sustaining the fight for truth and justice and building peaceful societies.

## Recommendations for action

### • Adopting gender-sensitive approaches

Adopting a gender-based approach is crucial in addressing enforced disappearances. This includes integrating gender perspectives in search processes and supporting women-led initiatives.

### • Overcoming legal and administrative obstacles

All States should provide legal recognition of the status of disappeared and the corresponding certificate of absence to allow family members, in particular women and girls, to overcome legal and administrative hurdles in exercising their rights to property, education, etc.

### • Promoting inclusive and participatory processes

The participation of women searchers should be guaranteed in all processes that affect them: search and identification processes, investigations, development of relevant legislation and policies, etc. Transparent processes should be established to give families closure, with greater international pressure to ensure access to information and accountability of perpetrators.

### • Supporting and strengthening women searchers' collective action

Global solidarity and stronger alliances between CSOs and international organizations are essential. Creating networks of solidarity can help amplify their voices and advocacy efforts, while also providing protection. Additionally, women searchers should be supported with better resources to navigate legal systems and advocate effectively. Providing training for women searchers can empower them to participate in processes that affect them and peacebuilding efforts, ensuring their demands for truth and justice are heard.

*“Women searchers have pushed for legislative changes, the establishment of processes for truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition, memory-building and preservation. For this work, they are also recognized as peacebuilders”.*

**Carmen Rosa Villa Quintana**

*“Enforced disappearance is a universal experience for women across the world. Wherever you go, it’s the women who are out there fighting.”*

**Sirra Ndow**

*“We become advisors to other families without being lawyers, psychologists, police officers, investigators. That is a role we take on, all those who have a disappeared loved one. We are the all-ogists because we have to learn it all. That is the women’s strength”.*

**María Isabel Cruz Bernal**

*“I am here and I can raise my voice but I am speaking in the name of all Syrian women. Millions of Syrian women are going through the same pain as I am. We as women are half of the population and we will not remain silent. We will keep on demanding the support of international organizations to have a clear accounting of the crimes committed.”*

**Asmaa Al-Farraj**

*“We cannot do it alone. We have suffered so much alone. Finding strength in numbers also helps develop confidence in the pursuit of justice. The security provided by the organization helps embolden and empower the women.”*

**Edita Burgos**

# WORKSHOPS

---



# 1/ WORK ON REGIONAL ROADMAPS : IDENTIFYING KEY PRIORITIES

**This workshop aimed to foster collaborative work at the regional level by identifying priority actions to combat enforced disappearances in the following regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa.**

**40 participants** (20 women and 20 men ) took part in the regional workshop, representing 28 countries: Argentina, Bangladesh, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Colombia, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Guinea-Conakry, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, The Philippines, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Sudan, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey.

Each regional group identified three key priorities to be presented during the closing ceremony. Common threads across the regions included:

- Protection of human rights defenders, victims and witnesses, and support them in key areas (psychological and legal support in particular)
- Strengthening of civil society organizations and family associations, both on the political and financial levels.

- Engagement of new generations, bringing new modes of actions and new strategies
- Strengthen the collaboration between existing networks and provide impetus to new platforms
- Enhance monitoring at national, regional and international levels to assess States' compliance with their legal obligations and promote the principles of truth, justice, and guarantees of non-repetition.



## The Africa Group

• **The Africa Group** decided to recommend the creation an African Network/Federation bringing together victims of enforced disappearances and families, based on the experience of other regional federations (FEDEFAM, AFAD, FEMED). Strategic and priority actions were identified as follows:

- Capacity-building of civil society organisations, victims, media outlets, and State representatives, with a particular emphasis on gender aspects and women victims of enforced disappearances;
- Development of a strategy for the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons against Enforced Disappearance by African States, and the domestication of the Convention;
- Production of a specific and adaptable guide on enforced disappearances, available in local languages (text and broadcast versions).
- Proposal for a slogan encapsulating the fight against enforced disappearances for all African countries.



## The Asia Group

• **The Asia Group** identified as a priority the protection of families of victims, human rights defenders and witnesses, with three priority actions for its regional roadmap:

- The development of a repository of cases, statistics, stories and narratives, and case studies in the region in order to shed light on the trends and patterns of enforced disappearances in the region
- The need for further engagement with politicians, parliamentarians, ministers, presidents, legislators, and other relevant political actors through dialogues, meetings, and other concrete spaces in order to foster an exchange of ideas and recommendations to address enforced disappearance
- The development of a set of accountability indicators to measure State compliance with United Nations Human Rights standards and mechanisms' recommendations.

## The Europe Group

• **The Europe Group** decided to articulate its discussion around "Reframing needs as rights: truth, justice, reparation, memory and psychological support." The Group identified three sets of priority actions, with the following key targets:

- States: advocate for their commitment to reframe needs – truth, justice, reparation, memory and psychological support – as rights
- International organizations: recommend that States establish structured frameworks for the families of the forcibly disappeared – including but not limited to providing information, collecting DNA reference samples for identification, and offering legal and financial support
- States and international organizations: support international human rights mechanisms and NGOs

financially to monitor State compliance and ensure the protection of NGOs, individual and groups working on enforced disappearances.

Discussions and exchanges within the Latin America Group focused on the proposal to create a Latin American Network against Enforced Disappearances. This network would be open to the participation of victims and survivors' organizations from Latin America, accompanying organizations and other people bringing specific competences.

Specific actions were agreed upon on specific dates:

- 24 March: focus on the worrying setbacks in Argentina and El Salvador
- 10 May: focus on Mexico
- 30 August: on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced disappearances
- October 2025: potential regional meeting based on emerging and approved proposals at the meeting of organizations from Latin America organized by SERAPAZ the day before the Congress opened.

## The Middle East and North Africa Group

• **The Group Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** decided to concentrate on two key topics:

- Criminalization of enforced disappearance as an autonomous crime in the domestic law of MENA countries, as a crucial deterrent against the perpetuation of enforced disappearance in the region and a way to access justice and reparations
- Capacity-building of all stakeholders, in particular of civil society organizations and families of the forcibly disappeared, in the collection of evidence, psychological support and other basic services.

***“The Regional workshop was instrumental, because I could strengthen my knowledge on enforced disappearances, especially with the very relevant themes that were discussed. It was also an enriching setting for exchange with participants from various backgrounds. These interactions brought me new perspectives and reinforced my firm conviction that the creation of an African Federation against enforced disappearances would further strengthen the global fight against enforced disappearances”.***

**Daouda Diallo from Burkina Faso  
Forcibly disappeared for his work as human rights defender  
Recipient of the Martin Ennals Award**

*“The workshop was valuable to me because it highlighted how issues on enforced disappearance are shared across regions. Identifying priorities on the regional level is essential in coming up with actions that cover urgent concerns that are salient throughout Asian countries where enforced disappearance continues unabated. Through this workshop, I was also able to see differences and similarities in the situation in the Philippines with other Asian countries which may open points of collaboration in the fight against enforced disappearance.”*

**Cecille Baello from The Philippines  
Campaign and Lobby Officer  
Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND)**

# 2 / SETTING UP AN INTERNATIONAL YOUTH NETWORK : KICK OFF SESSION

**Pre-Congress consultations with stakeholders identified the need to foster the engagement of young people in the fight against enforced disappearance through the creation of a global youth network. The objective of this workshop was to facilitate a strategic discussion on how to mainstream the role of young people in the fight against enforced disappearance through the creation of a youth network and to identify key actions to reach this objective. In this context, “young people” are family members of the disappeared and human rights defenders engaged with the issue between 15 and 35 years of age.**

**28 young participants** (8 men and 20 women) took part in the workshop, representing 15 countries (Burundi, Cyprus, Eritrea, France, The Gambia, Indonesia, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Pakistan, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey).

Participants were divided into four groups along spoken languages: Arabic, English, French and Spanish and reflected on three main questions:

- Why build an international youth network?
- How to build this international youth network?
- What are the three key action-oriented proposals that could lead to the creation of that network?

Each group presented and exchanged ideas with the other groups.



## The Arabic-speaking Group

• **The Arabic-speaking Group**, which brought together young people from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, unanimously agreed that an international youth network was much needed for the fight against enforced disappearances. Key points included:

- The need, from an operational perspective, to link the global youth network against enforced disappearances with other levels of actions, including regional networks
- In the MENA region, the youth network against enforced disappearances needs to tackle the sensitive issue of enforced disappearances in various contexts (contexts of migration, conflicts), with activities aiming at connecting the younger with the older generation who are still at the forefront of the fight against enforced disappearances
- An intersectional approach needs to be included into programming
- Activities aiming at shedding light on the phenomenon of enforced disappearances (through awareness-raising or advocacy strategies, academic research, participation to international symposiums) should also be given priority.

## The English-speaking group

• **The English-speaking group**, including participants from Africa, Asia, Europe and MENA, unanimously agreed that an international youth network was much needed for the fight against enforced disappearances, based on the fact that there was still room for raising awareness of younger generations on this major human rights violation. From that perspective, the group proposed to develop learning-based youth advocacy as follows:

- The establishment of youth antennas in NGOs and initiatives to enable youth networks to work with more established NGOs and initiatives focusing on enforced disappearances, and rethink strategic communication with modern tools used by young people around the world
- The integration of enforced disappearances into the curricula of universities, especially the faculties of social sciences (including psychology) and humanities (including history), law and medicine (psychiatry).

## The Europe Group

• **The French-speaking-Group**, including representative from Europe, MENA and Africa, discussed the importance of the youth-led network against enforced disappearances for the following reasons:

- To meet the specific needs of young people
- Children of families experiencing enforced disappearances must be involved and not be stigmatized, discriminated against or sidelined
- The need to raise awareness
- Young people are agents of change
- To create a network of support of young people for young people.

**Based on those prior elements, the following strategic actions were identified:**

- Prioritizing education to build the capacity of young people with the knowledge, awareness, and tools necessary to carry out meaningful action across all levels (from pre-school to doctoral studies), including introducing courses on enforced disappearances, launching free mentorship programs within the network, hosting workshops, developing publications, and producing free online pre-recorded courses, supported by experts, to provide foundational knowledge on enforced disappearances
  - Forming strategic partnerships with different organizations, by creating a database of potential partner organizations (starting, for instance, with those partners of the World Congress on Enforced Disappearances), collaborating with academic institutions and think-tanks, with the support from student unions through dedicated workshops or summer camps.
- Other topics, such as the implementations of global actions during the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, the need to foster intergenerational dialogue, or the establishment of effective communication channels (through a dedicated website, social media channels, newsletter, and “catchy” slogans, theatre plays or visual arts) were also discussed.

## The Spanish-speaking group

• **The Spanish-speaking group**, which mainly gathered participants from Latin America, articulated the need to establish a global youth network on enforced disappearances based on the following key areas, including for young people:

- The right to participate in the search
  - The right to medical and psychological support for the families of victims, including children
  - The right to legal support, including for young people
- In that perspective, the Spanish-speaking group proposed three key priority actions:

- Awareness-raises campaigns
- Young people have the power to connect through social media and digital tools, podcasts, to share day-to-day experiences to raise awareness on the issue of enforced disappearance, break a sense of loneliness felt by young members of the families of the disappeared and build bridges among young people.
- Transgenerational solidarity
- Young people can support older generations in their fight for truth and justice. Many cases of enforced disappearances are led by aging people, leading to a generational gap. Young people can connect with other generations and foster better awareness on cases of enforced disappearances and problems encountered by the families, in a spirit of transgenerational solidarity.
- Multidisciplinary perspective
- University students can help in providing answers to multidimensional needs by providing support to CSOs, thus filling the capacity gap left by States.

The two main activities selected and shared during a specific segment of the closing ceremony were the ones focused on prioritizing education to build the capacity of the youth with the knowledge, awareness, and tools necessary to carry out meaningful action across all levels (from pre-school to PhD), as well as forming strategic partnerships with different organizations, by creating a database of potential partner organizations.

*“The Youth Network on Enforced Disappearances workshop ignited my passion for justice. I was reminded how young voices can be powerful agents for change and left feeling united with peers who share the same commitment, fight and power. This workshop showed me that we, as young activists, victims and survivors, have a pivotal role in challenging enforced disappearances around the globe. We are the torchbearers against injustice, lighting the way for generations to come for truth and justice.”*

**Aishah Masood from Pakistan  
Defence of Human Rights**

*“I think the workshop was essential for creating meaningful youth participation in the context of the congress. While hardships in Latin America are a constant in terms of enforced disappearances, youth demonstrate a drive for change, and for dreaming of a hopeful future. This space created the necessary discussion to imagine the steps for a future that leaves no one behind, not even those who are no longer with us.”*

**Jesús Abraham Maya Pedraza from Mexico  
Director of Eheco**

# CLOSING CEREMONY

---

**Call to collective action**

# CLOSING CEREMONY: CALL TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

## Moderation by two members of CEDI Advisory Board:

- **Grażyna BARANOWSKA**, UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, Vice-Chair, Poland
- **Saad HUSSEIN**, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Initiators Organization for Human Rights & Democracy, Iraq

## Presentation of the outcome of the regional workshop

- **Africa: Hala AL-KARIB**, SIHA Network, Sudan
- **Asia: Cecille BAELLO**, FIND, The Philippines
- **Europe: Özlem ZINGIL**, Saturday Mothers, Turkey
- **MENA: Rachid AL MANOUZI**, FEMED, Morocco
- **Latin America: María Adela ANTOKOLETZ**, FEDEFAM and ICAED, Argentina

### Wrap up by:

- **Mandira SHARMA**, Senior International Legal Adviser at the International Commission of Jurists and CEDI Advisory Board Member, Nepal.

**Representatives of each region – Africa, Asia, Europe, MENA and Latin America – presented priority actions identified as an outcome of the workshop on regional roadmaps.**



*The first World Congress on Enforced Disappearances concluded with a call to collective action during an engaging closing ceremony. In line with its multi-actor, action-oriented approach, a series of concrete follow-up initiatives were unveiled to carry forward the initiative.*

## Unveiling of key follow-up activities

Thanks to the support of partners, several initiatives recommended by stakeholders during pre-Congress regional consultations were revealed. Each activity was presented by one participant and supported by another, symbolizing the collaborative spirit of the project.

# 1. Creation a regional victim-led network in Sub-Saharan Africa

• **Daouda DIALLO, Collectif contre l'impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés (CISC), Burkina Faso**

"It is with great emotion that I take the floor to convey an African message. It's a key recommendation that came out of the group's work: the need to create an African regional network against enforced disappearances that will fill a gap and is necessary to strengthen the impact of our actions, their visibility, the capacities of local actors in terms of monitoring and reporting of ED cases, and of advocacy. This network will also enable us to intensify the collaboration with existing regional and international federations in terms of sharing of experiences and best practices. This will have a positive impact on the global fight against enforced disappearances."



• **Commissioner SOW, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights**

"I would like to say solemnly that, in my capacity as Chairman of the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances [of the African Commission], I am committed to supporting the creation of this network. We will do everything necessary to ensure that the network be granted observer status at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights."

# 2. Organization of annual meetings of women searchers

• **Yolanda MORÁN, Buscando Desaparecidos México (BÚSCAME)**

"Despite our differences in language, age, gender, and experience, we have connected and understood each other through the universal language of love. That is what drives us to continue the fight and find our disappeared loved ones. This Congress, meeting you all and feeling this connection that only those who live through the disappearance of a loved one can understand, has given me new hope. Let us commit to meet every year in person to share, plan and organize. Let us be a mutually supportive community that works hand in hand for everyone everywhere."



• **Silvia PLANA SUBIRANA, International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP)**

"At ICIP, we have been reflecting, promoting and accompanying reflections on how the search for the disappeared has strong links with peacebuilding and how it is necessary to contribute to the recognition of women searchers, of their political agency and also of their work. We have a small experience as we organized an encounter of women searchers from 12 countries at the end of 2023. It was very enriching and has the potential to be replicated. We have much to learn from women's collectives. We commit to keep offering our support so that women searchers can meet each other and we invite all of you to join us."

### 3. Reporting on the sessions of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances

• **Barbara LOCHBIHLER, UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances**

“Our main task is the interaction and the dialogue with States parties. The second part is to develop and interpret the Convention further. As a Committee, we will take the recommendations from this World Congress, which will enrich and strengthen our work. But we can do only do this successfully if you continue to interact with the Committee. We promise to continue to seek your knowledge, your experience and to interact with stakeholders with a very diverse background.”



• **Md Sazzad HUSSAIN, Bangladesh Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearance**

“Implementation of the Convention is challenging for all States. There should be a dialogue with all stakeholders, including the families’ associations, civil society and human rights defenders. The Committee needs to be proactive in terms of holding the government accountable for implementing the Convention. Monitoring by the civil society and by the international community, especially the WGEID and the CED, working jointly to keep the commitment and ensure justice for the victims and guarantees of non-repetition.”

### 4. Promotion of the ratification of the Convention

• **Mary Aileen DIEZ BACALSO, Forum-Asia and ICAED, The Philippines**

“The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance is a global response to the global phenomenon of enforced disappearances. By dint of the active role victims’ families played during the three-year drafting negotiation process of this convention and the supportive position of the late French ambassador Bernard Kessedjian, the Convention has strong pro-victim provisions. In the final session, H.E. Kessedjian dedicated the final text to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Linea Fundadora represented then by the late Marta Ocampo de Vasquez. The campaign for the Convention should be in a massive manner by families of the disappeared and all members of civil society as a way of empowering them and facilitating the regaining control of their lives. Let us work hard so that universal ratification and implementation of the Convention is a fitting tribute to all those who disappeared and all those whose memory shall never be forgotten. Never again.”everyone everywhere.”



• **Fatima BARKAN, Délégation Interministérielle aux Droits de l’Homme, Secretary General, Morocco**

“This first World Congress is only the first step towards the total and definitive eradication of enforced disappearances. This goal, to which we all aspire, cannot be achieved without universal ratification of the Convention and effective implementation of its provisions. The Kingdom of Morocco has pledged to organise a regional seminar in Morocco dedicated to the exchange of experiences and good practices in ratifying the Convention and implementing its provisions. Universal ratification and optimal implementation will be the result of its appropriation by the Member States. This regional seminar will be a significant milestone on this road. It will enable the multiplication of good practices and help informed decision-making based on experiences in a common context.”

## 5. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs to engage with UN mechanisms

### • Joseph MWANGI, Missing Voices Kenya

“Despite the presence of enforced disappearance cases in Kenya, many remain unreported to UN mechanisms due to inadequate documentation and capacity-building. This is where we must act. There exists a critical gap between the vital work conducted on the ground and the ability to report these cases to international bodies due to lack of capacity in evidence gathering, understanding the reporting pathways and recognizing the roles and procedures of these mechanisms. It is essential to invest in building civil society capabilities through targeted training sessions and providing opportunities for activist to engage directly with international mechanisms. Together, we can enhance our advocacy efforts and ensure that the voices of the disappeared are heard and acted upon at the international level.”



### • Ana Lorena DELGADILLO PEREZ, UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances

“I worked with organizations for nearly 20 years. From the field, we saw the United Nations as being very far away and we wondered how we could reach the UN. What I would hope from this encounter is that there is greater closeness between you and us, and now I speak as a member of the WGEID. We are here if you need us. If you have any questions, come and look for us. If you need a workshop, we can do it. Be a part of our reports. We invite you to keep collaborating and to also tell us how we can improve.”

## 6. Building an international youth network against enforced disappearances

### • Chrysostome KIRIMWINGANBO, Ligue Iteka, Burundi

Our workshop group of 26 young people from different countries and regions worked on the building of an international youth network. We concluded that there is a gap in terms of information of young people regarding enforced disappearance and we identified several actionable points.

### • Aishah MASOOD, Defence of Human Rights, Pakistan

“Young people are the agents of change. Let us clarify that. We need second liners to carry the flame of the fight against enforced disappearances and that is why young people are so important. We came to a conclusion of actionable items to achieve this network of young people against enforced disappearances.”



### • Berta OLIVA, Comité de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH)

“I would like to inspire these two young people to act on building, organizing and capacitating to take up the torch of the pursuit of truth and justice. It is inspiring to see them, and I tell as clearly as this, that our strength lies in the organized youth. We have worked at the national level on the building of networks and of young ambassadors of our memory, because we are aware and we are certain that, as we are reaching the end of the road, we need to invest in a generation handover.”



### • Salina GRENET-CATALANO, Director of Global Affairs of the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs

“Youth is crucial to energising collective efforts and, above all, ensuring their sustainability. France will support the creation of this international youth network against enforced disappearances to provide a platform to exchange ideas and join efforts and promote innovative initiatives.”

---

## Closing remarks

---



**In his closing remarks, Emmanuel Decaux, CEDI President and former Chair of the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances, highlighted the significance of hosting this Congress, the high number of participants, their diversity, active participation and commitment. This event, long envisioned since the 1970s, facilitated meaningful exchanges and fostered new commitments. Emmanuel Decaux expressed hope for a second Congress and emphasized the need for sustained collective action. Three key themes were underscored: continuity, coherence, and constancy.**

**Emmanuel Decaux concluded by urging collective action, emphasizing that **“we are all concerned”**.**

# THANK YOU

*This project, from its conception to this very report, is the result of collective efforts.  
The CEDI Team would like to express its heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to its success.*

*First and foremost, we extend our sincere appreciation to all the participants who took part in the **consultations** and in the Congress.*

*We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the survivors and family members who shared their powerful and humbling testimonies.*

## **Our gratitude extends to:**

- CEDI Advisory Board members as well as the other co-organizers of the Congress:
- the CED, the WGEID and OHCHR – for their invaluable guidance and steadfast support throughout the process. Special thanks to Olivier de Frouville, Albane Prophette-Pallasco and Pauline Younes Moreno for their unwavering support and their constant commitment.
- All our partners whose contribution went far beyond their financial support, by providing advice and input, facilitating contacts and participation of key participants, thus allowing for essential and unique voices from all regions to be heard:

- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- Confédération suisse
- République et Canton de Genève
- UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT)
- International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP)
- International Commission of Jurists
- Barreau de Paris
- CCFD-Terre Solidaire
- International Center on Transitional Justice (ICTJ)
- Amnesty International
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) & Global Initiative Against Impunity (GIAI)
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
- International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP)
- ACAT-France
- The Geneva Human Rights Platform
- International Geneva Welcome Centre (CAGI)
- Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, Mission de la Gouvernance Démocratique; Services de coopération et d'action culturelle (SCAC) des ambassades de France au Yémen et au Sénégal (French embassies).
- Our only partner from the private sector "Simultania Interprets". Jon and his team not only made the rich exchanges accessible in four languages: Arabic, English, French and Spanish. Their sensitivity to the issue also ensured that the powerful voices we heard were done justice.
- The Geneva Academy students who assisted in preparing the reports on the regional consultations and on the Congress:

Martina Caslini, Anupa Aryal, Mary Mam Degen Fye, Flavia Moya Miche and Lily Radwan.

- The Geneva International Conference Center (CICG), its teams and event suppliers, Fairy Motion, Compass catering company, Mathys printing company, Hôtel IBIS Centre Nations and ICV volunteers (thank you Blerina Zoto for your support and Juliana Cici for your great photos).

- The translators of this report in Arabic, French and Spanish.

A special "merci" to Caroline Amar for her powerful illustrations exhibited at the Congress, and for making this report visually compelling as well.

Finally, we express our deepest gratitude to all those who have supported CEDI since its inception: members of the association and its Administrative Board, particularly Emmanuel Decaux, President, for his invaluable knowledge and diligence in managing administrative matters, and Marina Eudes, Treasurer, for her precious support.

Many thanks to everyone who has volunteered their time, multiple services, and expertise to provide invaluable support.

The CEDI Team in charge of co-organizing the Congress was composed of:

Tatiana Avanthay, Communications Consultant  
 Claire Callejon, Project Manager  
 Nordine Drici, Strategic Coordinator  
 Jeanne Hirschberger, Project Officer  
 Ramla Liatouji, Executive Coordinator

# PARTICIPATING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

A Good Seed (أريج فؤاد) / Abductee's Mothers Association (AMA) / African Network against Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED) / Agrupación de Mujeres Organizadas por los Ejecutados, Secuestrados y Desaparecidos (AMORES) / Aluna / Amour Destiné / Asian Federation Against Enforced Disappearances (AFAD) / Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos de Guatemala (FAMDEGUA) / Association culturelle des Tamouls en France / Association Jardin Des Disparus / Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison (ADMSP) / Association of Families of the Missing in Bosnia / Association of Family Members of the Disappeared / Association of Relatives of Enforced Disappeared Mannar / Baloch National Movement / Buscador@s Zacatecas AC / Buscando Desaparecidos México (BÚSCAME) / Caesar Families Association / Celula de Busqueda e Investigacion Desaparecidos A.C / Colectivo «En Tu Búsqueda Michoacán» / Colectivo Buscadoras Guanajuato México / Colectivo De Pie Hasta Encontrare Guanajuato / Colectivo Madres Guerreras De León / Collectif contre l' impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés / Collectif des Adoptés du Sri Lanka-France / Collectif des adoptés français du Mali / Collectif des Familles de Disparu.e.s en Algérie (CFDA) / Comité de familiares de Desaparecidos de San Miguel Cajónos / Comité de Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH) / Comité de Familiares de Personas Detenidas Desaparecidas en México (COFFADEM) / Comité des familles des disparus Sahraouis au territoire occupé du Sahara occidental / Committee of the Families of Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon (CFKDL) / Coordination Nationale des Familles des Disparus en Algérie / Defence of Human Rights Pakistan / Desaparecid@s de la Costa y Femicidios de Michoacán A.C. / Desaparecidos (Families of the Disappeared for Justice) and Karapatan Alliance Philippines / Desaparición Forzada de Villa del Rosario norte de Santander Colombia (Hornos Cremato) / Donde estan - Geneve / Familiares Europa Abya Yala de Personas Desaparecidas en Colombia / Families for Freedom Movement / Families of the Enforced Disappearances in Sri Lanka / Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) / Family of the Involuntarily Disappeared Association Manipur (FIDAM) / Federación Latinoamericana de / Asociaciones de Familiares de Detenidos-Desaparecidos (FEDEFAM) / Fédération euro-méditerranéenne contre les disparitions forcées (FEMED) / Flam / Fondation Mohammed Bassir pour la recherche, les études et les médias / Foro Internacional de Víctimas - Colombia / Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en Coahuila (FUUNDEC-FUNDEM) / Fundación Nydia Erika Bautista / Gambia Center for Victims of Human Rights Violations / Grafting / Hope / Hasta Encontrarte / Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (H.I.J.O.S.) / Human Rights Analysis Centre / International Coalition against Enforced Disappearances (ICAED) / «International Justice Mission (IJM Kenya), / Missing Voices Coalition» / Iraqi Center for Documenting Extremism Crimes / Madres con una luz en el corazón / Massar association - Coalition des familles des personnes enlevés par Da' ech / Missing Persons Families Group / Movimiento Busco al Mío, Buscando a Todos / Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado / Movimiento por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México / Network of Families of the Disappeared in Nepal / Racines Perdues-Raíces Perdidas / Red Internacional De Asociaciones De Personas Desaparecidas (RIAPD) / Red Regional de Familias Migrantes (ReReFaMi) / Release me / RIAPD / Sabuesos Guerreras / Saturday Mothers / Truth Justice Memory Center / Saving Punjab / SOS Bebes Valencia / Synergy Association for Victims / Taafi / Tamil-Style / The Eftychia Project / Unión y Red Nacional de Búsqueda de Personas / Verify-Sy / Voice For North East Enforce Disappearance / Voix des Martyrs / ABC Tamil Oli / ACAT-France / Advocacy Forum-Nepal / African Center for Justice and Peace Studies / Al-Khoei Foundation / Almonqith Organization for Human Rights / Al-Rahma Humanity Association / AMAKEN/Creative Memory / Amnesty International / Amnesty International France / ANKADER / ANYKADER, MEBYADER / ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America / Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) / Asociación pro Derechos Humanos (APRODEH) / Asociación Uraglobal Suiza Colombia / Association BASMA pour l' action socioculturelle et les droits humains / Association Bharathi Centre Culturel Franco-Tamoul / Association caritative étudiante pour la jeunesse / Association d' aide aux migrants en situation vulnérable Oujda Maroc (AMSV) / Association de Défense et de Promotion des Droits de l' Homme / Association des étudiants tamouls de France / Association des femmes iraniennes en France / Association du Sahara pour la Culture, les Arts et la Paix / Association Humaniste de France / Association Humanitaire Franco-Sri Lankaise / Association Humanitaire Pieds D' Afrique / Association Internationale Contre les Disparitions forcées / Association Pour la Solidarité Internationale / Association pour le droit de l' homme et le développement durable / Association pour les victimes du monde / Association Thendral / Associazione Donne Democratiche Iraniane / Badael / Baketik / Bischöfliches Hilfswerk Misereor e.V. / borderline-europe - Human Rights without Borders / Brot für die Welt / Cameroon Red Cross / Caminando Fronteras / Caritas Germany / Casa Colibrí-Centro Cultural y de Derechos Humanos / CCFD-Terre Solidaire / Center for Civil Liberties / Center for Civil Society and Democracy (CCSD) / Center for Global Nonkilling / Centre d' Accueil de la Genève Internationale (CAGI) / Centre de Recherches et d' Etudes sur les Droits de l' Homme et le Droit Humanitaire (CREDHO) / Centre for Strategic Studies to Support Women and Children / Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation / Centre International Des Droits De L' Homme / Centre libanais pour les droits humains (CLDH) / Centre Zagros pour les Droits de l' Homme / Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) / Centro de Justicia para la Paz y el Desarrollo / Changement Social Bénin / CIDH AFRICA / Círculo de Estudios de Derecho Internacional de los Derechos Humanos (CEDIDH) / Citizens Against Enforced Disappearances (CAGED) / Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos / CMJTERI / Collectif de Femmes pour les droits de l' Homme (CFDH) / Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ) / Committee for Justice / Consultora Solidaria / Convention Against Torture Initiative (CTI) / Corporación De Promoción Y Defensa De Los Derechos Del Pueblo / Corporación Memoria y Paz (Cormepaz) / COSF Uganda / Courage SuisseCrew against torture / Croix Rouge Française / CSDHIDAL Khalsa Human Rights / Dawlaty / DCHRS / DefendDefenders / Defenders for Human Rights / Democracy and Human Rights (ArMa Academy) / DT InstituteDue Process of Law Foundation / / Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms / Eheco / Ensemble contre la peine de mort (ECPM) / Eritrean Coordination for Human Rights/ Etudiants pour une société durable Paris / EuroMed Rights / European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights / European House of Peace / European Human Rights Advocacy Centre (EHRAC) / Families Of Truth and Justice / Fédération internationale des ACAT (FIACAT) / FNF Human Rights Hub / Forum Justice et Droits de l' Homme / Forum marocain pour la vérité et la justice / Forum pour la Conscience et le Développement / Forum pour le développement et la coopération / ForumZFD / Free Syrian Lawyers Association / Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution (FNDC) / Tournons La Page / Fundación Internacional Baltasar Garzón / Garkuwa / Geneva for Human Rights / Geneva International Centre for Justice/ Global Citizen / Global Human Rights Defence / Global Tamil Movement / GongGam Human Rights Law Foundation / Hand in Hand Foundation / Hitma for Cultural and Social Development / Holly Heart United / Hope-Iraq / Human Rights Alert / Human Rights Centre ZMINA / Human Rights Council of Balochistan / Human Rights Defenders e.V / Human Rights Guardians / Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA) / Human Rights Solidarity - Libya / Ibsar association / IDHEAS - Litigio Estratégico en Derechos Humanos / Initiators Organization for Human Rights & Democracy (IOHRD) / Institut de recherche et d' études stratégiques de Khyber / Institut Promethus pour la Démocratie et les droits Humains / Instituto HEGOA / Instituto Mexicano de Derechos Humanos y Democracia AC / International Bar Association' s Human Rights Institute / International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP) / International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) / International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) / International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) / International Development and Construction Agency / International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) / International Rehabilitation Council for Torture (IRCT) / International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) / International Social Service / International-Lawyers.orgInter-Parliamentary Union / IOPDHR-GENEVA-NGO / Iranian Women' s Association Switzerland / Iraqi Human Rights Watch Society / JeunesIHEDN / Jeunesse Etudiante Tamoule / Junax Ko' tantik / Justice Rapid Response (JRR) / JusticeMakers Bangladesh in France / Kashmir Campaign Global / Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group / KlikAktiv / KontraS Indonesia / Kurdistan Human Rights Association-Geneva / Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights / Le Pont / League International Of Young Journalist / Legal Literacy - Nepal / Les Caribous Libérés / Liga Internacional de Protección de los Derechos Humanos (LIPDH) / Ligue ITEKA / Ligue Pour La Solidarité Congolaise / Local Administration Councils Unit / Mães Virtuosas Do Brasil / Mar Movement - Movement Against Atrocities & Repression / Memorial Human Rights Defence Centre / MENA Rights Group / / Mercy Hands Europe / Mizan for Legal Studies and Human Rights / Mwatana for Human Rights / NoPhotoZone / Observatoire Kisal / Odhikar / Organisation des Jeunes pour la Promotion et le Développement / Organisation pour le Développement International Social Solidaire Intégrée / Pan American Development Foundation / Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) / Pax Christi Uvira / Peace Brigades International / People for Equality and Relief / POWER Initiative / Red de acompañamiento Victimológico de Reynosa A.C. / Red para la Infancia y la Familia - Peru / Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) / RIF/AMARC/Section Sénégal / Rwanda Accountability Initiative / Sada Aljanub / Safeguard Defenders / Sahrawi NGO Coalition / SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties / Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz (Serapaz) / SIA For Africa / Sikh Federation / Sindhi Foundation / Solidarité Internationale pour la Paix / South Asia Research Institute for Minorities / Stichting Justice Initiative (SJI) / Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) / Swiss Red Cross Tracing Service / swisspeace Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) / Syrian Institute for Justice / The Day After / The Justice Foundation / The Media Initiative for Human Rights / The Public International Law and Policy Group / The Tibet Bureau / Thendral / Tournor La Page / Tournons La Page / TRIAL International / Truth Justice Memory CenterTruth Now! / United States Tamil Action Group / Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation / UTOPAX / Victims of Iraq in Spyker (OVOIS) / Village Suisse ONG / Voces Mesoamericanas, Accion con Pueblos Migrantes / White Helmets / WHRIA / World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

# ANNEXES

 *The annexes to this report are available on CEDI's [website](#).*

- 1. Programme*
- 2. Welcome address by Prof. Emmanuel Decaux, CEDI President*
- 3. Keynote remarks by Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights*
- 4. Closing address by Prof. Emmanuel Decaux, CEDI President*
- 5. Pledges*
- 6. List of participating States*
- 7. List of participating CSOs*
- 8. List of speakers and moderators*
- 9. Written contributions*
- 10. Resources*
- 11. About CEDI*

*The video recordings of the First World Congress on Enforced Disappearances are available to watch in original language and with English interpretation on our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@EDWorldCongress-CEDI193>.*



