



United States Mission to the OSCE

International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

As delivered by Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Elisabeth Rosenstock-Siller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 2, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to convey to the Permanent Council the statement by Secretary Blinken on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances:

On August 30, the United States marked the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, as established by the UN General Assembly in 2010. The United States stands in solidarity with victims of the egregious crime of enforced disappearance and with the loved ones who live with the agony of their absence and the added pain of not knowing their whereabouts or fate. Every year, friends and family members vanish after being arrested, detained, or abducted by government officials or those working in concert with them or with their tacit assent. Those responsible refuse to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or conceal the victims' fates and whereabouts. Human rights defenders, political activists, environmental defenders, journalists, and those who exercise their fundamental freedoms are often the targets of this egregious crime.

Mr. Chair, the 2020 Tirana Ministerial Decision on the Prevention and Eradication of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment expressed deep concern that enforced disappearances still occur in the OSCE region. We remain concerned about the reports of numerous enforced disappearances of political opponents and perceived dissidents in Turkmenistan and continue to support the efforts of the “*Prove They Are Alive!*” campaign. We appreciate the Government of Turkmenistan’s release of information on some individuals on this list. We encourage Turkmenistan to provide information on the many dozens of unaccounted for individuals and to fulfill their commitments under the 2018 UN Universal Periodic Review by ending disappearances in prisons. We hope the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances can soon conduct its visit to Turkmenistan. We also call for the immediate release of those among the disappeared whose prison terms have expired, for credible information on prisoner welfare, and for inmates’ access to visits by their families, lawyers of their choice, medical assistance, and international monitors.

More than two years after the scathing 2018 Moscow Mechanism Report on serious abuses in the Russian Federation’s Republic of Chechnya, information continues to emerge about enforced disappearances that occur there regularly with impunity. Salman Tepsurkayev, the young moderator of an opposition *Telegram* channel, was abducted last September by persons with connections to Chechen security officials. He subsequently

appeared in a video that showed him under conditions of extreme duress. His whereabouts remain unknown.

Russia's abuses extend to occupied Crimea where 43 cases of enforced disappearance have been reported since 2014. According to the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, 11 individuals remain missing today.

As Secretary Blinken further stated: *The United States strongly condemns all enforced disappearances and calls on governments to facilitate the return of and provide information about all victims of enforced disappearances, and to undertake independent and transparent investigations into all such cases. Governments must put an end to enforced disappearances, hold accountable those responsible, reveal the fate or whereabouts of loved ones who have been disappeared, and respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons.*

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Thank you, Mr. Chair.