

International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

I have read that about 250,000 people go missing in the UK alone each year. That is a staggering statistic and there are doubtless many different reasons for this. The human stories behind this are of course very distressing, particularly to the families and friends of those who are missing.

Some people go missing of their own volition, and that may be the case of many instances in our own country. Today, though, on 30th August each year, the United Nations keeps the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, where it is regimes that are most often responsible.

It is worth quoting the official website:

“Enforced disappearance has frequently been used as a strategy to spread terror within the society. The feeling of insecurity generated by this practice is not limited to the close relatives of the disappeared, but also affects their communities and society as a whole.

Enforced disappearance has become a global problem and is not restricted to a specific region of the world. Once largely the product of military dictatorships, enforced disappearances can nowadays be perpetrated in complex situations of internal conflict, especially as a means of political repression of opponents.

Of particular concern are:

the ongoing harassment of human rights defenders, relatives of victims, witnesses and legal counsel dealing with cases of enforced disappearance;
the use by States of counter-terrorist activities as an excuse for breaching their obligations;

and the still widespread impunity for enforced disappearance.

Special attention must also be paid to specific groups of especially vulnerable people, like children and people with disabilities.”

That such things still happen in our world today is a cause for great concern. The use of enforced disappearance by regimes and other groups to silence the peaceful expression of opposing views is a clear violation of human rights. As Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights so clearly states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Enforced disappearances are a challenge and an impediment to peace and justice. Any injustice is an affront to true humanity which we believe God intends all men, women and children to enjoy. For God is a God of love and of mercy, but also a God of justice.

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