



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Katherine Brucker
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 5, 2024

The United States stands in solidarity with the victims of enforced disappearances and with their families and friends. We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to ending this abhorrent practice and recall the OSCE commitments we all made in adopting the 2020 Tirana Ministerial Council Decision on the Prevention and Eradication of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Yet despite these commitments, and in violation of international law, several participating States still employ enforced disappearance to stifle and punish dissent, political opposition, or other perceived criticism against authorities, and even target for harassment and reprisal those who advocate for the disappeared.

The 2024 Moscow Mechanism expert mission report, international organizations, and civil society actors have documented how the Russian Federation has consistently, deliberately, and unjustly detained Ukraine’s civilians, resulting in enforced disappearances. Russia’s occupying forces have targeted the fabric of Ukrainian society for detainment, including legitimate local authorities, law enforcement officials, civic activists, journalists, education staff, and religious leaders. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights documented 621 cases of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention of Ukrainian civilians by Russian armed forces from February 2022 through March 24, 2023.

As detailed in ODIHR’s Fifth Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine, and as many of us have heard directly from victims who bravely shared their stories with us here at the Hofburg, Russia’s occupying authorities have often withheld information on detainees’ whereabouts from their families. These families only learn about the fate of their relatives from other detainees held with them. While the disappeared experience unimaginable horrors, their loved ones also face the anguish of continued separation and often the agony of never knowing their fate.

Russia developed the atrocious practice of forcibly disappearing individuals within its own borders. The problem is particularly acute in Russia’s Republic of Chechnya, where disappearances and reported serious abuses led the United States and fifteen other participating States to invoke the Moscow Mechanism in 2018. The Expert Mission report was grim, and the Russian Federation has failed to address the situation in Chechnya, where impunity is the norm.

We once again call on Russia to release all Ukrainian citizens it has unjustly detained or forcibly disappeared and to halt these horrendous practices, including on the territories of Ukraine that it occupies. We call on Russia to abide by the Geneva Convention and allow the International Committee of the Red Cross access to all sites in which Russia detains Ukrainian civilians and protected persons. Perpetrators will be held accountable for their crimes and other atrocities and abuses in Ukraine.

We urge all participating States to honor their international law obligations and OSCE commitments to human rights and fundamental freedoms by working to end enforced disappearance. We call on the participating States still engaged in that appalling practice to immediately and unconditionally release all victims of enforced disappearance they continue to hold, and provide a full accounting of their whereabouts, and return to their loved ones the remains of those who are deceased.

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