

VOICES OF VICTIMS: TESTIMONIES FROM VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

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November 2011 - Enforced disappearance is a dehumanising practice which has long-lasting and damaging consequences for both the disappeared person and his or her loved ones. It is also a crime under international law, prohibited by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the *International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance*, customary international law and other international law and standards. The following is a collection of testimonies from victims of enforced disappearance and their family members around the globe collected by Amnesty International.

Juan Almonte was an accountant at a human rights NGO in the Dominican Republic. He was abducted on 28 September 2009 in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, by four armed men. Witnesses identified the men as officers from the anti-kidnapping department of the National Police. In 2009 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights called on the authorities in the Dominican Republic to reveal the whereabouts of Almonte and guarantee his safety. To date, the Dominican authorities have done very little to investigate his whereabouts.

"[...] it is difficult to explain, only those who have gone through this know what our pain is, to wake up and to go to bed with so many unanswered questions, and to live in my country in total secrecy. Of course we are fighting against power, and they see us as if we are nothing.

"Our lives have been destroyed, we have no tomorrow, we just live in an uncertain past in total darkness [...]"

- Wife of Juan Almonte

The 10 year civil war between the government and Maoist forces in Nepal came to an end in 2006. The fate of 13,000 people who disappeared still remains unknown. Sanjeev Kumar Karna is one such victim. Kumar Karna and a group of friends were reportedly beaten and arrested by a group of 25-30 army and police personnel while on a picnic in Janakpur, Danusha District, Nepal on 8 October 2003. Five of these young people, including Sanjeev Kumar Karna, never returned. They are presumed to have been shot dead and buried.

"When a member of a family is disappeared, that family is completely destroyed."

- Rajeev Kumar Karna, brother

Since Pakistan became a key ally in the US-led "war on terror," hundreds of people accused of links to terrorist activity have been arbitrarily detained and subject to enforced disappearances. Recently the Pakistani government has convened two commissions of inquiry on this matter. However, there has been little progress in resolving many cases. The whereabouts and fates of hundreds, including Masood Janjua, Atiq-ur Rehman and Dr. Abid Sharif, remain unknown.

"We can never come to terms with this. If somebody dies you can come to terms [with their death]... but when my loved one is taken away forcefully you can never come to terms with it."

- Amina Janjua, wife of Masood Janjua

"Our life without him is bare and incomplete – I do not know how we continue to survive without him.

"Our family business was destroyed in our pursuit to find Atiq. We barely survive since we don't have an active bread winner. Atiq's father suffers from severe mental distress and we survive on the rent from our shop that we can no longer run on our own. We are in dire straits."

- Shams Un Nisa, mother of victim Atiq-ur Rehman

"I [have been on] anti-depressants for the past four years. My children are having nightmares. My second child Humzalla can't sleep alone. He likes to be with me or with his brother."

"My one son was born seven months after [Abid] went missing...he has never met his father, he just looks at his pictures."

- Zahida Sharif, wife of victim Dr. Abid Sharif

In April 2003, 22 year old Artur Akhmatkhanov was grabbed by masked armed men and bundled into an armored personnel carrier. Akhmatkhanov was a student from Grozny, capital of the Chechen Republic and human rights volunteer. Eyewitnesses at the time identified the armed men as members of the Russian Federal Forces (FSB). A year after Akhmatkhanov disappearance, the military prosecutor denied the involvement of the Russian military, stating that "[...] no citizens were detained" in the Chechen Republic. Akhmatkhanov's fate still remains unknown.

"Even today I think, maybe today, tomorrow, they will return my son to me [...] Every night he appears in my sleep and during the day I cry all the time [...] That is not a life anymore. For me everything came to a halt. I don't live; I just walk over the earth."

-Bilat Akhmatkhanova, mother

Raymond Manolo and his brother were abducted by Filipino security forces in 2006. He was accused of being a member of the NPA, an anti-government communist group. He was subject to torture and other inhumane treatment during the period of his disappearance. He and his brother managed to escape one night, while the guards were drunk and asleep.

"I started to speak out; I wanted to file a case. I wanted to fight and to show that I was a victim, [and] that [I had] also witness[ed] crimes—abductions and killings—carried out by the army. We filed a civil case, an abduction case, [...] a case on secret detention. But the case has still not moved forward."

"I am free, but I am not really free [...] I walk around with fear. The soldiers can take me anytime. All they need to do is to take off their uniforms and they can grab me anonymously. I have no doubt the military can do that."

- Raymond Manolo

Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh, leader of the Chadian opposition party, Party for Freedom and Development, was arrested on 3 February 2008 at his home in the capital N'Djamena by members of the Chadian security forces. Despite requests from his family, international human rights organizations, the UN and the EU to Chadian authorities for information regarding his fate, his whereabouts still remain unknown. His son, Mohamed Saleh Ibni Oumar, demands to know the truth about his father disappearance and calls for justice.

"I am calling for justice [...]. I am calling for light to be shone upon the fate that has been reserved for my father by his abductors. I am calling that those who have made themselves guilty of this be punished by the impartial sword of justice.

"We cannot belittle ourselves to the level of the abductors of my father by behaving without the least dignity and the smallest ounce of humanity [...] I no longer desire an unleashing of hatred against those who made him disappear, I no longer want those who use violence for political ends to brandish my father's memory in order to justify their acts.

"The truth about Professor Ibni's fate must come to light within the most reasonable appeasement and within a strictly legal framework. This is the price, and the only price, for my father's ideal to triumph over death, over oblivion, and most of all over those who lost their humanity by taking him away from his loved ones."

- Mohamed Saleh Ibni Oumar, son of Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh