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FIRST WORLD CONGRESS ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

REPORT ON CONSULTATIONS WITH STATES

Our partners



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Acknowledgements

The Convention against Enforced Disappearances Initiative (CEDI) would like to thank everyone who facilitated the organisation of the regional consultations with State representatives held between May and September 2024, i.e., CEDI's Core States – Argentina, France, Morocco and Samoa – as well as the coordinators of the European Union, the Group of African States, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Small Island Developing States, the Least Developed Countries, the Group of Asia-Pacific States and the Western European and other States.

Our sincere thanks to all the States who took an active part in the consultations and shared invaluable insights regarding the fight against enforced disappearances, including ratification and implementation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Their contribution to better understanding relevant challenges, identifying best practices and their suggestions for concrete action are much appreciated.

1. Introduction

The first [World Congress on Enforced Disappearances](#), co-organized by [CEDI](#), the United Nations [Committee on Enforced Disappearances](#) (CED), the [Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances](#) (WGEID), and the Office of the [High-Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR), will take place on 15 and 16 January 2025 in Geneva, Switzerland. One of its objectives is to promote intergovernmental dialogue, exchanges of experiences and best practices related to the fight against enforced disappearances, including the ratification and implementation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (the Convention).

Nearly 20 years after the adoption of the Convention, this event will bring together States, civil society organizations, victims, international and regional organizations, national human rights institutions and experts with renewed ambition to combat this heinous crime.

The Congress aims to create an opportunity for concrete and ambitious commitments to eliminate enforced disappearance everywhere in the world. To this end, participants will be encouraged to submit voluntary commitments.

To facilitate their contribution, CEDI and OHCHR co-organized, a series of consultations with State representatives before the United Nations in Geneva to:

- Provide a space of discussion for States to share their insights
- Gather their suggestions for the World Congress and the action plan that will be presented.

This report is based on consultations held between May and September 2024 with the following groups:

- European Union: 28 May in hybrid format
- African Group: 30 May, online
- Latin American and Caribbean States: 20 June, online
- Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries: 30 July, online
- Asia-Pacific States: 13 August, online
- Western European and other States: 20 September, in Geneva (Palais des Nations), in person.

The report highlights best practices, challenges, and recommendations shared during these sessions, with the insights gathered aimed at informing the World Congress on Enforced Disappearances, drawing from experiences across all regions of the world.

The provisional programme of the event, the proposed action plan and related model pledges will be developed based on the [consultations](#) held with State representatives as well as with other actors.

All consultations started with a presentation of the World Congress by CEDI or a member the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED), followed by an overview of the status of the ratification of the Convention in the concerned States presented by a member of CED or its Executive Secretary (OHCHR).

2. Discussion

2.1. Best practices

The following best practices were shared with the co-organizers of the World Congress on Enforced Disappearances:

- Legal and institutional reform, including criminalization of enforced disappearance at the domestic level, in line with international standards
- Fruitful cooperation with the Committee resulting in legal reforms and stronger legal and institutional framework
- Participation in and offer to contribute to a learning exchange, including in the context of transitional justice and of the Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI)
- Establishment of search mechanisms and processes. Various forms (judicial, extra-judicial) and mandates: locate the remains of disappeared persons, issuing recommendations on compensation, etc.
- Establishment of reparation programs
- Engagement with family members and civil society
- Establishment of a coordination mechanism at the national level to coordinate all relevant governmental entities
- Establishment of a continuous, permanent capacity-building programme for relevant officials
- Establishment of an alert system
- Establishment of a national localization system
- Creation of a national registry of disappeared persons

2.2. Challenges

Several State delegates highlighted the following challenges:

- Issue of enforced disappearance and Convention not as well-known as other human rights treaties
- Perception that the Convention is a complex instrument that requires many legal and institutional changes
- Perception that the national legislation needs to be adapted prior to ratification and that compliance is a pre-requisite for ratification
- Lack of expertise and technical assistance needed
- Civil society and public opinion not as mobilized on this issue at the domestic level in countries where enforced disappearance is not practiced
- Obstacles related to the domestic process for ratifying international treaties

2.3. Main suggestions and recommendations

State delegates from all regions suggested engaging in the following activities to promote the Convention and its objectives:

- Popularization, awareness-raising needed regarding an issue and a Convention that are not as well-known as others. Efforts should be targeted at broad public, right-holders, legal practitioners
- Promote ratification of the Convention as a political and legal commitment to the fight against enforced disappearance
- Ratification should be based on national context in each States and involve a long-term action plan for implementation (training of all relevant personnel, etc.)
- Address obstacles: for a majority of States, gradual meeting of conditions necessary to ratify the Convention, gradual harmonization of legal arsenal.
- The sovereignty of States should always be respected
- Support needed: technical assistance from CED and other actors, technical support (forensic capacities, DNA analysis), expertise to provide psychosocial support to victims
- Share positive experiences with peers
- Highlight essential role of CED in supporting States by providing technical assistance on ratification
- Share tools and assistance on treaty reporting to show that support is available
- Implementation: invite stakeholders to draw inspiration from the Convention against Torture Initiative (since 2014). Good practices developed. 19 ratifications since its inception.
- Promote learning exchanges and experience sharing
- Involve NHRIs who have a role to play as per their mandate of promotion of ratification and keeping track of implementation

2.4. Offers of assistance

Several States offered to provide technical assistance and share their experience with their peers regarding ratification and implementation of the Convention (Colombia, Morocco, Uruguay).

3. Selected questions answered

- **Does CED provide technical assistance regarding ratification?**

Yes, a [practical guide on becoming a party to the Convention](#) published by OHCHR is available. CED can also organize bilateral meetings or meetings with other States who would be interested in benefiting from such technical assistance.

- **Modalities of participation: all UN Member States invited**

All UN Member States will be invited – not only States parties to the CED Convention. The objective is to provide a space for discussion and exchange. The event will be open to all States and allow them to exchange with their peers and other participants and learn from each other's experience.

- **Outcome of the World Congress: action plan**

The action plan that will be presented will be based on the consultations and what States and stakeholders suggest. For example, activities may include awareness-raising and technical assistance. Such activities will be organized on a voluntary basis.

Participants are encouraged to submit [voluntary pledges](#). Model pledges are provided as examples.

The action plan that will be presented will be in line with agreed language and international human rights standards. The action plan will be developed on the basis of the consultations.

States are encouraged to submit voluntary commitments related to the action plan for its implementation.

- **Can a State participate without endorsing the outcome document or ratifying the Convention?**

There is no obligation to ratify the Convention or to submit voluntary pledges to participate in the World Congress. *All* UN Member States have received a “Save the date” message and will receive formal invitations via their Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva, including States that are not parties to the Convention, regardless of whether they intend to ratify it or not.

- **Follow-up to the World Congress**

The event is not an end in itself and aims to have a lasting positive impact on the fight against enforced disappearances. Regular follow-up on the implementation of the action plan will be provided.

The 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on 20th December 2006 will provide a good opportunity to review the implementation of the action plan and related pledges.

The implementation of the action plan will also form part of the daily work of the Committee and the WGEID, co-organizers of the World Congress.