

MISSING PERSONS

SUBMISSION TO INFORM THE REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON MISSING PERSONS

MARCH 2026

Amnesty International submits this input in response to the call issued to inform the Report of the Secretary-General on Missing Persons pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/173.¹ Due to the limited word count available, it is not an exhaustive account of the organization's concerns but includes examples for the report.

MEASURES TAKEN TO CLARIFY THE FATE AND WHEREABOUTS OF MISSING PERSONS, INCLUDING THE LACK THEREOF

Amnesty International has been campaigning for the right to search for forcibly disappeared persons. In the report *Searching Without Fear: International Standards for Protecting Women Searchers in the Americas*², Amnesty International highlights the situation in countries across the Americas, a region experiencing a crisis of enforced disappearances. The organization has observed that the majority of people searching for their missing loved ones are women³, and that the risks associated with enforced disappearance extend to those who engage in the search. In the case of women, these risks must be addressed with particular attention to gender-based violence. In this context, Amnesty International has stressed that, according to international standards, states have an obligation to search for victims of enforced disappearance. They also have a duty to respect the right to search of family members, loved ones, and communities of those who have been forcibly disappeared. Accordingly, states must protect searchers, with special emphasis on women searchers and the risks associated with gender-based violence.

In **Colombia**, in the report *Transforming Pain into Rights: Risks, Threats, and Attacks on Women Searchers in Colombia*⁴, Amnesty International highlighted the advocacy efforts led by women searchers themselves, that resulted in the passage of Law 2364 of 2024, which recognizes and protects the work of women searching for victims of enforced disappearance and includes measures to guarantee their access to economic, social, and cultural rights. Despite acknowledging the progress represented by this law, Amnesty International and the Colombian women searchers' rights organization Fundación Nydia Erika Bautista warned in June 2025, a year after being passed by Congress, that several of the deadlines established for its implementation had expired.⁵ It was not until early 2026 that the National Government published a decree to implement it. Law 2364 of 2024 includes measures at the international level, as requesting the Colombian government to propose to the UN the recognition of an International Day of women searchers of victims of enforced disappearance.

In **Mexico**, the number of missing persons increased by 10.5% compared to the previous year. In December, the number of cases of missing and unaccounted persons rose to 133,500. Faced with the inadequate response from the authorities, relatives of the missing persons—mostly women organized in collectives—carried out their own search efforts and found hundreds of human remains, some of them burned, and clandestine graves. These searches were highly risky, and those who carried them out were subjected to threats, extortion, disappearance, and murder. Six searchers (four women and two men) were murdered during 2025. In April 2025, the UN

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2026/call-inputs-report-secretary-general-missing-persons>

² Amnesty International. *Searching without fear. International Standards for protecting women searchers in the Americas*. (Index number: AMR 01/8458/2024). 29 August 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/8458/2024/en/>

³ Amnesty International. *Disappearing again: Violence and impacts experienced by women searchers in Mexico*. 8 July 2025. (Index number: AMR 41/9374/2025). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr41/9374/2025/en/>

⁴ Amnesty International. *Transforming pain into rights. Risk, threats and attacks on women searchers in Colombia*. 3 December 2024. (Index number: AMR 23/8752/2024). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr23/8752/2024/en/>

⁵ Amnesty International. *Colombia: One year on, women searchers for victims of enforced disappearance are still waiting for the country to deliver for them*. 18 June 2025. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/colombia-one-year-on-women-searchers-for-victims-of-enforced-disappearance-are-still-waiting-for-the-country-to-deliver-for-them/>

Committee on Enforced Disappearances announced that it would activate for the first time the procedure under Article 34 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance with respect to the situation in Mexico.⁶

Israeli authorities continue to hold an unknown number of Palestinian residents of the occupied **Gaza Strip** in conditions that may amount to enforced disappearances. While it has been difficult to obtain comprehensive data, according to the Israeli human rights organization Hamoked, as of [2 October 2025](#),⁷ hundreds of Palestinians from Gaza have disappeared after being in Israeli military custody. This number doesn't include 1,249 Palestinians from Gaza who are held without charges or trial under the Unlawful Combatants' Law.

According to the Palestinian National Campaign for the Recovery of Bodies, Israeli authorities continue to [withhold the bodies of at least 776 Palestinians](#)⁸, include at least 96 Palestinians who died in Israeli custody and 77 children. Palestinians whose loved ones' bodies are being withheld by Israel – either in morgues or on so-called cemeteries of numbers which are closed military zones - are not informed of the whereabouts of the body of their relatives. They are not provided with any official death report, information about of their places of burial, and when this is known they are barred from accessing it. This number does not include Palestinians from Gaza, including those reported to have died in prison under torture and other ill-treatment or due to the denial of adequate medical treatment since October 2023. According to [Physician for Human Rights – Israel](#)⁹, at least 94 Palestinians have died in the Israeli detention centres between 7 October 2023 and 31 August 2025, as a result of these practices.

Amnesty International has documented the case of two Palestinian Journalists from the Gaza Strip - Nidal al-Waheidi and Haitham Abdelwahed – who went missing while covering the 7 October attacks and continues to [campaign](#) for the disclosure of their fate and whereabouts. Released detainees reported that they had seen in them in prisons at different points – claims that Amnesty International could not verify.

THE SITUATION OF MISSING CHILDREN;

In **Ecuador**, a lower court found 16 members of the Armed Forces guilty of the enforced disappearance of four Afro-Ecuadorian children --Steven Gerald Medina Lajones, Nehemías Saúl Arboleda Portocarrero, Josué Didier Arroyo Bustos, and Ismael Arroyo Bustos—, aged between 11 and 15.¹⁰ The children's case, known as “the four children of Las Malvinas,” became one of the most high-profile cases of enforced disappearances in the country's recent history and was condemned by both UN mechanisms and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights.¹¹ The children disappeared on 8 December 2024, after they were detained by members of the military during a security operation in Las Malvinas, a low-income neighbourhood in the port city of Guayaquil. On 25 December 2024, the children were found dead with signs of torture.¹²

In recent years, Ecuador's public security policy has become increasingly militarized, with soldiers regularly carrying out security operations, normally conducted by police forces, to tackle organized crime. Amnesty Internacional has found that the militarized security policy of current president Daniel Noboa, known as “Plan Fenix”, has facilitated the commission of human rights violations, including enforced disappearances.¹³ In its report “It was the military, I saw them,” the organization concluded that the Armed Forces had committed the enforced disappearance of 10 individuals during security operations carried out in 2024 in coastal region of Ecuador. The victims included six children (among them, “the four children of Malvinas”) and all belonged to marginalized and racialized communities

⁶ Amnesty International, “[Mexico: Disappearing again: Violence and impacts experienced by women searchers in Mexico - Amnesty International](#)” 8 July 2025, AMR 41/9374/2025.

⁷ <http://www.hamoked.org/document.php?dID=Updates2517>

⁸ <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/166785>

⁹ <https://www.phr.org.il/en/palestinian-deaths-behind-bars-eng/>

¹⁰ Fiscalía General del Estado, “Caso Malvinas: 16 militares son sentenciados por desaparición forzada”, BOLETÍN DE PRENSA FGE N° 1326-DC-2025, 22 December 2025. Available in: <https://www.fiscalia.gob.ec/caso-malvinas-16-militares-son-sentenciados-por-desaparicion-forzada/>

¹¹ See: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, “ACHR condemns the disappearance and subsequent murder of a child and three adolescents of African descent in Ecuador”, 22 January 2025 and UNHCHR and UNICEF, “Ecuador: Declaración de ONU Derechos Humanos y UNICEF”, 24 December 2024: <https://acnurdh.org/ecuador-declaracion-de-onu-derechos-humanos-y-unicef/>

¹² Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, “ACHR condemns the disappearance and subsequent murder of a child and three adolescents of African descent in Ecuador”, 22 January 2025

¹³ Amnesty International, “It was the military, I saw them: Enforced disappearances in Ecuador at the hands of the Armed Forces,” Index Number: AMR 28/0258/2025, 23 September 2025, pp. 2-3. Available in: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr28/0258/2025/en/>

in the country. Amnesty International has called the Ecuadorian government to ensure it adopts a comprehensive policy to prevent and investigate enforced disappearances, with a differentiated approach to consider the particular vulnerability faced by certain groups, such as children and adolescents.

Following the presidential election of July 28, 2024 in **Venezuela**, Amnesty International documented a sharp increase in enforced disappearances as part of what the organization describes as a widespread as well a systematic campaign of repression. In its statement *"He Felt He Was Dead": Torture Against Children for Political Reasons*, Amnesty International reported mass arbitrary detentions of protesters and bystanders, including over 200 children, some of which constituted possible enforced disappearances.

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS AND PROSECUTIONS IN CASES OF MISSING PERSONS;

In **Egypt**, security forces regularly subject suspected opponents and critics of the government to enforced disappearance in unofficial detention facilities for periods that range between a few days and to seven years. During this period of disappearance, detainees are at high risk of torture and other ill-treatment, including through beatings, electric shocks, suspension in contorted positions, and verbal abuse. Subsequently, security forces bring those subjected to enforced disappearance before prosecutors who routinely refuse to investigate their claims of enforced disappearance. According to Egyptian NGOs, hundreds of those arrested for political reasons on accusations of terrorism-related offences remain forcibly disappeared, as authorities refuse to provide information about their fate and whereabouts to their families.

In **Ecuador**, Amnesty International considers that the Prosecutor's Office faces serious obstacles to guarantee prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into possible enforced disappearances.¹⁴ According to information shared by that Office to the organization, there are 43 individuals who are the possible victims of enforced disappearance in the context of militarized security operations conducted during President Daniel Noboa's administration. Most cases are concentrated in the coastal region of Ecuador. Against this backdrop, Amnesty International has identified that authorities responsible for investigating and searching for disappeared persons in Ecuador are overwhelmed by the number of cases they have to deal with and by the lack of adequate resources at their disposal. Notably, until December 2025, the "Specialized unit for investigating the illegitimate use of force," which is tasked with investigating serious human rights violations by security forces, only had seven prosecutors for dealing with cases throughout the whole country and only one prosecutor dedicated to cases occurring in the provinces of the Ecuadorian coastal region. Thanks to local and international advocacy, as of January 2026, a new prosecutor joined the unit and is supporting investigations of possible enforced disappearances in the coastal region. In recent interviews during a country visit, the organization further identified that justice operators had experienced undue pressure and fear of reprisals in relation to their work for these cases.¹⁵

In addition to these issues, Amnesty International considers that the main obstacle to the progress of the cases in Ecuador is the lack of cooperation by the Armed Forces with the investigations, which it found to be a common pattern in all the cases analysed. The military authorities typically claimed that the information required for the investigation was "secret", "classified" or "confidential", and could therefore not be provided to the Prosecutor's Office.¹⁶

Most of these cases continue to be stagnant in the criminal justice system, with the exception of the case of "the four children of las Malvinas," as previously mentioned. On 22 December 2025, the Guayas Criminal Court issued a sentence against the 16 members of the Armed Forces. One colonel, against whom charges had also been brought, was found not guilty. The suspects had been held in pre-trial detention for most of 2025. The hearings experienced several delays because the defence of the military was intentionally unprepared or requested additional time, according to the legal representatives of the victims.

¹⁴ Amnesty International, "It was the military, I saw them: Enforced disappearances in Ecuador at the hands of the Armed Forces," Index Number: AMR 28/0258/2025, 23 September 2025, pp. 20-22. Available in: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr28/0258/2025/en/>

¹⁵ Amnesty International, "Ecuador: Submission to the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances: 30th period of sessions, 9-27 March 2026, Additional information", 6 February 2026, pp 5-6. Available in: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr28/0609/2026/en/>

¹⁶ Amnesty International, "It was the military, I saw them: Enforced disappearances in Ecuador at the hands of the Armed Forces," Index Number: AMR 28/0258/2025, 23 September 2025, pp. 20-22. Available in: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr28/0258/2025/en/>

Amnesty International's report *Detentions Without a Trace* documents a systematic failure of **Venezuela's** judicial system to provide effective recourse in cases of enforced disappearance.¹⁷ Of the 15 cases investigated, families attempted to file habeas corpus appeals in 12; yet not a single one proved effective. Some were flatly rejected without legal justification, others accepted but left without any response for months. Families described being turned away by court staff, given evasive answers, or told to come back another day, only to find nothing had moved. In the case of Jorgen Guanares, the only person among the 15 who remained disappeared as of February 2026, courts told his family that an appeal could not be admitted without knowing who had taken him: an impossible condition by definition in cases of enforced disappearance. Underlying these individual failures is what the report calls a "judicial façade" — a system designed to give the appearance of legality while shielding state violence from accountability, through secret hearings, ineffective public defenders, and courts stripped of any real independence.

Sri Lanka has thus far only managed to achieve successful prosecutions in two instances of disappearances – not as enforced disappearances, but for offences related to abduction. Both these cases pre-date the end of the war. The first success is with the 1989 Embilipitiya school boys' case and the second is the 1996 Krishanthy Kumaraswamy case. Post-war, only a handful of emblematic cases of enforced disappearances have made it to trial stage. As far as Amnesty is aware, none of the cases are being prosecuted for enforced disappearances, but for crimes such as abduction and murder – offences that do not acknowledge a core element of the crime, i.e. involvement of the state, for example in the Prageeth Eknaligoda case and the 'Navy 11' case.¹⁸

In many cases where state actors are implicated in enforced disappearances, prosecutions have not been forthcoming. This is because the Attorney General's department holds a dual and conflicting mandate: legal advisor and defendant of the state and chief prosecutor. In practice, this dual mandate becomes problematic when state officials or security forces are accused of serious crimes committed with the authorization, support or acquiescence of state authorities. In such cases, the roles tend to blur, undermining prosecutorial independence. The prosecution of enforced disappearances by the Attorney General's department would be challenging for this very reason.

The Court of Appeal's writ jurisdiction of habeas corpus under Article 141 of the Constitution has not in practice proven to be an institutional remedy available for victims of enforced disappearances. Many habeas corpus cases were dismissed due to petitioners' absence, often caused by poverty or fear. Respondents, usually state agents, avoided court by citing service duties. Some petitioners, or their lawyers disappeared or faced threats, making justice inaccessible.¹⁹

THE FORENSIC RECOVERY AND IDENTIFICATION OF REMAINS OF MISSING PERSONS;

In **Sri Lanka**, a report released in 2023 drew attention to the fate of mass graves or clandestine graves discovered around the country.²⁰ It highlighted the flawed exhumation process, lack of involvement of families in the process, the very few exhumations that have led to identification of victims, or any clarification of the circumstances surrounding their deaths, let alone prosecutions and convictions. Mass graves were discovered in 2023 in Kokkuthoduvai in the Mullaithivu district, in Muhamalai in the Kilinochchi district in April 2024, and near Chemmani in the Jaffna district in February 2025. In Kokkuthoduvai, the year-long excavation process unearthed 52 skeletons.²¹ Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) reportedly confirmed that bodies of individuals whose remains were excavated from the Kokkuthoduvai mass grave were buried "in a hurry" without any religious rites, sometime

¹⁷ Amnesty International. *Venezuela: Detentions without a trace: The crime of enforced disappearance in Venezuela*, 15 July 2025. (Index number: AMR 53/0083/2025). www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr53/0083/2025/en/

¹⁸ Amnesty International, Sri Lanka: Submission to the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, 21 July 2025, pages 9-10, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa37/0125/2025/en/>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mass graves and failed exhumations in Sri Lanka, JDS, FOD, CHR, ITJP, June 2023, https://itjpsl.com/assets/ITJP_MassGraves_report_v5.1.pdf

²¹ Kokkuthoduvai mass grave body parts identification process on, Ceylon News, 14 August 2024, <https://english.ceylonnews.lk/kokkuthoduvai-mass-grave-body-parts-identification-process-on/>

between 1994 and 1996.²² Amnesty raised concerns²³ around the Chemmani mass grave that is being exhumed at the time of submission. Reports from journalists covering the exhumation indicate that 65 skeletons have been exhumed and that the Ministry of Justice has released the necessary funds required for the process.²⁴ In an interim report submitted to the Jaffna Magistrate's Court, Archaeologist Professor Raj Somadeva reportedly highlighted that the recovered skeletal remains do not resemble those from customary burials.²⁵ Sri Lanka has multiple mass graves in the South of the country²⁶ where there were two armed insurrections during the 1970s and 1980s. One of the largest discovered so far is the 2018 Mannar mass grave which saw the exhumation of more than 300 skeletons.²⁷

ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTION.

Following the invocation of the Alien Enemies Act, the Trump administration illegally expelled 252 Venezuelan migrants and asylum seekers and 36 Salvadoran nationals to **El Salvador's** Terrorism Confinement Centre (CECOT)²⁸ Families received no official information, and the individuals were removed from government tracking systems, making it impossible for their family members or lawyers to locate them. Neither **US** nor Salvadoran authorities have provided any official information confirming the identities of the individuals expelled. After four months, the men were returned to Venezuela. At least three of the expelled Salvadorans were later reported missing, with authorities failing to clarify their fate or whereabouts.²⁹ In October, the IACHR granted precautionary measures in favour of a Salvadoran man deported from the USA and allegedly detained in CECOT, urging the State to immediately determine his fate and whereabouts.³⁰ Amnesty International considers that these individuals, whose fate was then unknown, were subjected to enforced disappearance.³¹

Amnesty International has documented cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of migrants and people seeking asylum at the Everglades Detention Facility ("Alligator Alcatraz"). The facility operates outside federal oversight, without the public tracking systems used in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities. Amnesty International considers that the absence of registration or tracking mechanisms for those detained at "Alligator Alcatraz" facilities incommunicado detention and constitutes enforced disappearances when the whereabouts of a person being detained there is denied to their family, and they are not allowed to contact their lawyer.³²

²² Sri Lankan government refuses to fund Kokkuthoduvai mass grave excavation, crippling investigation, Tamil Guardian, 5 April 2024, <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/sri-lankan-government-refuses-fund-kokkuthoduvai-mass-grave-excavation-crippling>

²³ Amnesty International South Asia Regional Office on X, 5 June 2025,

<https://x.com/amnestysasia/status/1930610604194050253?s=46&t=vPB8rPu2GneCugglnTTnKQ>

²⁴ See tweet by Kumanan, 10 July 2025, <https://x.com/kumanan93/status/1943247516557889671>

²⁵ See tweet by Kumanan, 15 July 2025, <https://x.com/kumanan93/status/1945175125990760808>

²⁶ Mass graves and failed exhumations in Sri Lanka, JDS, FOD, CHR, ITJP, June 2023, page 13,

https://itjpsl.com/assets/ITJP_MassGraves_report_v5.1.pdf

²⁷ Mass grave in Mannar in Northern Sri Lanka unearths 300 human skeletons, Ceylon Independent, 17 January 2019,

<https://www.independent.lk/mass-grave-mannar-northern-sri-lanka-unearths-300-human-skeletons/>

²⁸ Amnesty International, *Americas: Enforced disappearances in limbo: the human cost of repressive cooperation between the US and El Salvador* (AMR 01/9259/2025), 14 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/9259/2025/en/>, pp. 3-6.

²⁹ El País, "Deportados por Trump, desaparecidos en cárceles de Bukele", 28 september 2025: <https://elpais.com/us/migracion/2025-09-29/deportados-por-trump-desaparecidos-en-las-carceles-de-bukele.html>

³⁰ OAS, "IACHR grants precautionary measures in favor of Irvin Quintanilla in El Salvador, 3 October 2025". Available in:

https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/jsForm?File=/en/iachr/media_center/preleases/2025/200.asp

³¹ Amnesty International, *Americas: Enforced disappearances in limbo: the human cost of repressive cooperation between the US and El Salvador* (AMR 01/9259/2025), 14 April 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/9259/2025/en/>, pp. 3-6; Amnesty International, *Ring the Alarm Bells: Rising authoritarian practises and erosion of human rights in the United States* (AMR 51/0616/2026), 20 January 2026, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Ringing-the-Alarm-Bells.pdf>, pp. 23-24.

³² Amnesty International, *USA: Torture and enforced disappearances in the Sunshine State: Human Rights Violations at "Alligator Alcatraz" and Krome in Florida* (AMR 51/0511/2025), 4 December 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR51/0511/2025/en/>, pp. 39-40.