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Enforced disappearance

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Implementation of recommendations from the previous period

In 2018, the Colombian state only received two recommendations for this area. These involved accelerating search and identification processes for forcibly disappeared persons and guaranteeing operations and funding for the Search Unit for Allegedly Disappeared Persons (UBPD). However, these recommendations have not been fully implemented. Of the 103,955 cases identified by the UBPD, just 881 bodies have been recovered, 191 have been handed over to relatives with dignity and 13 people have been found alive. (1)

The outlook continues to be bleak. The crime persists in Colombia, as shown by the fact that between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2023 a total of 244 persons were reported as disappeared. (2)

It is important to note that after many years, on 30 August 2022 the Gustavo Petro administration accepted the jurisdiction of the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances. (3) In addition, Article 198 of the new government's National Development Plan ordered the creation of the National System to Search for Disappeared Persons and called for a uniting of inter-institutional, civil society, and the international community's efforts to search for and identify this population.

Current status

There is a need to unite the efforts of all public institutions so that the process of searching for, locating, and identifying disappeared persons ends with the dignified return of remains to relatives or finding people alive.

As enforced disappearances continue to occur in Colombia, it is important to implement programs and plans that prevent this crime.

(1) Data accessed on 04 September 2023 at: <https://ubpdbusquedadesaparecidos.co/actualidad/cifras-busqueda-desaparecidos-colombia/>

(2) Socio-political violence database operated by the Colombian Commission of Jurists.

(3) Available at: <https://www.elspectador.com/judicial/colombia-acepta-la-competencia-del-comite-contra-la-desaparicion-forzada-de-la-onu/>

The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) must establish protocols that allow it to gather relevant information about acts of enforced disappearance in which the responsibility of the authors and other perpetrators is identified, with a special emphasis on State agents.

Human Rights defenders and victims' organizations have demanded that that benefits granted to those appearing before the JEP are conditional on the provision of information about the location of victims of enforced disappearance and a recognition of their responsibility in these crimes.

Recommendations

1. It is essential to move towards the consolidation of a single register for people reported as disappeared that includes information on victims, the type of disappearance, alleged perpetrators, and possible location of the disappeared person.
2. There is a need to strengthen the national and regional plan to search for, locate, and identify disappeared persons that is currently being implemented by the UBPD, as well as strengthening relationships with relatives' and grassroots organizations in the territories and decentralizing the Unit's work teams in the territories.
3. In the framework of the peace talks being led by the current government, it is important to demand that enforced disappearances cease as a practice of war and that peace talks are conditional on the provision of information that facilitates the search for, location, and identification of people who have been forcibly disappeared when these crimes are attributable to a specific armed group.
4. It is essential to strengthen coordination between the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and the Search Unit for Allegedly Disappeared Persons so that the information collected by the JEP can be efficiently used by the UBPD.