

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

First Conference of the States Parties

Geneva, 19 December 2016

Item 6 of the agenda

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to read the oral statement of the Irish Centre for Human Rights, Mr. Thamil Ananthavinayagan (Galway)

Honorable chair,
Distinguished excellencies,
Colleagues and friends,

Close your eyes. Imagine you are a mother. Imagine you have an 11-year-old son. Imagine you are preparing him for an ordinary day in school. While he leaves for school in the early morning, you are planning the dinner in the evening. But he will never return, as he will be kidnapped by unidentified persons in broad daylight on his way to school. Imagine that -five years later- this mother will desperately reach for both your hands, crying and taking out a vanishing black and white picture of her son with his cheeky smile in school uniform. A little boy whose best days were still ahead of him. Imagine this woman asking you desperately for help and to speak to the state authorities - in case they know anything.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This happened to me on visit to a country of our world community. The tears of a mother are the affirmation of universal pain, a pain that needs no translation. Enforced disappearances not only compromise -inter alia- the human right to life and right to liberty. Enforced disappearances are furthermore torture for loved ones, relatives and friends.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The evil phenomenon of enforced disappearances is on the agenda of the international community since 1974: initially, the problem was to find the appropriate right legal category to qualify this practice. In 1992 the UN General Assembly approved a Declaration on enforced disappearances and in 2006 finalized the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. One of its key provisions is art. 5, calling enforced disappearances 'a crime against humanity'.

The Committee began its work in 2010 and held 11 sessions, reviewed 18 state reports issued the 18 concluding observation and four statements. Meanwhile it contributed to the elaboration and clarification of international human rights law. The institutional evolution of the United Nations in this field is impressive, yet much work needs to be done. Too many enforced disappearances are still taking place, as perpetrators are hiding behind the veil of impunity and lulling themselves in the false sense of security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances is a committee of its own nature. It owes immense gratitude and knowledge to the older committees, as it nourishes itself from their past experiences. However, as a new committee, it was also innovative, and should be a role model for other and probably future treaty bodies. And the Convention is one of the strongest human rights treaties ever adopted under the auspices of the United Nations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are all the United Nations. We make human rights violations visible, we give hope. The human rights violation of one is a human rights violation of all of us. There is no international body except the United Nations that had, has and will have the credibility, capacity and audacity to bring the perpetrators to justice, lift the veil of impunity and wipe away every tear of the countless mothers of this world. Thank you very much.