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United Nations: A new step towards justice

Relatives of the "disappeared" have renewed hope that other families will not have to endure their suffering, Amnesty International said as a UN working group is meeting in Geneva between 12 and 23 January to draft a new treaty on enforced disappearance, the UN term for "disappearances".

As currently discussed, the draft treaty would include measures for preventing enforced disappearance, bringing perpetrators to justice and affording reparation to victims. Also under discussion is the creation of an urgent international humanitarian procedure for locating the "disappeared".

According to the UN, 41,636 people remain "disappeared" around the world, but the true figure is certainly much higher, with new cases recorded in dozens of countries each year. *

In most cases, the victims were arrested or abducted by state agents, often tortured or killed, but governments deny holding them.

"An effective treaty would be a significant step to ending disappearances around the world" said Amnesty International.

Background information

The working group meeting in Geneva was created in 2001 by the UN Commission of Human Rights and entrusted with preparing a "draft legally binding normative instrument for the protection of all persons from enforced disappearance", for eventual adoption by the UN General Assembly.

The working group made good progress at its first formal meeting in January 2003 and at an informal session in September 2003. In the context of the meeting starting today Amnesty International is calling for the speedy adoption of a treaty giving strong protection against enforced disappearance.

For more information, please see:

Amnesty International feature on the day of the "disappeared":
<http://www.web.amnesty.org/mavp/av.nsf/pages/dofd>

UN Fact Sheet on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs6.htm>

* The figure is taken from the UN expert Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

Public Document

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