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## **Landmark enforced disappearances convention to enter into force**

Amnesty International today called on all states to commit themselves to end enforced disappearances, following news that a landmark treaty aimed at preventing the practice will come into effect.

The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (Disappearances Convention) will enter into force on 23 December, after Iraq on Wednesday became the 20th country to ratify it.

The Convention aims to establish the truth about enforced disappearances, punish perpetrators and provide reparations to victims and their families.

"This is an important step in the fight to stop enforced disappearances, which cause horrendous suffering to victims, their families and their communities," said Salil Shetty, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"However, we are still a long way from banishing this widespread practice to history. Although the 20 ratifications mark a milestone for the implementation of the Convention, almost 90 per cent of the international community have yet to commit themselves to tackling enforced disappearances," said Salil Shetty.

An enforced disappearance takes place when a person is arrested, detained or abducted by a state or agents acting for the state. The authorities then deny that the person is being held or conceal their whereabouts, placing them outside the protection of the law. The ramifications of enforced disappearances are severe. Those disappeared are often tortured and subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

In many cases, they are secretly killed and their remains are hidden. Family members and those close to the person disappeared are left not knowing what has happened to their loved one, whether they are alive or dead. Entire communities can fracture under pressure as people fear being associated with those targeted.

States that ratify the Convention commit themselves to conduct investigations to locate the disappeared person, to prosecute those responsible and to ensure reparations for survivors and their families. The entry into force will also lead to the establishment of a new international Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

This independent and impartial treaty body will monitor implementation of the Convention and it can receive complaints from or on behalf of victims when the national authorities fail to fulfil their obligations.

However, in order for the Committee to be able to receive and consider complaints by victims or their representatives, their governments must make a declaration accepting it. Fourteen of the 20 states which have ratified the Disappearances Convention have not done this including Iraq.

Amnesty International has campaigned for over a quarter of a century for a convention to prevent and combat enforced disappearances worldwide.

"In the next few years, as part of our Campaign for International Justice we will be campaigning for those remaining states to ratify the Disappearances Convention without delay and to recognize the competence of the new Committee to consider individual complaints," said Salil Shetty.

"We urge all states to review their national laws to ensure that they can investigate and prosecute this horrendous crime before national courts."

Notes to editors

The 20 states that have ratified the Disappearances Convention are:

Albania, Argentina, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, France, Germany, Honduras, Iraq, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Paraguay, Senegal, Spain and Uruguay.