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WORLD ENFORCED CONGRESS ON DISAPPEARANCES

15&16
JANUARY
2025



France on behalf of CEDI Core States: Argentina, France, Morocco and Samoa

Ms. Isabelle Rome, Ambassador at Large for Human Rights for France

Original version (French)

“Where are they?” « Où sont-ils, où sont-elles ? »

Aujourd’hui, ce premier Congrès mondial sur les disparitions forcées revêt un symbole puissant et une importance capitale, à l’heure même où les Syriennes et les Syriens commencent tout juste à recouvrer la liberté après des décennies d’oppression du régime d’Assad ; et alors que des milliers d’entre elles, d’entre eux, sont encore portés disparus.

L’Argentine, la France, le Maroc et les Îles Samoa remercient l’Initiative pour la Convention contre les disparitions forcées (CEDI), le Comité des disparitions forcées, le Groupe de travail sur les disparitions forcées ou involontaires, et le Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies aux droits de l’homme, pour l’organisation de ce premier Congrès mondial sur les disparitions forcées. Nous mesurons notre responsabilité en tant que coparrains de cet événement, qui fera date dans la lutte universelle contre les disparitions forcées. Notre premier message s’adresse aux victimes du crime de disparition forcée et à leurs proches, pour leur exprimer notre solidarité et notre soutien. C’est pour elles que nous menons ce combat contre ce fléau, et en avons fait une priorité de notre politique étrangère. C’est aussi pour elles que nous ne mettrons jamais sur le même plan l’opresseur et l’opprimé, comme le rappelait Louis Joinet.

Depuis 2006, nous nous engageons et nous agissons pour la ratification universelle et la mise en œuvre effective de la Convention pour la protection de toutes les personnes contre la disparition forcée. Ce Congrès nous permet de progresser dans cette voie. La Convention, entrée en vigueur le 23 décembre 2010, comptait 30 États parties lorsque le Comité des disparitions forcées a tenu sa première séance publique. Aujourd’hui, elle en compte 77 – c’est encore trop peu, mais cinq États, de diverses parties du monde, l’ont ratifiée en 2024 : l’Afrique du Sud, le Bangladesh, la Côte d’Ivoire, la Pologne et la Thaïlande, et nous les saluons collectivement.

L’Initiative pour la Convention contre les disparitions forcées œuvre sans relâche pour l’universalisation de cet instrument. Son action est indispensable pour lutter contre le crime de disparition forcée et offrir une protection aux victimes et à leurs proches. Aux côtés de la CEDI, les organisations de la société civile et les défenseurs des droits humains sont engagés partout dans le monde pour alerter et documenter les faits. Nous leur rendons hommage, car c’est grâce à l’action collective des États et de la société civile que nous réussirons à atteindre cet objectif commun de mettre fin à cette pratique indigne et lutter contre l’impunité. L’ONU ne serait pas l’ONU sans les ONG, ne l’oublions pas.

Depuis sa création, le Comité a recensé, avec l’aide du Groupe de travail, près de 61 000 cas de disparition forcée. Derrière le chiffre de ces vies enlevées, qui heurte notre conscience, il y a une réalité : la pratique des disparitions forcées persiste, parfois de manière systématique, dans toutes les régions du monde. Ce sont des visages – et j’ai compris, en vous entendant



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tout à l'heure, combien il est important d'avoir toutes ces photos qui nous rappellent tous ces disparus, qui sont bien sûr avec nous ce matin.

Entre mai 2023 et mai 2024, le Groupe de travail a élucidé 199 cas. C'est un résultat encourageant, un soulagement pour les proches des victimes concernées, et un espoir pour les autres. Les disparitions forcées sont une violation grave et intolérable des droits humains, et peuvent constituer un crime contre l'humanité – un crime enfin nommé, au regard du Statut de Rome de la Cour pénale internationale. Des victimes sont privées de leur droit à la vie, à la dignité, à la liberté. Leurs proches en subissent les conséquences pendant plusieurs années.

De tels actes n'ont pas leur place dans un monde en paix et en sécurité, qui aspire à la justice, à la réconciliation et au respect des droits humains. La lutte contre les disparitions forcées est un combat pour le droit inaliénable de chaque personne à exister, à être reconnue, et protégée.

L'Argentine, la France, le Maroc et les Îles Samoa se tiennent aux côtés de l'Initiative pour la Convention contre les disparitions forcées pour unir leurs forces afin de mettre fin à cette pratique inhumaine et dégradante. Ce Congrès marque une étape importante pour renouveler et renforcer les engagements de toutes les parties prenantes dans un esprit de responsabilité et d'exigence. Pour les victimes et leurs proches, je vous remercie.

English translation

"Where are they?"

Today, this first World Congress on Enforced Disappearances is a powerful symbol and of the utmost importance, at a time when Syrians are just beginning to regain their freedom after decades of oppression by the Assad regime, and when thousands of them are still missing.

Argentina, France, Morocco and Samoa thank the Convention Against Enforced Disappearances Initiative (CEDI), the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for organizing this first World Congress on Enforced Disappearances. We are aware of our responsibility as co-sponsors of this event, which will mark a milestone in the universal fight against enforced disappearances. Our first message is addressed to the victims of enforced disappearance and their families, to express our solidarity and support. It is for them that we are fighting this scourge, and have made it a priority of our foreign policy. It is also for them that we will never put the oppressor and the oppressed on the same level, as Louis Joinet reminded us.

Since 2006, we have been committed to the universal ratification and effective implementation of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. This Congress enables us to make progress in this direction. The Convention, which entered into force on 23 December 2010, had 30 States parties when the Committee



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on Enforced Disappearances held its first public session. Today, it has 77 – still too few, but five States, from different parts of the world, ratified it in 2024: Bangladesh, Cote d'Ivoire, Poland, South Africa and Thailand, and we collectively salute them.

The Convention Against Enforced Disappearances Initiative (CEDI) works tirelessly for the universalization of this instrument. Its action is indispensable in the fight against the crime of enforced disappearance and in offering protection to victims and their families. Alongside CEDI, civil society organizations and human rights defenders around the world are committed to alerting and documenting the facts. We pay tribute to them, for it is thanks to the collective action of States and civil society that we will succeed in reaching this common goal of putting an end to this outrageous practice and combating impunity. Let us not forget that the United Nations would not be the United Nations without NGOs.

Since its creation, the Committee, with the help of the Working Group, has recorded nearly 61,000 cases of enforced disappearance. Behind the number of lives taken, which shocks our conscience, there is a reality: the practice of enforced disappearance persists, sometimes systematically, in every region of the world. They are faces – and I understood, listening to you just now, how important it is to have all these photos to remind us of all these disappeared persons, who are of course with us this morning.

Between May 2023 and May 2024, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances clarified 199 cases. This is an encouraging result, a relief for the relatives of the victims concerned, and a hope for others. Enforced disappearances are a serious and intolerable violation of human rights, and can constitute a crime against humanity – a crime at last named, under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Victims are deprived of their right to life, dignity and freedom. Their loved ones suffer the consequences for years to come.

Such acts have no place in a world of peace and security, which aspires to justice, reconciliation and respect for human rights. The fight against enforced disappearances is a fight for the inalienable right of every person to exist, to be recognized and protected.

Argentina, France, Morocco and Samoa stand alongside CEDI in joining forces to put an end to this inhuman and degrading practice. This Congress marks an important step in renewing and strengthening the commitment of all stakeholders in a spirit of responsibility and high standards. On behalf of the victims and their families, I thank you.

Switzerland

H.E. Mr. Julien Thöni, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva



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Original version (French)

Ce Congrès est une étape importante pour faire avancer la lutte contre les disparitions forcées, et nous sommes fiers d'avoir contribué à son organisation, d'autant plus en cette année où la Suisse siège à nouveau au Conseil des droits de l'homme des Nations Unies.

Les disparitions forcées ne concernent pas seulement de graves violations des droits humains. Elles touchent au fondement-même de notre vivre-ensemble. Chaque disparition est une famille brisée, une communauté dévastée, une société marquée par l'angoisse et l'incertitude.

Face à ce défi global, la Suisse s'engage sur plusieurs fronts.

Premièrement, par une collaboration internationale effective, pour renforcer la prévention, la recherche et la répression contre ce crime. La Suisse collabore avec d'autres États, des organisations humanitaires et des sociétés de familles. Il y a trois ans, la Suisse, en partenariat avec le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, a créé l'Alliance mondiale pour les disparus. Désormais, l'Alliance compte 13 États membres à travers le monde. Ensemble, nous nous efforçons de renforcer l'engagement diplomatique collectif, afin de prévenir les disparitions, d'élucider le sort des personnes disparues et de répondre aux besoins des familles.

Deuxièmement, la Suisse s'engage en reconnaissant le lien entre la promotion de la paix et la problématique des disparitions. Nous accordons une attention particulière à la problématique des personnes disparues et du déplacement forcé dans des situations de conflit, mais aussi dans le cadre du rétablissement de la paix. Une approche transnationale est nécessaire pour élucider ces graves violations des droits humains, garantir que les responsables soient traduits en justice et prévenir la répétition de tels actes. Intégrées dans des processus de médiation et de promotion de la paix, les mesures de justice transitionnelle pour garantir les droits des victimes et de leurs familles à la vérité, à la justice, à la réparation et à la non-répétition, constituent un pilier indispensable pour instaurer une paix durable.

La question des personnes disparues, qui inclut les disparitions forcées, demeure donc une priorité centrale pour notre engagement tant sur le plan multilatéral que dans différents contextes géographiques touchés par ces problématiques. Afin de renforcer la prévention et de promouvoir la mise en œuvre effective des droits des victimes et de leurs familles, la Suisse mise troisièmement sur la coopération directe avec les autorités et les organisations sur le terrain. Depuis 2021, la Suisse soutient un projet avec l'Université de Lausanne pour renforcer les capacités en matière d'enquête sur les cas de disparitions forcées au Mexique. Dans ce cadre, cette université suisse met à disposition son expertise dans le domaine forensique pour la formation d'experts engagés dans la recherche de personnes disparues. En Colombie, la Suisse appuie depuis 2017 les trois institutions du système de traitement du passé créées par l'accord de paix de 2016 : la Justice spéciale pour la paix, la Commission de la vérité et l'Unité de recherche des personnes disparues. Dans ce contexte, nous avons soutenu un congrès international visant à tirer parti d'expériences dans l'utilisation des nouvelles technologies pour la recherche de personnes disparues. Au Sri Lanka, nous menons un projet dans le but de renforcer les réseaux et les compétences des familles de disparus, afin de permettre aux victimes de faire entendre leur voix dans les processus de réconciliation et de traitement du passé. En outre, la Suisse est engagée sur la question de la préservation des archives et du traitement du passé lorsque les violations graves des droits humains ou du droit humanitaire



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international ont été commises. En ce sens, nous soutenons financièrement et politiquement, depuis sa création en 2020, la Commission nationale libanaise pour les personnes disparues au Liban.

Enfin, la Suisse continuera de se mettre à disposition pour la tenue de pourparlers ou initiatives de paix, notamment en lien avec la thématique des personnes disparues. La libération récente de nombreux détenus en Syrie a confirmé l'ampleur des atrocités commises dans les prisons de l'ancien gouvernement syrien. La Suisse soutient de longue date la volonté de la société civile syrienne de mettre en place un mécanisme humanitaire de recherche des personnes disparues en Syrie. Un tel mécanisme existe aujourd'hui, sous la forme de l'Institution indépendante sur les personnes disparues en Syrie (IIMP), qui est désormais bien placée pour faire la lumière sur le sort des dizaines de milliers de personnes disparues dans tout le pays ; en coopération directe avec les associations des familles de victimes et d'autres acteurs et actrices humanitaires.

Il y a presque quinze ans, la Convention pour la protection de toutes les personnes contre la disparition forcée est entrée en vigueur ; aujourd'hui elle compte 77 États parties. La Convention a permis des avancées majeures, en établissant un cadre juridique clair pour prévenir les disparitions forcées. C'est dans cet esprit que la Suisse a ratifié la Convention, érigé le crime de disparition forcée en infraction pénale nationale et institué un réseau de recherche. Cependant, la Convention fait face à des défis importants, notamment en matière de ratification et de mise en œuvre effective. Il est donc essentiel de renforcer les actions communes afin de veiller à son application concrète. La coopération internationale constitue un levier clé pour atteindre les objectifs fondamentaux de cet instrument : protéger les droits des victimes et prévenir les graves violations des droits de l'Homme.

Dans ce contexte, la Suisse réaffirme son engagement à poursuivre sa collaboration avec les mécanismes de l'ONU sur les disparitions forcées d'une part, et son action concrète sur le terrain d'autre part. Nous sommes convaincus que ce premier Congrès mondial constitue une opportunité précieuse de chercher ensemble les solutions aux multiples défis soulevés par la thématique.

English translation

This Congress is an important step forward in the fight against enforced disappearances, and we are delighted to have contributed to its organization, all the more so in a year when Switzerland is once again a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Enforced disappearances are not just serious human rights violations. They go to the very heart of how we live together. Each disappearance represents a broken family, a devastated community, and a society marked by anguish and uncertainty.

In the face of this global challenge, Switzerland is committed on several fronts.

Firstly, through effective international collaboration, to strengthen prevention, research and repression of this crime. Switzerland collaborates with other States, humanitarian



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organizations and family associations. Three years ago, Switzerland, in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross, created the Global Alliance for the Missing. Today, the Alliance has 13 Member States worldwide. Together, we are striving to strengthen our collective diplomatic commitment to preventing disappearances, clarifying the fate of missing persons and meeting the needs of their families.

Secondly, Switzerland's commitment recognizes the link between peacebuilding and the issue of disappearances. We pay particular attention to the issue of missing persons and forced displacement in conflict situations, but also in the context of peacebuilding. A transnational approach is needed to elucidate these serious human rights violations, ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, and prevent the recurrence of such acts. Integrated into mediation and peace-building processes, transitional justice measures to guarantee the rights of victims and their families to truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition are an indispensable pillar in building lasting peace.

The issue of missing persons, including enforced disappearances, therefore remains a central priority for our commitment, both multilaterally and in the various geographical contexts affected by these problems. In order to strengthen prevention and promote the effective implementation of the rights of victims and their families, Switzerland relies thirdly on direct cooperation with authorities and organizations on the ground. Since 2021, Switzerland has been supporting a project with the University of Lausanne to build capacity for investigating cases of enforced disappearance in Mexico. As part of this, this Swiss university is making its forensic expertise available for the training of experts engaged in the search for missing persons. In Colombia, Switzerland has been supporting the three institutions of the system for dealing with the past created by the 2016 peace agreement since 2017: the Special Justice for Peace, the Truth Commission and the Unit for the Search for Missing Persons. In this context, we supported an international congress aimed at learning from experiences in the use of new technologies for the search for missing persons. In Sri Lanka, we are implementing a project to strengthen the networks and skills of families of the missing, so as to enable victims to make their voices heard in reconciliation processes and in dealing with the past. Switzerland is also committed to preserving archives and dealing with the past when serious violations of human rights or international humanitarian law have been committed. Since its creation in 2020, we have been providing financial and political support to the Lebanese National Commission for Missing Persons in Lebanon.

Finally, Switzerland will continue to make itself available for peace talks and initiatives, particularly in connection with the issue of missing persons. The recent release of numerous detainees in Syria has confirmed the scale of the atrocities committed in the prisons of the former Syrian government. Switzerland has long supported the Syrian civil society's desire to set up a humanitarian search mechanism for missing persons in Syria. Such a mechanism exists today, in the form of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP), which is now well placed to shed light on the fate of tens of thousands of missing persons throughout the country, in direct cooperation with associations of victims' families and other humanitarian actors.

Almost fifteen years ago, the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance came into force; today it has 77 States parties. The Convention has led to



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major advances, establishing a clear legal framework to prevent enforced disappearances. It was in this spirit that Switzerland ratified the Convention, made the crime of enforced disappearance a national criminal offence and set up a search network. However, the Convention faces major challenges, particularly in terms of ratification and effective implementation. It is therefore essential to strengthen joint action to ensure that it is applied in practice. International cooperation is a key lever for achieving the fundamental objectives of this instrument: protecting the rights of victims and preventing serious human rights violations.

In this context, Switzerland reaffirms its commitment to continuing its collaboration with the UN mechanisms on enforced disappearances on the one hand, and its concrete action in the field on the other. We are convinced that this first World Congress represents a valuable opportunity to work together to find solutions to the many challenges raised by this issue.

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT)

Mr. Jens Modvig, Chair of the Board of Trustees

For over 40 years, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture has supported civil society in providing social, psychological, medical, legal, humanitarian and other services to people subjected to torture and their families. In 2024, the Fund is awarding 187 annual grants, amounting to 8 million USD, to support more than 56,000 survivors of torture and their families in 91 countries.

The Fund responds with agility to emerging crisis by also disbursing emergency grants. On January 8, we launched a Special Call for Syria on January 8, to address the acute needs of victims of torture, including thousands of prisoners released after years in secret detention and relatives of over 100,000 people still forcibly disappeared.

Enforced disappearances and torture are intricately linked. People who “disappear” are often tortured. However, also the relatives of enforced disappeared persons may be considered primary victims of torture, due to the suffering and anguish resulting from the disappearance. Not knowing what has happened to a disappeared relative places an intolerable burden on those left behind.

In politically repressive contexts, where there is inducement to consider the missing person dead, and where perpetrators remain unpunished, local NGOs and initiatives by relatives of disappeared persons become the main source of social, psychological and moral support. Absence of legal and government responses increases the necessity for activism, such as showing of photographs in public, and giving testimony and narratives about the disappeared.

The history of the Voluntary Fund goes back to support for victims of torture and enforced disappearances in South America over four decades ago. Still, in 2024, 25% of the organizations funded are providing support to victims of enforced disappearance, including relatives. I would like to thank those states that provide voluntary contributions to the Fund and invite those that do not yet contribute, to do so.

In conclusion, the UNVFVT is a main supporter of victims of torture and – as is hopefully clear now – of victims of enforced disappearances.



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International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP)

Ms. Kathryne Bomberger, Director-General

The numbers of missing persons are on the rise. According to the Norwegian Peace and Research Institute, we are experiencing the highest number of conflicts since 1946. Conflicts are major drivers of persons going missing. Also, the consequences of global warming are causing higher and higher numbers of persons to go missing. This has also caused a higher number of missing migrants. Europe today has the highest number of missing migrants in the world, according to the International Organization for Migration. There are 70,000 missing and dead migrants in Europe today, and nobody talks about it.

Given that the numbers of missing persons are on the rise, the Convention is more important than ever. The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance is a seminal document; however, it should go farther. It should not only consider the issue of persons that were forcibly disappeared, but all missing persons; because sometimes you don't know what the circumstances were under which persons can go missing and persons go missing for many reasons (for example war, human rights abuses, man-made and natural disasters, migration and other causes).

Witness Syria today. The numbers are up to 200,000 missing persons, and finally there is an opportunity to do something about it. However, they are not only missing as a consequence of the crimes committed by the Assad regime, but they are also missing as a consequence of the earthquake, they are also missing from migration because the misery of what happened in Syria did not end at the border with Syria – it extended into Europe and beyond. So, finding a missing person in the context of Syria will be hugely complicated not only for political reasons, and it will involve a number of States. As the Convention very clearly outlines, finding missing persons and investigating their disappearances is a State responsibility; and all States now are affected by the Syrian conflict because of the many, many Syrians who go missing. This is an issue that affects every single country in the world. There is not one country in the world that does not have a missing persons' problem, for the reasons outlined earlier.

The majority of missing persons are men, which means women and children are left behind to search for their missing loved ones and secure rights to justice. This fact has changed the missing persons process. Women have taken the lead in the last 30 years, and this is what has changed the issue. This issue had been a silent one for many years and it is really because of women taking a leadership position in this issue that it is finally on the world stage. We must remember that women leaders and families of the missing should be central to this process.

The ICMP is an independent, treaty-based international organization, with the mandate to secure the cooperation of governments and others to locate missing persons regardless of the circumstances under which they went missing. This cooperation is one that I want to highlight today and which is very important here at this World Congress: we must cooperate, whether it is States, whether it is international organizations, whether it is civil society organizations and families of the missing; because addressing this tragedy will take all our efforts.



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This is a difficult, highly politicized issue. But it is one that, if it is tackled properly, is an investment in peace, and justice, and accountability, and security.

International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)

Mr. Santiago Canton, Secretary General

I am standing before you as the Secretary General of International Commission of Jurists, an international organization that played a critical role in the past in promoting and advancing the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. I am also standing here as a former Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an institution that also played a critical role, together with the Inter-American Court on Human Rights. I come from a region, Latin America, and a country, Argentina, where the issue of enforced disappearances changed societies and our lives forever.

The first entry into an old book in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, back in 1974, was a case against Chile was referenced as “*personas desaparecidas*”, “missing people”. Between brackets, they added “persons whose whereabouts is unknown”, as a way to explain what they were talking about. That was the first entry, at least to my knowledge, in the Inter-American system, of the word “disappearance” with a legal meaning. Then came the Velasquez-Rodriguez case against Honduras in 1988, which was a landmark decision that really established a very good jurisprudence for Latin America, but also for the rest of the world as well. There were three important cases in 1992 about amnesty laws in relationship with enforced disappearances. Then came the Inter-American Convention, and many different things done by the Inter-American system to fight against enforced disappearances. So, the advances have been extraordinary in the Inter-American system from the institutional and legal perspective.

However, after more than 50 years, the announcement of over 100,000 disappeared persons in Mexico, and of many others in other countries in the region, last year, really underscores the difficulty, severity and gravity of this problem.

The question in front of us today and tomorrow is: what is the best way to advance this issue? There is no magical or easy answer to it. This is why this meeting is impressive and what it is all about. Based on my experience, the lack of political will is the main challenge we have. Civil society is critical, the role of victims is critical, but the States have to have a policy and political will to look for the disappeared and to fight against impunity.

If you can bring together, particularly at this time, all these people from civil society, from governments, from the victims, from multilateral institutions, to try to find a solution, that is the way to do it. I really hope that, in the next two days, we are going to start to find a solution. We may not find it today, but if we continue coming all of us together, I know we will be able to find a solution.



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Paris Bar

Mr. Charles Ohlgusser, Representative

Original version (French)

Les disparitions forcées brisent des vies, détruisent des familles, et minent les fondements même de nos sociétés. Pourtant, malgré l'adoption en 2006 de la Convention pour la protection de toutes les personnes contre la disparition forcée, sa transposition dans les droits internes reste incomplète dans de nombreux États et le manque de formation des magistrats et des avocats entrave souvent son application effective. Au-delà des défis juridiques, il y a aussi des menaces concrètes qui pèsent sur ceux qui défendent ces dossiers : les avocats qui s'engagent dans la défense des victimes de disparition forcée affrontent des risques considérables, des intimidations, des violences, voire l'exil. Ces attaques, qui sont loin d'être anecdotiques, traduisent une tentative inacceptable de réduire au silence ceux qui se battent pour la justice. Face à cette réalité, le Barreau de Paris a mis en place des initiatives concrètes, comme le programme « Répit », pour les avocats menacés – illustrant ainsi notre solidarité envers nos confrères et consœurs en danger.

Mais ces engagements dépassent la simple assistance, car le Barreau de Paris entend militer pour le renforcement de la compétence universelle, un principe essentiel permettant de juger les responsables des crimes les plus graves, quelle que soit leur localisation. Toutefois ce principe est encore trop souvent freiné par des considérations politiques ou un manque de ressources.

Aujourd'hui, je vous inviterai à agir collectivement sur trois axes prioritaires :

- Le renforcement de la coopération internationale, pour garantir le respect des textes internationaux et leur application effective dans le droit interne ;
- La formation et la sensibilisation des magistrats et avocats ;
- La protection des victimes ainsi que de tous ceux qui travaillent sur les cas de disparitions forcées ; en soutenant les initiatives et les programmes de protection, et en adoptant les instruments contraignants, comme la future Convention du Conseil de l'Europe sur la protection de la profession d'avocat.

English translation

Enforced disappearances shatter lives, destroy families, and undermine the very foundations of our societies. Yet, despite the adoption in 2006 of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, its transposition into domestic law remains incomplete in many States, and the lack of training of judges and lawyers often hinders its effective application. Beyond the legal challenges, there are also concrete threats to those who defend these cases: the lawyers who engage in the defense of enforced disappearances victims face considerable risks, intimidation, violence and even exile. These attacks, which are far from anecdotal, reflect an unacceptable attempt to silence those who fight for justice. Faced with this reality, the Paris Bar has put in place concrete initiatives for threatened lawyers – illustrating our solidarity with our colleagues in danger.

But these commitments go beyond mere assistance, as the Paris Bar intends to campaign for the strengthening of universal jurisdiction – an essential principle enabling those responsible



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for the most serious crimes to be tried, wherever they are located. However, this principle is still too often hampered by political considerations or a lack of resources.

Today, I would like to invite you to take collective action in three priority areas:

- The strengthening of international cooperation, to ensure compliance with international texts and their effective application in domestic law;
- The training and awareness-raising of judges and lawyers;
- The protection of victims and all those who work on cases of enforced disappearance; by supporting protection initiatives and programs, and by adopting binding instruments, such as the Council of Europe's future Convention on the Protection of the Legal Profession.

CCFD-Terre Solidaire

Ms. Charlotte de Poncins, International Partnerships Director

Original version (French)

Le CCFD-Terre Solidaire agit pour lutter contre toutes les formes d'impunité et d'oppression à travers le monde. Nous soutenons des acteurs et actrices des sociétés civiles. À leurs côtés, nous souhaitons défendre la dignité de chaque personne humaine en luttant contre toutes les formes de domination, d'exclusion, d'individualisme, de violences systémiques ; en ayant à cœur de promouvoir et de développer une culture de paix, de rendre justice et d'agir contre les crimes et notamment ceux qui privent de leur dignité les victimes, comme les victimes de disparition forcée, leurs familles et leurs communautés.

C'est dans le cadre de cette mission que nous avons souhaité soutenir l'organisation de ce Congrès, ainsi que la participation de plusieurs actrices et acteurs, de familles et de proches de victimes de disparition forcée. En effet, alors que les sociétés civiles sont de plus en plus contraintes et criminalisées, et ce dans l'ensemble des régions, elles portent la voix des premières et premières concernés.

Le CCFD-Terre Solidaire se fait ainsi l'écho de la voix de ses partenaires d'Asie, d'Afrique, d'Europe et du Moyen-Orient, d'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes. Il est essentiel et urgent de les écouter, de leur donner les moyens et le pouvoir d'agir pour mener des actions de justice, de devoir de vérité, de réparation, de prévention et pour lutter contre ces impunités.

Nous souhaitons avec elles, avec eux, avec vous tous ici, interpeller les autorités et les décideurs pour prendre des mesures fortes et responsables contre la criminalisation des défenseurs des droits, et notamment ceux qui agissent contre les disparitions forcées.

C'est pourquoi nous saluons qu'ils soient aujourd'hui au centre des échanges que nous allons avoir. Nous saluons leur courage et leur persévérance et nous souhaitons qu'ensemble nous puissions nous engager pour éradiquer ces disparitions forcées.



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English translation

CCFD-Terre Solidaire works to combat all forms of impunity and oppression throughout the world. We support civil society actors. Alongside them, we aim to defend the dignity of every human being by fighting against all forms of domination, exclusion, individualism and systemic violence, and by promoting and developing a culture of peace, justice and action against crimes, particularly those that deprive victims of their dignity, such as victims of enforced disappearance, their families and their communities.

It is within the framework of this mission that we wished to support the organization of this Congress, as well as the participation of several actors, families and loved ones of victims of enforced disappearance. At a time when civil society is increasingly constrained and criminalized in all regions, civil society is the voice of those most affected.

CCFD-Terre Solidaire thus echoes the voices of its partners in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. It is essential and urgent to listen to them, to give them the means and the power to act, to carry out actions for justice, truth, reparation and prevention, and to fight against impunity.

Together with them, and with all of you here, we wish to call on the authorities and decision-makers to take strong, responsible measures against the criminalization of human rights defenders, and in particular those who take action against enforced disappearances.

This is why we welcome the fact that they are at the heart of our discussions today. We salute their courage and perseverance, and we hope that together we can commit ourselves to eradicating these enforced disappearances.

International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)

Mr. Fernando Travesi, Executive Director

Through our work in countries like Lebanon, Syria, Colombia, The Gambia, Libya, Yemen, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and many others and with the commitment to work in any place where the need arise, ICTJ will continue fighting against the impunity of the perpetrators of this heinous crime and working side by side with victims and families and; among many others commitments, concretely, ICTJ pledges to:

- Strengthen the capacities of families and organizations who support them to advocate for effective search and investigation processes;
- Advocate for specific socio-economic and psychosocial support that consider the specificity of enforced disappearances-related human rights violations and their disproportionate impact on women, children, and other vulnerable groups;
- Through the provision of comparative experiences and lessons learned, build the capacities of officials in search and investigation processes on how to take a victim-centered approach;
- Continue using artistic initiatives to raise awareness on enforced disappearances, the violation's impact on families, and their search for justice;



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- Continue advocating for the establishment of reparations programmes for victims and their families, including fair and adequate compensation, restitutions, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.

Amnesty International

Ms. Agnès Callamard, Secretary General

I would like to begin a way, a bit, from enforced disappearance; and I would like to replace the World Congress in 2025. We are meeting today at a time when the dangerous trends of the last decades are amplified, strengthened, and multiplied. We are meeting today as we are confronting a new era of great instability and insecurity, with many powerful actors seeking to annihilate international law, to deny international human rights standards, to deny the existence of a genocide being broadcasted on a daily basis and to render United Nations agencies and multilateral institutions obsolete. This is when and where we are meeting, and we cannot run away from this reality. Neither can we run away from the fact that enforced disappearances and missing people have never been so high and will continue to be high; because authoritarian practices are multiplying the world over and enforced disappearances is part and parcel of the way authoritarians behave, rule and instill fear.

We are here for the past and the present, but we must be here too for the future. We must be here thinking of what we have learned over the last two decades, but also of what we must build for 2048, for the generations to come. International solidarity, in an era where powerful actors are trying to annihilate all the learnings of the last 40, 50, 60 years, is going to be key. We are here today to remind all those actors that we will rise to the challenge, that we will be here to defend those who have disappeared and who are not and cannot be here today.

I would also like to demand of all others, that by understanding the reality, by understanding that some actors want to destroy what was put in place in 1948, that does not mean that we must sacralize what was put in place in 1948. We must be prepared to challenge ourselves. This must be a turning point, we are not just here to remind us of what was done in the past, to remember the good standards and practices; we must be prepared to look and evaluate them and, if there are not fit for purpose, let us imagine new ones, let us create new standards where and when they are required. Let us not give the space of recreating the world to those who have the intention to do so on the basis of notions of superiority and destruction.

So thank you very much, let us make that meeting a turning point for enforced disappearances and let us come together because the challenges are huge.

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Ms. Alice Mogwe, President

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has been deeply committed to the fight against enforced disappearances, for decades. As a member of civil society, we were privileged to be amongst those who played a key role in the process leading up to the adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced



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Disappearance, a historic milestone in the global effort to end this abhorrent practice. Today, while this Convention stands as a powerful legal tool, in many places around the world it, nevertheless, seems to have little deterrent effect.

Having worked closely with our FIDH members and colleagues from Chile, Indonesia, Mexico, Palestine, Syria, and Ukraine, to name a few, in the very recent past, I am constantly reminded of the global and devastating impact of enforced disappearances on individual victims, including families of the disappeared, and entire societies where this practice is still prevalent. We are very grateful to welcome these and all other victims and their representatives at the Congress today.

The Convention provides a vital framework for ensuring that no state can turn a blind eye to this crime and that its perpetrators do not walk free. Yet, as we gather here today, only 76 states have ratified the Convention and many countries are yet to fully implement its provisions. The full implementation of the Convention is key to ensuring accountability for this heinous crime and victims' access to remedies. A most recent example of this commitment is the ratification of the Convention by Bangladesh on 29 August 2024. This, after over 1,600 cases of enforced disappearances under the former government.

At FIDH, supporting victims and survivors and ensuring that their rights are respected lie at the heart of our work. As a partner to the Congress, we are here today to reaffirm our commitment to placing victims and survivors at the center of our efforts to eradicate enforced disappearances. We will continue to do so by raising awareness, across regions, of this heinous crime and by advocating for their fundamental rights — the rights to truth, justice, participation, protection and reparation.

This Congress presents a unique opportunity to assess our collective achievements, to learn from one another, and to renew our resolve to fight against enforced disappearances and impunity. It is a key moment for us to strengthen our efforts to ensure not only that the Convention reaches universal ratification and implementation, but also that it can be rigorously implemented through strong domestic legal and institutional frameworks.

Let us leave this Congress with renewed energy and a shared commitment to bring an end to enforced disappearances through a concrete plan of action. Civil society, international institutions and national authorities – let us all work together to ensure that the voices of victims and survivors are heard, their rights are respected, and that the perpetrators of this crime are held accountable.

International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP)

Mr. Kristian Herbolzheimer, Director

The International Catalan Institute for Peace commits to:

- Raising awareness, including through artistic and cultural activities, on the issue of enforced disappearances and its gender-based dimension;
- Encouraging and giving visibility to the strategic contributions of women searchers to peacebuilding;
- Undertaking and promoting further research on the contribution of women searchers to peacebuilding;



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- Convening a second international meeting of women searchers from different regions of the world aimed at enhancing their efforts through exchange of experiences, capacity building, knowledge transfer and psychosocial attention.

Expected timeframe within which the pledges will be realized: 31/12/2026

Indicators used to measure progress: Number of activities organized; Number of academic, press or web articles published; Celebration of a 2nd meeting of women searchers in Barcelona and number of women searchers attending the meeting

Activities of the proposed Action Plan to which the pledges refer: 1.5 Enhance international cooperation to assist victims of enforced disappearances; 3.2 Adopt a gender-based perspective when addressing enforced disappearance; 3.4 Strengthen and support the creation of victim-led solidarity networks; 5.4 Address misconceptions (i.e., enforced disappearance is not a practice of the past or circumscribed to a particular region; States do not need to align their legislation with the Convention prior to ratification, etc.); 5.14 To raise awareness in schools and universities, include in curricula the teaching and dissemination of, and research into, topics related to the disappearance of persons, from a multidisciplinary standpoint, that include an accurate account of violations that occurred; 5.17 Support artistic and cultural initiatives to inspire action

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Mr. Antoine Bernard, Director of Advocacy and Assistance

Original version (French)

Reporters sans frontières se joint à l'appel lancé aujourd'hui pour la ratification universelle de la Convention internationale pour la protection de toutes les personnes contre la disparition forcée. En participant à ce 1^{er} Congrès, RSF est fier de s'engager :

- Pour la ratification universelle de la Convention ;
- Pour enquêter et publier, le plus systématiquement possible, sur les cas de journalistes victimes de disparition forcée ;
- Pour agir, avec les justices nationales et internationales, pour la sanction des auteurs et la réparation des victimes.

English translation

Reporters Without Borders joins today's call for universal ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances. By participating in this first Congress, RSF is proud to commit itself :

- To the universal ratification of the Convention;
- To investigate and publish, as systematically as possible, the cases of journalists victims of enforced disappearance;
- To work with national and international justice systems to punish the perpetrators and compensate the victims.



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World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Ms. Carin Benninger-Budel, Deputy Secretary-General

The OMCT stands committed to continue its efforts to raise global awareness about the grave human rights violations of enforced disappearances and the inextricable link to torture by:

- Advocating for Universal Ratification: recognizing it as a vital tool to combat impunity for torture and disappearances.
- Strengthening national legal frameworks by work with governments, civil society, and international bodies to support the development and enforcement of national legislation aligned with the Convention's provisions.
- Empowering survivors and their families by prioritize the voices of survivors and victims and their families in shaping our advocacy and provide support for their pursuit of justice, truth, and reparations.

ACAT-France

Ms. Solange Moumé-Etia, Programs and Advocacy Director

Original version (French)

Notre mandat est clair : militer et agir pour l'abolition de la torture, l'abolition universelle de la peine de mort, et la protection du droit d'asile en France et en Europe. L'ACAT-France est également très impliquée dans le soutien, la protection et la défense des victimes.

Aujourd'hui, nous sommes réunis pour mettre en commun nos connaissances, nos travaux et les plaidoyers que nous avons menés en soutien aux victimes et aux familles de victimes d'une méthode de répression pratiquée dans de nombreux pays à travers le monde, qui constitue une série de violations du droit international relatif aux droits de l'Homme : les disparitions forcées. Ces disparitions ne sont pas de simples statistiques, mais des vies brisées, des familles dévastées et des communautés qui se trouvent dans l'impossibilité de faire leur deuil. Chaque nom, chaque visage, chaque histoire que nous portons ici est un rappel poignant de notre responsabilité collective. Comme l'a si bien dit Victor Hugo, « l'inviolabilité de la vie humaine est le droit des droits ». Ce droit est bafoué chaque jour dans le monde, et il est de notre devoir, à l'occasion de ce congrès, de le défendre avec ferveur.

Depuis 50 ans, nous sommes également un partenaire historique d'organisations de défense des droits humains, telles que les Mères et les Grands-mères de la Place de Mai en Argentine, qui luttent pour retrouver leurs enfants disparus pendant la dictature militaire. Nous interpellons régulièrement les gouvernements afin de connaître le sort et le lieu de détention des personnes disparues, comme nous l'avons fait récemment pour Mamadou Billo Bah et Oumar Sylla, deux défenseurs des droits humains disparus en Guinée.

Grâce à notre réseau de 4 500 militants et à nos 222 groupes locaux en France, nous intervenons dans une trentaine de pays. Nous collaborons étroitement avec des partenaires en Afrique subsaharienne, en Asie, en Afrique du Nord, au Moyen-Orient et dans les Amériques pour sensibiliser le public et interpellier les gouvernements sur leurs obligations en matière de droit international relatif aux droits de l'Homme. Nous faisons régulièrement campagne sur des centaines de cas de disparitions à travers le monde, grâce à nos appels



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urgents hebdomadaires, tout en exerçant une pression sur les gouvernements pour mettre fin à cette pratique cruelle.

Pour conclure, l'ACAT-France s'engage à continuer de se battre aux côtés des familles de disparus, à plaider pour des politiques qui garantissent leurs droits et à promouvoir la ratification universelle de la Convention internationale pour la protection de toutes les personnes contre les disparitions forcées. Nous avons la responsabilité de faire entendre la voix de ceux qui ont disparu et de bâtir un avenir où chacun peut vivre en sécurité et en dignité.

English translation

Our mandate is clear: to campaign and advocate for the abolition of torture, the universal abolition of the death penalty, and the protection of the right to asylum in France and Europe. ACAT-France is also deeply involved in supporting, protecting and defending victims.

Today, we have come together to pool our knowledge, our work and the advocacy we have carried out in support of the victims and families of victims of a method of repression practiced in many countries around the world, which constitutes a series of violations of international human rights law: enforced disappearances. These disappearances are not mere statistics, but shattered lives, devastated families and communities unable to mourn. Every name, every face, every story we carry here is a poignant reminder of our collective responsibility. As Victor Hugo so aptly put it, "the inviolability of human life is the right of rights". This right is violated every day throughout the world, and it is our duty, on the occasion of this Congress, to defend it with fervor.

For 50 years, we have also been a long-standing partner of human rights organizations such as the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, who are fighting to find their children who disappeared during the military dictatorship. We regularly call on governments to find out the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, as we did recently for Mamadou Billo Bah and Oumar Sylla, two human rights defenders who disappeared in Guinea.

Thanks to our network of 4,500 activists and our 222 local groups in France, we are active in some 30 countries. We work closely with partners in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, North Africa, the Middle East and the Americas to raise public awareness and challenge governments on their obligations under international human rights law. We regularly campaign on hundreds of cases of disappearance around the world, through our weekly urgent appeals, while exerting pressure on governments to put an end to this cruel practice.

In conclusion, ACAT-France pledges to continue fighting alongside the families of the disappeared, to advocate for policies that guarantee their rights, and to promote universal ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. We have a responsibility to make the voices of those who have disappeared heard, and to build a future where everyone can live in safety and dignity.

Geneva Human Rights Platform (GHRP)

Mr. Felix Kirchmeier, Executive Director



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Jointly with the Paris Human Rights Centre, we commit to facilitate the constitution of a network of experts to exchange on strategies and prospects on prosecuting enforced disappearances both as a crime against humanity and an autonomous crime at the international and domestic levels. To this end, the two academic institutions commit to organizing a first seminar of experts in 2025.