

17 February 2017

71st session of the General Assembly

**Opening Remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson,
Tenth anniversary of the adoption of the International Convention
for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance**

Ms. Chef de Cabinet,
Mr. Santiago Corcuera Cabezut, Chair of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this High-Level meeting of the General Assembly marking the 10th Anniversary of the adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Today is a milestone for the international community in its fight to rid the world of one of the most painful crimes against humanity – that of enforced disappearance.

The legacy of enforced disappearances is harrowing: victims being taken at work or off the streets in broad daylight, or abducted from the sanctity of their familial homes late at night.

The sudden loss of loved ones, the torment of institutional denial, the strain of the uncertainty, has been the cause of unbearable sorrow for so many. Today we reach out to embrace those who have suffered so much.

Today, is the day for the international community to not only honour the victims, but to acknowledge the unspeakable pain suffered by their families, and to pay tribute to their unrelenting determination and commitment in the fight for justice and recognition of the fate of their loved ones.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance was a landmark achievement resulting from a decades-long struggle by family members – in particular, the mothers of victims – to find truth, justice, and reparations for the loss of their loved ones.

It was also the result of the dedicated work of Member States, United Nations experts, and civil society representatives who championed the Convention's establishment, and who have supported adherence since it came into effect.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its adoption in December 2006, the Convention has filled an important judicial void in the international system, by providing a binding legal instrument that provides a multi-faceted approach to the fight against enforced disappearance.

The Convention sets out the breadth of the violations caused by enforced disappearances, by recognizing such fundamental human rights as the right not to be subjected to enforced disappearance; the right not to be kept in secret detention; the right to know the truth; and the rights of those who have suffered direct harm because of an enforced disappearance to be considered victims themselves.

The Convention also seeks to prevent future victimization by extending protections to those in danger of enforced disappearance as a result of expulsion, refoulement, surrender, or extradition.

And it seeks to redress past wrongs, by strengthening accountability, through requiring States to investigate and prosecute enforced disappearances, including providing mechanisms for redress and reparations.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

While the catalyst to establishing the Convention was the horrendous events that took place in Latin America during the 1970's and 1980's, in many parts of our world today the scourge of enforced disappearance continues.

Accounts of these horrific crimes are detailed each year in the reports to the General Assembly of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, and the Working Group on Involuntary or Enforced Disappearances.

These reports underline the ongoing importance of the Convention and the work of the Committee and Working Group. They underline the centrality of promoting human rights, the pursuit of accountability, and the responsibility of the international community to recommit to doing all it can to prevent enforced disappearance.

As the international community's attention focuses on implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is important that we begin to see the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance as an important element in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

This applies particularly to SDG16 in promoting the rule of law, ensuring equal access to justice, ending impunity, protecting human rights, sustaining peace, and in achieving the central tenet of the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind. Faithful implementation of SDG 16 will create the conditions that will ensure no one will ever be subjected to enforced disappearance.

I commend the 56 States that have become parties to the Convention, and I encourage all States that have not yet done so, to consider signing, ratifying, and acceding to it.

I also call on Member States to lend their full support to the work of the two parallel organs, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

On this commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, we should all resolve to redouble our efforts to ensure that over the next decade the heinous crime of enforced disappearance is consigned to the annals of history.

I thank you.