



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Katherine Brucker
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 8, 2023

The United States stands in solidarity with the victims of enforced disappearances and with their families and friends. 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. This abhorrent practice is frequently perpetrated by law enforcement and other security bodies that have betrayed their fundamental duty to serve and to protect. Unfortunately, in contradiction of international law, a number of participating States still employ enforced disappearance to stifle and punish dissent, political opposition, or other perceived slights against authorities, and even target for harassment and reprisal those who advocate for the disappeared.

Eyewitness testimonies indicate that in Ukraine, Russia's occupying forces and sham officials have unjustly detained and forcibly disappeared Ukrainian citizens. They target Ukraine's legitimate local authorities, law enforcement officials, civic activists, journalists, education staff, and religious leaders. As detailed in ODIHR's Third Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine, Russia's occupying authorities often withheld information of victims' whereabouts from their families. These families only learned about the fate of their relatives from other detainees held together with them.

In Kherson in May 2022, according to Human Rights Watch, Russia's armed forces detained social activist Iryna Horobtsova and forcibly transferred her to Russia-occupied Crimea, refusing to provide any information about her whereabouts or her fate. Iryna's family only found out her location when a woman who had been her cellmate at a detention facility in Crimea contacted them. According to the Russian independent media outlet MediaZona and other media reports, Iryna is still languishing in a pre-trial detention center in Simferopol, with no access to a lawyer and no clarity about the charges brought against her.

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 in the territories of Ukraine that it occupies. Perpetrators will be held accountable for their crimes and other atrocities and abuses in Ukraine.

Russia continues the atrocious practice of forcibly disappearing individuals within its own borders as well. The problem is especially acute in Russia's Republic of Chechnya, where disappearances and other 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. Ever since, the Russian Federation has failed to address the situation in Chechnya, where impunity is the norm. Law enforcement bodies regularly detain individuals on spurious charges and face no accountability for disappearing them. One especially egregious case is that of a young man named Rizvan Dadayev, whom police detained in Grozny, Chechnya, in July 2022. According to human rights defenders, police forced Rizvan to confess his sexual orientation in a video clip they later made public and to provide names of other LGBTQI+ men he knew, two of whom have also disappeared. His whereabouts remain unknown.

In keeping with the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances on August 30, the United States once again urges participating States to honor their international law obligations and OSCE commitments to human rights and fundamental freedoms by putting an end to this appalling practice. We call on participating States to release victims immediately and unconditionally, and to return to their loved ones the remains of those who have tragically lost their lives.

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