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Convention against Enforced Disappearance: Amnesty International calls for prompt signature, ratification and implementation

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To "disappear" is to vanish, to cease to be, to be lost. But the "disappeared" have not simply vanished. Someone, somewhere, knows what has happened to them. Someone is responsible. In the nearly seven decades since the crime of enforced disappearance was devised by Adolf Hitler in 1941, hundreds of thousands of people have been the victims of "disappearance" in almost half the countries in the world. Sadly, these horrendous crimes continue to be committed today in every region of the globe.

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by the UN General Assembly by consensus on 20 December 2006, represents the culmination of a long effort to address the continuing problem of enforced disappearance through international law. After many years of preparation, the actual drafting and adoption of this complex treaty in the record time of four years is a testimony to the dedication and commitment of many non-governmental organizations and governments.

The new Convention requires each state party, whenever a person suspected of carrying out enforced disappearances anywhere in the world is found in any territory under its jurisdiction, to submit the case to its competent authorities for the purposes of prosecution, unless the state extradites the suspect to another state or surrenders him or her to an international criminal court. It also obliges each state party to ensure in its legal system that the victims of enforced disappearance have the right to obtain reparations. The Convention requires states to institute stringent safeguards for the protection of persons deprived of their liberty, including an absolute ban on secret detention. It provides for the tracing of the whereabouts of the "disappeared" and addresses the problems faced by their children and families. It establishes an expert committee empowered to monitor the implementation of the Convention and to take action in individual cases.

In terms of potential effectiveness, the Convention against Enforced Disappearance is one of the most forceful human rights conventions ever adopted by the UN. Amnesty International calls on all states to ratify the Convention without delay and to enact effective implementing legislation in accordance with their international obligations, thereby joining together to put an end to the practice of enforced disappearance, one of the worst violations of human rights.

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