



Enforced disappearance is not a crime of the past – it's happening in the present. It is a global problem that is not restricted to a specific region of the world and in many countries it is increasing. Not only does this practice have an effect on the victims and their families, it also has an impact on society as a whole, spreading terror and generating a feeling of insecurity within a community. Deeply concerned about the increase in enforced or involuntary disappearances around the world, the UN General Assembly voted in 2010 to designate 30 August as the [International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances](#) to draw attention to the global problem of enforced disappearance.

According to the [Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances](#) , victims of enforced disappearance include “any individual who has suffered harm as the direct result of an enforced disappearance”. Although it was once largely the product of military dictatorships, nowadays enforced disappearances are often used as a means of political repression of opponents, particularly in complex situations of internal conflict.

While the General Assembly adopted the Declaration in 1992, the [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#) was not created until 23 December 2010. Unlike the Declaration, the Convention is a legally binding instrument that created specific international instruments, such as the

Committee on Enforced Disappearances

, to address enforced disappearance. The Convention represents significant progress in international law, as it makes clear the circumstances that constitute an enforced disappearance, namely “arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the State”.

Furthermore, there is a particular concern for the ongoing harassment of human rights defenders, relatives of victims, witnesses and legal counsel dealing with cases of enforced disappearance, the use by States of counter-terrorist activities as an excuse for breaching their obligations, and the still widespread impunity for enforced disappearance. The United Nations acknowledges that special attention must also be paid to specific groups of especially vulnerable people, like children and people with disabilities.

Undoubtedly, enforced disappearance is one of the most heinous violations of human rights. Victims of this practice are frequently tortured and live in constant fear for their lives, all the while their families remain unaware of the fate of their loved ones, their emotions alternating between hope and despair, wondering and waiting (sometimes for years) for news that may never come.

As of August 2017, 57 countries have ratified the Convention. By 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner Office for Human Rights aims to reach the goal of 114 ratifications.

Additional links:

- You can learn more about enforced disappearances: <http://ow.ly/ejx530eB2oF>
- Take action by sending a letter to your Government: <http://ow.ly/CU8Y30eICGU> .
- To see if your country has already ratified the Convention: <http://ow.ly/TMYx30eB1wo> .