

Syria: INOVAS welcomes UN Secretary-General recommendations on Syria's missing and disappeared

On 30 August, 2022 the UN Secretary General published [a landmark report](#) recommending the appointment of an international body to search for the missing in Syria. The report comes following years of relentless campaigning by Syrian victim groups and their families to seek truth and justice.

As human rights defenders, civil society activists and victim associations, we welcome the UNSG's recommendations, including the call to ensure "the full and meaningful participation of victims, survivors and their families" in the process.

This a crucial step forward in the struggle for meaningful justice and accountability after more than 11 years of conflict in Syria. Victims, survivors and their families are best placed to identify needed measures for solving the scourge of detention and enforced disappearance in the country.

Echoing the voices of Syrian victim groups, we urge UN member states to ensure that the recommendations of the report are translated into action, since any continuation of the status quo would further undermine the rights of victims and their families. In addition, we urge the UN to help deliver justice for victims and survivors of enforced disappearances in other conflict and post-conflict contexts around the world on the basis of understanding that an enforced disappearance is a continuing crime until the fate of the disappeared is established.

We commit to continue working for the signing and subsequent ratification of the UN Convention Against Enforced Disappearances. On 28 March 2022, the date of the opening of the twenty-second session of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, there were [68 States parties and 98 signatory States to the Convention](#).

For example, in Guatemala state-backed forces carried out approximately 45,000 enforced disappearances against suspected opponents during the country's civil war (1996), while army and state-backed forces disappeared as many as 100,000 people in Sri Lanka since the 1980s. *INOVAS urges the Secretary General, UN institutions and civil society organisations to pursue similar steps to combat the phenomenon of enforced disappearance globally - wherever and whenever these abuses take place - giving victims and survivors crucial rights including their right to truth and assurances of non-recurrence.*

Background

The UNSG report follows a culmination of almost two years of sustained advocacy efforts led by Syrian victims' associations, among them a founding member of the INOVAS, the Ta'afi Initiative.

In February 2021, five leading associations for victims and survivors of detention and enforced disappearance, torture and other abuses launched the '[Truth and Justice Charter](#),' a framework for a victim-centred approach to work on arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance in Syria.

Those same organisations then commissioned a [study](#) in mid-2021 recommending the establishment of a dedicated mechanism to reveal both the fate and whereabouts of Syria's 100,000 missing and forcibly disappeared.

Since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, at least 100,000 people have been arbitrarily detained and disappeared with their families still waiting for information about their fate or whereabouts. Others simply went missing during the course of military offensives, displacements and security raids.

All parties to the conflict have detained and disappeared civilians, although the Syrian government and affiliated armed actors are responsible for the overwhelming majority of these abuses--the UN's Commission of Inquiry on Syria has even stated that the Syrian government's policy of detention, disappearance and torture "amounts to extermination."

Individuals seeking information about detained, disappeared or missing friends and family find themselves in an opaque and punishing limbo. Victims and survivors are often unsure where to turn, with no one institution working on the file and representing the needs for victims and their families to clarify the fate and whereabouts of disappeared and missing persons, investigate gravesites, provide support to victims' families, or provide families with a space in which to report new cases.

INOVAS is a network formed by, and for, victims and survivors of gross human rights abuses around the world. The network helps to strengthen the participation of victims and survivors in national, regional and international processes related to justice, human rights, social change and peace. Find out more: <http://www.inovas.ngo/>

Signatories:

Asociación de víctimas Renacer siglo XXI ("Rebirth in the 21st century" Victims' Association)
(Colombia)

Asociación Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas del Conflicto Armado Interno de Guatemala (Q'anil Tinamit) (Guatemala)

Association of Justice and Rehabilitation (Tunisia)

Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Missing in Lebanon (Lebanon)

Initiative for Vulnerable Persons and Women in Action for Integrated Development

(IPVFAD) (Democratic Republic of Congo)

Khulumani (South Africa)

Network of Families of the Disappeared in Nepal (NEFAD) (Nepal)

Proyecto VOS-Voices of Survivors (USA/Argentina)

Relais Prison-Société Association (Morocco)

Ta'afi Initiative (Syria)