



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1279 Vienna, 3 September 2020

EU Statement marking the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

On 30 August, we marked the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. On this occasion, the European Union reaffirms its strong commitment to the prevention and eradication of involuntary or enforced disappearances, as well as to combatting impunity for those responsible for, or complicit in, such crimes.

Enforced disappearances are a serious violation of human rights that guarantee, inter alia, the right not to be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Our OSCE and international commitments are abundantly clear: Any forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are unequivocally prohibited, under all circumstances, without exceptions.

COVID-19 has created worrying new contexts for enforced disappearances. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reports examples of compulsory quarantine in places of deprivation of liberty, during which families do not know the fate and whereabouts of their relatives.

We have to make sure that vulnerable groups, such as persons belonging to national and religious minorities, are protected against enforced disappearances. This crime has also gender consequences, particularly affecting women and LGBTI persons, according to the UN Committee and Working Group on Enforced Disappearances.

We continue to receive new, alarming reports of enforced disappearances from several parts of the OSCE region, often in the context of the fight against organised crime and terrorism. The fear generated by this practice is not only limited to the victims, but also affects their families, communities and society as a whole.

At the same time, many older cases remain unresolved, denying justice and effective remedy and assistance to the victims. Moreover, a culture of impunity and a lack of safeguards in the criminal justice system impede the eradication of these crimes.

We are deeply alarmed by the numerous recent reports from Belarus where peaceful protesters and bystanders go missing for days, which amounts to enforced disappearance. Relatives of the detainees and their lawyers have made unsuccessful attempts to ascertain their whereabouts, yet the location of hundreds of detainees remains unknown.

The European Union calls on Belarus to immediately stop the practice of enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment and to release all those unlawfully detained. Civil society and opposition actors engaged in discussions of political transition must be protected from unlawful arrests and violence. The EU calls for a complete and transparent investigation into all alleged violations and abuses of human rights.

We also remain seriously concerned about the fate of people subjected to enforced disappearance in Turkmenistan. Credible reports have documented more than 120 cases of people kept in total isolation in Turkmenistan's prisons. We continue to follow the situation of the disappeared persons, and are concerned about reports that at least seven disappeared persons have served their sentences, but have not yet been released.

The European Union once again reiterates its strong call on Turkmenistan to immediately acknowledge this scourge, take action on the outstanding cases and eradicate the problem of enforced disappearances.

In light of persisting challenges, we encourage all OSCE participating States to strongly consider ratifying the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to cooperate fully with the UN Committee and the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances and to prevent enforced disappearances. This includes investigating effectively all allegations of enforced disappearances, bringing perpetrators to justice and providing proper redress to the victims and their families.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA* align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.