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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Enforced disappearances and elections

Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances*

Summary

In the present report, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances examines the interrelation between enforced disappearances and elections. It analyses the key features, including patterns, profiles of the victims, specificities, such as the prevalence of the so-called “short-term” enforced disappearances and the lack of available data, as well as the overall impact of the phenomenon of enforced disappearances on the electoral process. The Working Group also examines the accountability challenges and the preventive measures that can be taken to address this phenomenon, concluding with recommendations.

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to the decision taken by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances at its 128th session to conduct a thematic study on the issue of enforced disappearances and elections.¹ To inform the study, the Working Group held an internal consultation with human rights officers of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in May 2023 during its 130th session and a consultation with external experts in September 2023, during its 131th session. The Working Group further issued a call for written inputs,² in response to which it received 56 submissions (4 from member States, 1 from national human rights institutions and the remaining 51 from individuals, academia and civil society organizations). The Working Group extends its gratitude to those who took part in its consultations, and to all those who responded to its call for inputs.

2. The year 2024 is marked by an unprecedented number of elections worldwide, with billions of voters in more than 60 countries turning to the polls to elect public officials.³ Yet, paradoxically, while elections are one of the foundational pillars of democracy, in many instances, they take place amidst a growing decline in the guarantee of the rule of law and democratic principles, with a significant impact on the enjoyment of human rights,⁴ including the fundamental right not to be subject to enforced disappearance.

3. In the past two decades, studies on the issue of human rights violations in the context of elections have been conducted by academics,⁵ at the intergovernmental level,⁶ within OHCHR⁷ and by the special procedures.⁸ Although the Working Group has voiced its concern about enforced disappearances in the context of elections as early as 1983,⁹ the issue has not been analysed in a systematic and comprehensive manner. This thematic study proposes to fill this gap by examining the interrelation between enforced disappearances and elections while taking into account key features, accountability challenges and preventive measures that can be put in place to address this phenomenon.

4. Over the years, pursuant to its humanitarian mandate and jointly with other Special Procedures, the Working Group has sent communications on cases of enforced disappearances in the context of elections to several countries, including Algeria,¹⁰

¹ A/HRC/WGEID/128/1, para. 11.

² The call for inputs and the contributions received (except those confidential) can be found here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2024/call-contributions-thematic-study-working-group-enforced-or-involuntary>. The Working Group notes that, unless otherwise indicated, the information contained in the study is based on the submissions received and the consultations held. Direct reference to the submissions, if they are not confidential, will be made only when figures are provided or if it was explicitly requested.

³ 2024 elections are testing democracy's health, OHCHR, 2024; Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot. University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, Marina Nord, Martine Lundstedt, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Cecilia Borella, Tiago Fernandes, Lisa Gastaldi, Ana Good God, Natalia Natsika, Staffan I. Lindberg and V-Dem Institute, 2024.

⁴ Human Rights and Elections: a Handbook on International Human Rights Standards on Elections, OHCHR, 2021, para. 1.

⁵ Votes and violence: Electoral competition and ethnic riots in India, Steven Wilkinson, Cambridge University Press, 2006; Electoral violence, corruption, and political order, Sarah Birch, Princeton University Press, 2020; Violence in African elections: Between democracy and Big Man politics, Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs and Jesper Bjarnesen, eds., Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.

⁶ Developing operational tools within the EU for a comprehensive approach to prevent electoral violence, Holly Ruthrauff and Andrew Bruce, Directorate-General for External Policies, European Parliament, 2015.

⁷ Human Rights and Elections: A Handbook on International Human Rights Standards on Elections, OHCHR, 2021.

⁸ A/HRC/14/24/Add.7, A/HRC/26/30 and A/68/299.

⁹ E/CN.4/1983/14, para. 51.

¹⁰ E/CN.4/2001/68, para. 33.

Bangladesh,¹¹ Belarus,¹² Burundi,¹³ Colombia,¹⁴ the Comoros,¹⁵ the Dominican Republic,¹⁶ Egypt,¹⁷ Ethiopia,¹⁸ India,¹⁹ Iran (Islamic Republic of),²⁰ Libya,²¹ Pakistan,²² Peru,²³ the Philippines,²⁴ Rwanda,²⁵ Sri Lanka,²⁶ Tajikistan,²⁷ Türkiye,²⁸ Uganda,²⁹ the United Republic of Tanzania,³⁰ Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)³¹ and Zimbabwe.³²

5. While the above demonstrates the global reach of this phenomenon, the Working Group would like to underline that enforced disappearances in the context of elections remain somehow invisible and underreported due to a multiplicity of factors. First, enforced disappearances are only one type among various forms of electoral violence, making it challenging to specifically target and address it. Second, in many instances, victims of enforced disappearance in the electoral context, reappear after brief periods of disappearance. Due to such a *modus operandi*, the enforced disappearance is often not reported as such. Finally, as is the case for enforced disappearances more broadly, in the election context, the very nature of enforced disappearance, which is committed with the direct or indirect involvement of the State, creates a significant barrier to reporting and documentation, notably due to fear of reprisals. The involvement of the State becomes particularly likely and pervasive when those in power have greater motives to use State resources to carry out enforced disappearances for electoral gain to consolidate power, especially in countries with fragile democratic institutions.

II. Key features of enforced disappearances in the context of elections

A. Patterns of enforced disappearances in the context of elections

6. While there is no agreed definition of “electoral violence”, it is generally recognized as a form of political violence that occurs in connection with the electoral process and aims to influence the election results.³³ It differs from other forms of political violence in terms of the victims’ profile, motive, and timing. Electoral violence, including enforced disappearances, first and foremost, serves as a strategic tool for political influence, especially to maximize chances of winning and affecting electoral outcomes.

7. When committed in the context of elections, enforced disappearance forms part of electoral violence with distinct features and rationales. Through enforced disappearances, the ruling elite aims to maintain power by instilling fear, silencing opposition, and manipulating

¹¹ A/HRC/WGEID/106/1, para. 13(b).

¹² BLR 13/2023.

¹³ A/HRC/WGEID/116/1, para. 35(h).

¹⁴ E/CN.4/1996/38, para. 35.

¹⁵ A/HRC/WGEID/132/1, para. 45.

¹⁶ E/CN.4/1995/36, para. 143.

¹⁷ A/HRC/16/48, para. 173.

¹⁸ E/CN.4/1995/36, para. 169.

¹⁹ IND 4/2021 and E/CN.4/2003/70, para. 125.

²⁰ A/HRC/19/58/Rev.1, paras. 251 and 252.

²¹ A/HRC/WGEID/116/1, para. 96(a).

²² PAK 4/2018 and A/HRC/WGEID/108/1, para. 74(a)-(g).

²³ E/CN.4/1992/18, para. 273 and E/CN.4/1993/25, para. 389.

²⁴ E/CN.4/2003/70, para. 226.

²⁵ E/CN.4/2002/79, para. 273.

²⁶ E/CN.4/1990/13, paras. 281-286.

²⁷ A/HRC/WGEID/100/1, para. 113.

²⁸ E/CN.4/1995/36, para. 395.

²⁹ UGA 1/2021 and A/HRC/WGEID/128/1, para. 96(a)-(c).

³⁰ TZA 6/2020.

³¹ EN 4/2024 and A/HRC/WGEID/133/1.

³² ZWE 7/2011.

³³ A/HRC/14/24/Add.7, paras. 7-9 and *op cit.*: Birch 2020, von Borzyskowski, 2019; Høglunf, 2009.

voters' behaviour in a context where Government and ruling party interests are closely merged.

8. The Working Group received allegations regarding the use of pre-electoral violence aimed at influencing electoral results, undercutting political competition, and/or eliminating political dissent.³⁴ It further documented numerous instances of post-electoral violence, where the practice of enforced disappearance was aimed at quashing those who contested election results.³⁵ Enforced disappearances do not only occur around election periods but may feature as a systemic violence model targeting key political figures and political leaders, as well as journalists and activists. Because of these groups' diverse roles in elections, violence against them can have a significant (though not immediately apparent) impact on elections and the electoral process in the long run.

9. The Working Group documented enforced disappearances in the context of various types of elections, including municipal/local, general/legislative and presidential elections. It also documented cases that took place in different electoral settings, such as alternative presidential elections or unofficial elections in non-competitive one-party electoral systems.

10. The Working Group also documented a large number of enforced disappearances amidst elections-related protests. In some cases, the fate and whereabouts of the victims remain unknown. In many others, the victims were either released or presented before a court after having been subjected to enforced disappearance over a few days. Examples of enforced disappearances in protests taking place during the lead-up to elections have been documented in Bangladesh³⁶ and Uganda.³⁷ Instances of post-electoral protests where enforced disappearances occurred were documented in 2017 in Honduras³⁸ and in 2020 in Belarus.³⁹

11. The Working Group also observed instances of enforced disappearances during political rallies, such as in the example of the Maguindanao massacre in the Philippines.⁴⁰ Submissions received by the Working Group suggest that the massacre of the relatives and supporters of a vice mayor running for governor, who was en route to filing the candidate's certificate of candidacy, was preceded by enforced disappearance.

12. The Working Group received allegations that establish that, in several cases, victims of enforced disappearance had been previously subjected to harassment, threats or attacks. These patterns exhibit the existence of a particular climate of intimidation during electoral cycles and, at the same time, these signals facilitate the early identification of potential risks before an enforced disappearance occurs, hence providing an opportunity to implement preventive measures.

13. In this vein, the Working Group also found that, in many instances, the victims who had initially been forcibly disappeared during elections reappeared later detained based on treason or terrorism-related charges. In other instances, when victims resurface, they are found on the roadside, after having been subject to torture and sexual violence.⁴¹ In this connection, the Working Group highlights the record number of arbitrary detention practices around election times, which in many cases amount to enforced disappearances for limited periods of time or of permanent nature.

14. The Working Group also documented patterns of incommunicado detention of political prisoners, among others, which are enforced disappearances when the fate or whereabouts of the detained are concealed. In such cases, individuals serving prison sentences can be further isolated from the external world through solitary confinement for

³⁴ UGA 1/2021 and General Allegation on Uganda (127th session, May 2022).

³⁵ BLR 6/2020, A/HRC/52/68, para. 22, and A/HRC/54/22/Add.2, para. 10.

³⁶ "Türk urges Bangladesh to change course, create conditions for truly inclusive democracy", press release, OHCHR, 8 January 2024.

³⁷ UGA 1/2021.

³⁸ A/HRC/54/22/Add.2, para. 10; Accountability for Human Rights Violations Committed in the Context of the 2017 Elections in Honduras: Progress and Challenges, OHCHR, 2020, para. 49. See also: General Allegation on Honduras, WGEID, 2021.

³⁹ BLR 4/2023 and BLR 13/2023.

⁴⁰ A/HRC/14/24/Add.7, para. 64.

⁴¹ ZWE 1/2020.

lengthy periods; they can be denied visits, phone calls, parcel deliveries, and all forms of spoken and written communications with their families and legal representatives. These conditions increase the likelihood of enforced disappearances and, in turn, contribute to the occurrence of other human rights violations. On this note, the Working Group received information on prisoners in Belarus who, after having been denied communication to the outside world in conditions that could amount to enforced disappearances, passed away in custody because of aggravated health issues under detention conditions and the absence of timely and sufficient medical care.⁴²

15. The Working Group observed several instances where States categorically rejected allegations of enforced disappearances in the electoral contexts before international human rights bodies, notwithstanding well-substantiated reports of such practices. The Working Group observes such interventions with great concern. It underscores that failure to adequately respond to allegations of enforced disappearances of this kind undermines the sincerity of the political commitments made by States to combat and eradicate enforced disappearances and calls on States to show greater scrutiny and sufficient engagement in responding to such allegations.

16. As is generally the case, enforced disappearances in the context of elections are committed by State actors, such as the police, military and counterintelligence services. Similarly, Governments have also resorted to proxies such as the militia, youth groups, clandestine units, other pro-government factions and members of political parties in power. The Working Group affirms that such acts, committed with the support or acquiescence of State, constitute acts of enforced disappearance. The Working Group notes that the privileged access of the ruling elite to State resources, coupled with their vested interest in consolidating and perpetuating power through elections, can engender a perilous synergy wherein State actors engage in violence to assert control over election outcomes.

17. The Working Group noted with great concern a number of submissions received where disappearances had allegedly been committed in the electoral context by actors such as organized crime and with the goal of controlling public power and territory, and thus extending their network of illicit activities. According to the information received, in Mexico, such instances have allegedly targeted prospective candidates and candidates, public officials, including those working in security and justice institutions, as well as from the executive branch. Organized crime groups reportedly carry out the attacks,⁴³ in many instances in collusion with politicians and with the aim to influence the political process and guarantee that the authorities provide them with protection, information and economic resources. The same trend has also been reported with regard to elections in Nigeria, where the protection allegedly offered by politicians to criminal gangs serves as an incentive for electoral violence, including the kidnaping of political opponents.⁴⁴ The Working Group recalls that, on one hand, when such acts are perpetrated with the acquiescence, tolerance or support of State actors, they constitute acts of enforced disappearance. On the other hand, when disappearances are committed without the participation or acquiescence of the State, they are not enforced disappearances. However, States remain under an obligation to investigate, to search for the disappeared and to hold perpetrators accountable.⁴⁵

B. Enforced disappearances and the electoral cycle

18. The time frame of the electoral cycle is often understood academically as the six-months prior and the three-month period after a scheduled election.⁴⁶ The Working Group

⁴² BLR 4/2023 and BLR 13/2023.

⁴³ “Mexico: UN and regional experts call for peace after violent election campaign”, press release, OHCHR, 8 June 2021.

⁴⁴ “Do not come out to vote: gangs, elections, political violence and criminality in Kano and Rivers, Nigeria”, Kingsley Madueke, Lawan Danjuma Adamu, Kate Lindskov Jacobsen, Lucia Bird, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2023.

⁴⁵ A/HRC/36/39/Add.2, para. 82.

⁴⁶ *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence*, Inken Von Borzyskowski, Cornell University Press, 2019, p. 32-35.

documented cases of enforced disappearances in the electoral context taking place during the pre-election phase, the elections or in the post-electoral period. The submissions received generally reflect an increase in enforced disappearances around elections.

19. Nonetheless, the Working Group underlines that, when determining whether an enforced disappearance is linked to elections, it is necessary to adopt a broad temporal frame, not necessarily within the officially declared timelines of the electoral calendar. For example, there are indications that, in Colombia, enforced disappearances against political figures begin a year prior to elections.⁴⁷ The Working Group received other submissions about cases clearly linked to elections that nevertheless occurred outside the above-mentioned time frame. In certain cases, the increase in repressive actions preceded the declaration of election dates, marking the start of the electoral period and the consequent rise in actions against political dissidents.

20. The Working Group further observes that the electoral cycle in which enforced disappearances occur has different influences in the elections. In pre-election periods, disappearances are mostly aimed at preventing rivals from running; during elections, they disrupt the electoral process and influence outcomes; while in the post-electoral period, it includes motives to prevent winning candidates from taking office and quash controversies about the legitimacy of elections. For instance, it has been reported that pre-electoral enforced disappearances have aimed to eliminate opponents, journalists and activists, while violence during the elections has sought to instil fear and discourage voter participation. In other instances, enforced disappearances aimed at weakening opposition and preventing them from intervening in the electoral process to influence the outcome. The Working Group was also informed about a significant number of post-electoral enforced disappearances, which appear to aim at silencing dissent, blocking investigations of election fraud, eliminating challenges to the ruling regime and maintaining political legitimacy.⁴⁸

C. “Short-term” enforced disappearances in the context of elections

21. The Working Group received information regarding a shift in repressive measures, from harsher and generalized tactics towards more targeted and so-called “short-term” enforced disappearances. The latter are used to serve as exemplary punishment and create an overall climate of repression and a chilling effect on society, particularly on opponents, and thus hinder their participation in the electoral process. The Working Group has found that an alarmingly high number of cases of so called “short-term” enforced disappearances take place prior to, during and after the elections. In these cases, individuals are initially forcibly disappeared and later either released or taken before a judge or a prosecutor who handles their cases through processes, frequently fraught with irregularities, lacking judicial independence and victims’ choice of legal representation.⁴⁹ The Working Group notes that duration is not a constitutive element of enforced disappearances and that a State’s obligations under international human rights law are the same regardless of the duration of the disappearances.⁵⁰

D. Lack of precise data

22. The Working Group found that the phenomenon of enforced disappearances in the electoral context is generally indiscernible from other human rights violations taken place simultaneously and therefore there is a lack of precise and reliable data. Moreover, when studies generate empirical data on electoral violence, they do not disaggregate it to identify in detail all different forms of violence. Thus, it becomes impossible to distinguish enforced disappearances from other forms of violence and to differentiate the alleged perpetrators. In

⁴⁷ See submission to this study by Misión de Observación Electoral – MOE Colombia.

⁴⁸ A/HRC/54/22/Add.2, para 10.

⁴⁹ A/HRC/46/4, para. 51.

⁵⁰ A/HRC/7/2, paras. 8 and 9; *Yrusta v. Argentina*, CED/C/10/D/1/2013, para. 10.3; Alarming rise in enforced disappearances ahead of Venezuela’s presidential poll: UN experts, press release, OHCHR, 30 April 2024.

countries with data on electoral violence, documentation of enforced disappearances in the context of elections is scarce, focusing instead on the lethal forms of electoral violence. Another difficulty in identifying enforced disappearances lies in the lack of details to determine whether the act of deprivation of liberty was committed entirely by private individuals or whether there was participation, direct or indirect, of State agents.

E. Profile of victims of enforced disappearance in the context of elections

23. The Working Group has observed that enforced disappearances in the context of elections have targeted almost all segments of society, including political opponents, dissenters, persons with specific mandates and responsibilities related to the election process, human rights defenders, journalists and other authority figures, and even individuals not involved in politics in any way, including minors. Specifically, the Working Group has identified the following groups as those mostly affected by enforced disappearances in the context of elections: political opponents, political party representatives and other members of opposition political parties, opposition campaign managers and coordinators, electoral commission members, human rights defenders, photographers, trade unionists, journalists, volunteers, members of non-governmental organizations, lawyers, priests, medical workers, former law enforcement officers bloggers, and relatives of these potential targets.

24. According to information gathered and analysed by the Working Group, opposition members constitute the largest group of victims of enforced disappearances in the context of elections. This includes opposition candidates, members, and supporters of the opposition. Enforced disappearances of opposition members can occur over extended periods, spanning the time between two elections, and do not necessarily happen directly with a specific election. In an application lodged by the Patriotic Union, a Colombian political party, to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the Court examined a wide range of electoral violence cases, including enforced disappearance that occurred from 1984 to 1993. It found that the actions taken against the members and supporters of the Patriotic Union gradually undermined the party's popular support and electoral performance.⁵¹ The Working Group flags that State agents' targeting of candidates, directly affects the electoral process by discouraging or otherwise disabling candidates from continuing to run or preventing their assumption of office.

25. The Working Group has also learned of those with various duties and functions in the electoral process as another group of victims of enforced disappearances. This group includes election officers, unofficial election officers, members of civil society organizations with electoral monitoring functions, other members of national or international election monitoring bodies, those who provide assistance to them and those involved in electoral law projects.

26. The Working Group has registered information on enforced disappearances of human rights defenders in the context of elections.⁵² Human rights defenders advocating for electoral rights and raising awareness about informed vote are particularly vulnerable to enforced disappearances during elections. The Working Group notes that pro-democracy human rights defenders with broader human rights agenda, including territorial disputes and environmental rights, have also been also targeted, making it more challenging to determine whether the enforced disappearance was motivated by the electoral process, their human rights work, or both.

27. Journalists constitute another group of victims of enforced disappearances during the elections.⁵³ One of such example is the enforced disappearance of the journalist Itai Dzamara,

⁵¹ *Integrantes y Militantes de la Unión Patriótica v. Colombia*, Judgment, 24 January 2024, (Interpretation of the Sentence on Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs), Inter-American Court of Human Rights, para. 333.

⁵² A/HRC/30/38/Add.5, paras. 33-41; see "Human Rights Committee Reviews Human Rights Situation in Burundi in Absence of Delegation", press release, OHCHR, 3 July 2023.

⁵³ PAK 4/2018; see "Human Rights Committee Reviews Human Rights Situation in Burundi in Absence of Delegation", press release, OHCHR, 3 July 2023; and Press briefing note on Egypt, United States and Ethiopia, OHCHR, 5 June 2018.

a critic of President Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe, who was reportedly abducted on 9 March 2015 after calling for public action against economic decline in Zimbabwe, and who had previously submitted a petition to President Mugabe, requesting his resignation and holding fresh elections.⁵⁴ Similarly, Jean Bigirimana, a journalist, was forcibly disappeared during the period of turmoil that unfolded following the controversial decision by President Pierre Nkurunziza to seek an unconstitutional third term in 2015.⁵⁵ In 2012, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled on the enforced disappearance of Narciso González Medina, an activist and a columnist critical of the dictatorial regime in the Dominican Republic who had publicly denounced electoral fraud.⁵⁶

28. The Working Group also observed that religious figures can also be subjected to enforced disappearance in the context of elections. The Working Group noted with concern that, in Nicaragua, the enforced disappearances of several priests appear to be associated with their questioning of the validity of electoral results.⁵⁷ According to information received by the Working Group, in the Gambia, the year before the 2016 presidential elections, incommunicado detention of religious leaders who were critical of the Government was a significant issue that created a conducive environment for enforced disappearances.⁵⁸

29. The Working Group further identified a worrying trend of enforced disappearance of relatives of important political figures, activists, and human rights defenders. For instance, the alleged enforced disappearance of the son of a former Prime Minister of Pakistan during a political rally shortly before the 2013 elections starkly illustrates this issue.⁵⁹ Similarly, the Working Group received information about the alleged enforced disappearance of Collen Mutemagawo, an opponent youth chairperson, along with his wife and 2-year-old child in Zimbabwe. Moreover, the arbitrary detention and the alleged enforced disappearance for a limited period of time of the human rights defender Rocío San Miguel along with her daughter in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela exemplify this trend.

F. Groups in situation of vulnerability

30. The Working Group emphasizes the vulnerability of certain groups such as women and indigenous peoples. The Working Group highlights that the targeting of women and indigenous communities can have an impact on their involvement in elections and political participation which could lead to their further marginalization.

31. In line with the patterns previously identified by the Working Group, also in the context of elections, the majority of the disappeared individuals are men.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, women have also been forcibly disappeared in the context of elections, either as candidates, supporters or human rights defenders, or family members. The abovementioned example of the human rights defender from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and her daughter, and of a female opposition figure in the 2020 post-electoral violence period in Belarus⁶¹ illustrate this point. The lower incidence of female among the disappeared can be attributed to women's reduced participation in the political process, both as candidates and in other roles. The Working Group stresses that this reluctance stems from, among other reasons, the higher risk that their involvement may result in their own enforced disappearance, and exposure to gender-based violence, such as sexual violence, attacks on their integrity and reputation, digital gender violence (e.g., media exposure of their sexualized photographs).

⁵⁴ ZWE 1/2015.

⁵⁵ A/HRC/33/37, para. 51.

⁵⁶ *González Medina y Familiares vs. República Dominicana*, Sentence, 27 February 2012, (Interpretation of the Sentence on Preliminary Objections, Merits, Reparations and Costs), Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2012.

⁵⁷ HRC/54/60, para. 20 and A/HRC/WGEID/132/1, para. 83 (c) and (d).

⁵⁸ *Dangerous to Dissent – Human Rights Under Threat in Gambia*, Amnesty International, 2016, pp. 32-34.

⁵⁹ See submission by Rule of Law Center at Szabist University.

⁶⁰ A/HRC/WGEID/98/2, para. 4.

⁶¹ Opinion No. 23/2021, A/HRC/WGAD/2021/23.

32. Indigenous peoples are also exposed to enforced disappearances in the context of elections. Such violence against indigenous political figures has concerning implications on these peoples' political participation, which influences their involvement in democratic processes, including elections. The Working Group was particularly alarmed by the recent incidents in 2022 and 2024 elections in Nicaragua, where indigenous leaders were targeted. Notably, according to the information received, 30 indigenous members of the YATAMA political party were detained in 2022 for anti-fraud protests. Brooklyn Rivera, a Miskitu Indigenous leader, member of the National Assembly of Nicaragua and YATAMA, an indigenous political party, was forcibly disappeared on 29 September 2023.⁶² Against this backdrop, the Working Group observed with great apprehension that the Supreme Electoral Council in Nicaragua cancelled YATAMA's judicial personality and prevented them from participating in the elections.

G. Impact of enforced disappearances on the electoral process

33. The Working Group received numerous submissions flagging the chilling effect of enforced disappearances on voter turnout, which increase the general sense of disempowerment among citizens and other participants in the electoral process, and lead to further electoral violence. In this sense, the Working Group stresses that enforced disappearances in the electoral context are aimed at silencing, discouraging or eliminating perceived or real opposition. This is achieved through pressuring candidates by targeting them, their supporters and relatives to prevent them from running, and through the continued enforced disappearance of those elected. The Working Group further notes that, according to its analysis, such an impact can extend over different electoral cycles.

34. Moreover, obstacles to accountability for enforced disappearances undercut prevention efforts and create an environment that emboldens perpetrators to resort to electoral violence as a means to advance their agenda. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the Working Group is alarmed by the frequent use of the so-called "short-term" enforced disappearances with a direct impact on electoral outcomes. Temporarily forcibly disappearing candidates and their supporters shortly before, or on the election day, prevents them from participating in the elections and creates a chilling effect among other candidates – and sometimes also voters. These practices demonstrate the broader impact of enforced disappearances on the electoral process, that extends beyond the violation of individual rights, having a long-lasting impact on the States' democratic fabric.

35. Enforced disappearance is one of many tools of State-perpetrated electoral violence to influence the electoral process and the outcomes. It foments a climate of overall repression and leads to a series of human rights violations. Authorities have also concomitantly resorted to other violations to quash dissent and manipulate electoral results, namely, arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, torture, and extrajudicial killings. These methods, together with enforced disappearance, contribute significantly to undermine democratic processes by creating an atmosphere where free expression and political engagement are met with repression, thereby hindering the democratic rights of individuals and communities.

36. As with enforced disappearances in other contexts, election-related enforced disappearances violate not only the right not to be subjected to enforced disappearance but also a multiplicity of other human rights. Indeed, in this specific context, they also hinder the right to participate in public affairs, the right to vote and be elected.⁶³

37. By aiming to control the free exercise of the right to vote through fear and repression and intending to disrupt the electoral process for maximizing favourable outcomes, to the use of enforced disappearances by States interferes with the right to vote. This is further evidenced by electoral violence tremendously lowering voter turnout.

38. Enforced disappearances in the context of elections also aim to block rivals from running pre-election and prevent their victory during elections. In this respect, they infringe on the right to be elected under article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political

⁶² A/HRC/WGEID/132/1, para. 83.

⁶³ General comment No. 25, Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, para. 2.

Rights, which guarantees citizens the right “to vote and to be elected” in genuine, periodic elections conducted by universal and equal suffrage through secret ballots. Regional human rights treaties also contain provisions enshrining these rights, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (protocol 1, art. 3), the American Convention on Human Rights (art. 23) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (art. 13).

III. Accountability for enforced disappearances in the context of elections

39. The Working Group notes with concern that the impunity that is generally linked to the practice of enforced disappearances, is further exacerbated in electoral contexts. The challenges surrounding the investigation and prosecution of enforced disappearances in general also apply to enforced disappearances linked to elections. These challenges are complex and multifaceted, ranging from legislative loopholes to the lack of political will and the compromised independence of investigative, prosecutorial and judicial bodies. However, establishing effective accountability mechanisms for enforced disappearances in the electoral context is paramount to ending the cycles of impunity, ensuring justice for victims and building strong and long-lasting foundations for democratic societies and free and fair elections.

A. Inadequate domestic legislative framework

40. Legal frameworks can both fail to provide effective accountability mechanisms as well as facilitate the enforced disappearances of actors involved in the electoral process. Many States still lack legislation that criminalizes enforced disappearance as an autonomous offence. On the submissions received, the Working Group noted with concern various legal provisions in different contexts that enabled or otherwise promoted enforced disappearances, including those linked to elections: broad and vaguely defined provisions under national security laws, organized crime and anti-terrorism legislation; wide powers granted to security agents to arrest and detain, and most importantly, limited procedural safeguards under laws regulating the arrest and detention conditions can facilitate targeting opponents and enforced disappearances by State agents.

41. The Working Group identified with concern several examples of legal frameworks in the submissions it examined, such as the emergency regulations adopted in Sri Lanka just before the interim presidential elections that amplified law enforcement powers, to allow police to carry out searches and arrests without respecting due process, as such facilitating enforced disappearances.⁶⁴ In Nicaragua, Law 1060 reforming the Code of Criminal Procedure,⁶⁵ adopted in the context of the 2021 presidential elections, increased the limit of detention without filing formal charges from 48 hours to 90 days. Other countries have amended their laws to better address such challenges. For example, the Working Group acknowledges with appreciation the recent police reforms enacted in Kenya in 2022 to prevent enforced disappearances as part of a broader agenda launched as an election campaign and calls for further commitment to overcome the challenges around their effective implementation.⁶⁶

42. Laws infringing upon freedom of expression and assembly in electoral contexts not only suppress political dissent and favour violence, including enforced disappearances but also obstruct access to information regarding the risks of enforced disappearances, which might otherwise be helpful for their prevention. In this respect, the Working Group notes the

⁶⁴ Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions and Powers) Regulations No. 1 of 2022, Extraordinary Gazette no. 2278/23 of 6 May 2022.

⁶⁵ Law No. 1060 of 2 February 2021, amending the Code of Criminal Procedure, Law No. 406 of 13 November 2001.

⁶⁶ Executive Summary: report of the National Taskforce on Police Reforms, National Taskforce on Police Reforms (Kenya), 2023.

allegations that, in Cuba, media censorship has been used as a tool to identify targets⁶⁷ and control information during the elections. More broadly, the Working Group notes with concern reports on the adoption of legislation to prevent journalists from reporting on post-electoral protests, where enforced disappearances were committed, and thus directly undermining the freedom of press and the right to information.⁶⁸

43. The Working Group notes the adoption of laws within the context of national security that, during the elections, are reportedly often applied to target the opposition. In Belarus, Maria Kalesnikava, the opposition candidate who was abducted from the streets of the capital, reappeared in pretrial detention and was officially charged with undermining national security.⁶⁹ In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Working Group documented a pattern of enforced disappearances where several critics of the Government had been detained, placed in incommunicado detention and eventually charged with State security-related charges, including "logistical support" to a group of civilians and military personnel in an alleged "conspiracy plot" against the president or for the crimes of treason, conspiracy, terrorism and association, due to an alleged "conspiracy plot against the president."⁷⁰ In Nicaragua, Laws 1042⁷¹ and 1055⁷² have been used particularly in the pre-electoral context to target political opponents to prevent their participation in the elections.⁷³ According to public reports, among those to whom Law 1055 was allegedly applied, were seven prospective presidential candidates who were forcibly disappeared.⁷⁴

44. The Working Group has learned of instances whereby the search for the disappeared was suspended by the authorities based on a broad interpretation of electoral laws requiring neutrality and impartiality during electoral campaigns. The Working Group emphasises that the search for the disappeared is an ongoing State's obligation aimed at ensuring the right to justice and truth to the victims and cannot be tied to electoral campaigns, but rather must be aligned with international legal standards.⁷⁵

B. Obstacles to investigations and prosecution

45. The Working Group notes that corruption, lack of transparency and the separation of powers enable State agents to perpetrate enforced disappearances while eluding accountability for political gain and consolidation of their power through elections. As stated previously, so-called "short-term" enforced disappearances are common in electoral contexts. The brevity of the detention periods and the lack of transparency by the detaining authorities create difficulty in collecting evidence and the reappearance of victims before formal complaints can be filed provides a layer of impunity for the perpetrators of the crime. These issues perpetuate enforced disappearances as a looming threat that overshadows electoral processes.

46. The Working Group has been informed of situations concerning absolute isolation of detainees, at least in the early stages of the proceedings, the refusal or hindrance of contact with lawyers of their choice, imposing attorneys assigned by States, the presentation of detainees before the courts late at night. Additionally, there are instances where the victims' lawyers have also been subject to intimidation, threats and restrictions while carrying out their duties, particularly in cases of special relevance to those in power. Such procedural flaws have a detrimental impact on the rights of detainees and undercut accountability efforts.

⁶⁷ "Cuba: Bachelet urges dialogue, calls for release of detained protesters", press release, OHCHR, 16 July 2021 and CUB 6/2021.

⁶⁸ Threats that Silence: Trends in the Safety of Journalists UNESCO, 2021, p. 15.

⁶⁹ BLR 7/2020.

⁷⁰ See <http://www.mp.gob.ve/index.php/tag/brazalete-blanco/>.

⁷¹ Law No. 1042 of 27 October 2020 on Cybercrime.

⁷² Law No. 1055 of 21 December 2020 on the Defense of the Rights of the Public to Independence, Sovereignty and Self-Determination for Peace.

⁷³ Nicaragua: Concentración del poder y debilitamiento del Estado de Derecho, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 288, 25 October 2021, paras. 161-162.

⁷⁴ Nicaragua: Where are they?: Enforced Disappearance as a strategy for repression, Amnesty International, 2021.

⁷⁵ CED/C/7.

In addition, the Working Group underscores the effect of these issues related to detention, investigation and prosecution on the electoral process that takes place in time-sensitive electoral contexts, for example where those apprehended by State agents often have crucial roles to play in elections as opponents, activists, journalists or observers.

47. The Working Group learned of instances where there is a lack of an appropriate independent mechanism with the power to investigate and prosecute enforced disappearances. In some instances, those responsible for law enforcement were involved in the actual enforced disappearance from the initial stage or become involved at a later stage. In others, perpetrators invoked the security of the State as a reason for refusing to cooperate with police investigations. The Working Group also received information that States had engaged in systematic efforts to obstruct justice by prematurely ending investigations into alleged crimes, replacing investigators, refusing to interrogate officials suspected of involvement into the alleged enforced disappearances, or resisting consideration of procedural motions made by lawyers and family members. The Working Group stresses that many of these investigations might implicate important political figures and their legitimacy in elections, thus, perpetrators will be especially motivated to obfuscate these incidents of enforced disappearances.

48. The Working Group notes that, in some countries, judiciary appointments and removals are fully dependent on the President.⁷⁶ Such strong connections between the ruling elite and judicial institutions heighten the susceptibility of the judiciary to politicization, often prioritizing the electoral ambitions of incumbent politicians over the interests of victims. The Working Group has received information that in Cuba, the judiciary reportedly often dismisses appeals against State repression, especially in situations involving criticism of the Government or participation in dissident electoral activities.⁷⁷

49. The Working Group was informed of instances where persons allegedly involved in enforced disappearances had been entrusted with the mandate of leading investigations on the very acts in which they were implicated. States must establish robust mechanisms to ensure that investigations are conducted with the utmost impartiality and diligence, free from the influence of those who may have vested interests.

50. The Working Group received reports of cases where individuals accused of perpetrating enforced disappearances ran for elections and occupied high-ranking positions within the State apparatus, in some instances even becoming presidential candidates or presidents themselves. Such cases raise concerns regarding the effectiveness of investigations and accountability mechanisms given that individuals against whom serious allegations have been raised continue to be present in important posts without any implications for the accusations.

C. Prevailing impunity and challenges to accountability

51. The Working Group notes that a judicial system's lack of independence and susceptibility to political influence further impedes efforts to achieve accountability. In one example received, domestic judges did not grant appeals, claiming that the victim had already been presented to a competent judge, despite the fact that a victim's or legal defence counsel remained unaware of their fate and whereabouts, and the in-camera hearings violated the principle of publicity.

52. Relatives of the disappeared and others advocating for thorough and impartial investigations reported experiences of surveillance, pressure and threats from the authorities. The Working Group emphasizes that such actions not only violate the fundamental rights of individuals to seek redress and justice, but it also serves to further entrench the culture of impunity surrounding enforced disappearances linked to elections. These issues highlight the need to protect the victims and their advocates and ensure their safety and freedom to pursue justice without fear of reprisals or intimidation. The Working Group emphasizes that fear of

⁷⁶ A/68/276, paras. 83-85.

⁷⁷ See submission by Cubalex.

reprisals and intimidation can discourage the victims from political participation of any kind, thereby, indirectly acting as a deterrent for political participation.

53. The Working Group notes that countries have adopted amnesty laws to prevent investigation and prosecution of enforced disappearance, including those committed in the electoral context and despite such laws being contrary to international law, including article 18 of the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.⁷⁸ For instance, in 2021, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela adopted a law on the Commission for the Guarantee of Justice and Reparation of Victims of Human Rights Crimes prescribing accountability only for serious crimes committed after the law came into force. In this way, many victims of enforced disappearances prior to 2021 did not have a remedy to seek reparations and justice. In 2002, the Government of Zimbabwe adopted general amnesty for crimes, including crimes committed during the elections, preventing victims from seeking accountability for enforced disappearances.⁷⁹

IV. Prevention of enforced disappearances in the context of elections

A. Capacity-building for structural prevention mechanisms

54. Capacity-building efforts encompass a wide range of technical, resource and logistical support designed to empower national structures to manage electoral violence in the democratic process.⁸⁰ The Working Group received contributions that emphasized the importance of incorporating robust transparency measures within election commissions, strengthening, adequately funding and ensuring the independence of national human rights commissions, as well as of the independence and active participation of security agents in preserving peace during elections.

55. The Working Group observed a fundamental level of distrust towards the electoral system that called for extensive reforms in the political and legal system of the States concerned. In its consultation sessions and through the submissions received, the Working Group has been informed of academic studies showing that capacity-building initiatives increase the overall legitimacy of the electoral system, the process and outcomes which, in turn, decrease the likelihood of electoral violence and as such appear to be a promising prevention strategy.

56. Likewise, strategies of investing in electoral management bodies must be mindful of the fact that members of these institutions have personally been victims of enforced disappearances and other forms of electoral violence in several cases reported to the Working Group. Though the Working Group appreciates the role of specialized electoral commissions in safeguarding electoral integrity and mitigating violence, it underscores the imperative of impartiality and transparency as essential components of their functioning.

B. Election monitoring

57. The Working Group emphasizes the role of election monitoring bodies in assessing the electoral process against national and international standards, and to deter violence and fraud.⁸¹ These bodies involve international and domestic observers who, by maintaining neutrality and visibility, can positively influence the conduct of elections. The Working Group considers the presence of oversight mechanisms significant for their potential to prevent enforced disappearance in elections.

⁷⁸ General Assembly resolution 47/133.

⁷⁹ Clemency Order No.1 of 2000, (General Notice 457A of 2000), published on 6 October 2000.

⁸⁰ Elections and Conflict Prevention Guide, UNDP, 2017; Electoral Violence Prevention: What Works?, Sarah Birch and David Muchlinski, 25 Democratization 385, 2018, p. 387.

⁸¹ What Works in Preventing Election Violence, Jonas Claes and Inken von Borzyskowski, United States Institute of Peace, 2018, p. 22.

58. Submissions received by the Working Group recommended the presence (or the continuation) of international observers during elections, including, but not limited to, the United Nations, the established missions of the African Union, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. According to information gathered by the Working Group, international observers can act as independent watchdogs by offering insights into the political climate and enhancing transparency during elections. Their activities can include analysing the political environment, issuing public reports, holding press conferences, observing rallies and the adjudication of election-related dispute. Oversight mechanisms of this sort can act as a deterrent to electoral violence. The presence of international observers can be particularly fruitful for complementing the work of independent domestic observers, who, as the Working Group has found, are vulnerable and have been subjected to enforced disappearances.

59. The Working Group has regrettably learned about several measures taken by States to undermine election oversight. Such measures range from ousting non-governmental organizations engaged in election monitoring shortly before elections, enforced disappearances of observers as a tactic to undercut independent monitoring and control narrative around elections, providing limited or completely cutting the access to independent observers. The Working Group stresses that such measures not only undermine the integrity of the electoral process but also fail to respect mechanisms with a crucial role in preventing enforced disappearances and other forms of electoral violence.

C. Early warning systems

60. The Working Group received submissions that suggested the use of early warning systems to monitor political tensions, hate speech and rights violations, which should involve multiple actors, such as police, civil society, election management bodies and national human rights institutions. Early warning mechanisms can play a significant role in preventing enforced disappearances by identifying potential risks and triggers for electoral violence. These mechanisms involve the collection and analysis of data, the creation of early warning alerts, and the coordination of prevention and mitigation activities.⁸² Establishing national infrastructures tasked with risk analysis and early warning can reduce the likelihood of electoral violence, thereby preventing enforced disappearances.⁸³

61. Implementing these strategies involves collaboration across various stakeholders, including electoral bodies (i.e., election monitoring bodies and election commissions) security agencies, political parties, platform operators and civil society, to ensure a comprehensive and context-sensitive approach to electoral violence prevention.⁸⁴ The Working Group appreciates past efforts to develop, test and implement mechanisms to predict the risk of electoral violence by multiple stakeholders in Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nepal and Nigeria.⁸⁵ It also emphasizes the need to tailor these preventative measures specifically to address the nuances of enforced disappearances.

62. The Working Group has noted with great interest the use of new technologies in enhancing early warning mechanisms, including analysing online speech patterns and social media posts to identify potential risks and act pre-emptively. These methods have proven effective in confirming incidents of electoral violence through real-time social media monitoring.⁸⁶ Despite the potential, the specificity of enforced disappearance makes prediction and prevention difficult. Nevertheless, the capacity to analyse extensive data through various techniques hopefully offers an avenue for early detection and prevention.

⁸² Electoral Violence Early Warning and Infrastructures for Peace, Sead Alihodžić, 7 *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 54, 2012.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ WGEID Consultation Session (Sept. 26, 2023) Presentation by Sead Alihodžić, Senior Programme Manager in the Electoral Processes Programme, International IDEA.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

63. Enforced disappearances in the electoral context are employed by States not just to suppress political dissent and intimidate the opposition but also to instil fear among voters, thereby compromising the democratic process. By targeting key opposition political figures, activists, community leaders, opinion makers, journalists, outspoken members of society and human rights defenders, authorities seek to silence dissent through coercion and repression of political freedoms and rights.

64. The consequences of enforced disappearances in the electoral context are significant and far-reaching. These acts not only cause direct harm to the disappeared and their relatives and communities but also create an environment of fear and disengagement among the population. Moreover, such acts undermine the electoral process and therefore democracy, influencing the prospects of new generations.

65. The Working Group underlines the lack of data and research specifically focusing on enforced disappearances in the electoral context. To date, available electoral data and academic studies appear to have treated electoral violence as a broad phenomenon that may or may not encompass enforced disappearance. The Working Group believes that, in order to effectively address enforced disappearance in the context of elections, there is a need to gather, compile and disaggregate data on electoral violence with the understanding that election-related enforced disappearances can take place within a broad time frame encompassing, but not limited to, the brief period surrounding the elections. Disaggregated data can elucidate different aspects of enforced disappearance, such as (a) the duration of the enforced disappearance; (b) the multiplicity of perpetrators, in the case of enforced disappearances directly committed by State agents and acts carried out by non-State actors, which can still trigger State responsibility; and (c) feature particularly vulnerable groups of victims, including women, children and indigenous peoples.

66. The Working Group recalls the critical importance of proactive prevention measures to tackle enforced disappearances in the context of elections. Addressing enforced disappearances in such contexts is not only about responding to incidents after they occur, but also about creating an environment where such acts are significantly less likely to happen.

67. A multifaceted and a context-sensitive approach that involves all relevant stakeholders can maximize the effectiveness of prevention strategies. This approach should include addressing national legal frameworks that can provide the basis for targeting opponents, discretionary and broad law-enforcement powers that enable their unwarranted intervention in electoral processes, and undue restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly that lead to the reduction of civic space. It should also incorporate capacity-building road maps for engaging with security forces through targeted training, strengthening the management capacity of electoral bodies, and comprehensive electoral monitoring.

68. Addressing human rights violations committed in the context of elections, including enforced disappearances, requires in-depth reforms, including the consolidation of State structures with robust legal frameworks in full compliance with the rule of law. It also requires respect for the separation of powers and the independence of State institutions from political pressure.

69. The Working Group stresses the need to address and remove structural barriers in the domestic legal systems that hinder effective investigation and prosecution of enforced disappearances in the electoral context, including by ensuring the consistency of domestic legislation with international law, including in the Declaration and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

70. The Working Group considers the fact that elections are cyclic and scheduled events as a uniquely advantageous factor for advance planning and the implementation

of prevention measures to address electoral violence, including enforced disappearance, and thus strengthen electoral integrity and ensure free and fair elections.

71. In the light of the foregoing, the Working Group makes the recommendations below.

A. States

72. The Working Group recommends that States, with the involvement State institutions, political parties, civil society organizations and other relevant electoral actors, including domestic election monitoring bodies:

(a) Adopt risk management tools and processes that assess and analyse the likelihood and the impact of enforced disappearances in the context of elections in order to protect those at risk;

(b) Establish inter-institutional coordination mechanisms together with political parties specifically designed to promptly document and address violence around elections;

(c) Design and implement awareness-raising and prevention activities throughout electoral cycles, with different segments of the population, including the representatives of political parties, civil society organizations, community leaders, youth groups, women, journalists, human rights defenders and indigenous peoples;

(d) Allow unhindered participation of domestic and international electoral observers in the electoral process by ensuring unrestricted movement, access to information and uncensored publication of their reports;

(e) Repeal any laws that unnecessarily hinder freedom of speech, association and assembly in the context of elections and can lead to the enforced disappearance of those who are exercising their rights;

(f) Provide victims of enforced disappearance in the context of elections, including disappearances of limited periods of time, with prompt, fair and adequate reparation for the harm suffered, including compensation, restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition and access to psychosocial support;

(g) Include in election educational and capacity-development resources materials specifically related to electoral violence, and enforced disappearance in particular, including where and how it can be addressed;

(h) Guarantee immediate interim protection measures for those who have suffered and reported threats or violence in the context of elections.

73. As reiterated on multiple occasions, the Working Group considers that with the view of establishing a solid legal framework for the prevention and punishment of enforced disappearances, including in the electoral context, States that have not done yet ratified the International Convention on the Protection of All Persons against Enforced Disappearance should do so, and recognize the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive individual and inter-State communications.

B. Electoral bodies

74. The Working Group recommends that electoral bodies:

(a) Consider whether the existing electoral legal and institutional frameworks are sufficient to effectively deal with enforced disappearances in the context of elections, and initiate reforms as needed;

(b) Consider the risks of enforced disappearances during different phases of the electoral cycle and address them as part of a broader risk management effort;

(c) Liaise with other State and non-State actors in obtaining situational awareness and coordination of action to prevent and effectively resolve cases of enforced disappearances in the context of elections;

(d) Include the topic of enforced disappearances in their organizational capacity-development plans;

(e) Train, either directly or through other State or non-State institutions, election monitors on human rights violations, including enforced disappearance.

C. Office of the High Commissioner and its field presences

75. The Working Group recommends that the Office of the High Commissioner and its field presences:

(a) Include in their monitoring and early warning and prevention activities a component aimed at identifying those especially at risk of being subject to electoral violence, including enforced disappearance;

(b) Report on the enforced disappearances occurred in the context of elections;

(c) In elections-related fact-finding missions, pay special attention to the documentation of enforced disappearances, and include in their election training programmes specific modules on enforced disappearances;

(d) Where appropriate, assist victims of enforced disappearances in the context of elections in their engagement with regional human rights mechanisms, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and the treaty bodies, including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances;

76. The Electoral Assistance Division should, where relevant, coordinate with OHCHR to ensure that modules on enforced disappearances, and human rights more broadly, are included when technical assistance is part of its electoral assistance to Member States.

77. United Nations specialized agencies and funds, including UNDP and UNICEF, UN-Women and UNODC, should include in their training programmes, when relevant, modules on enforced disappearance;

78. During pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral periods, United Nations agencies should cooperate closely to support robust awareness-raising, identification and mitigation system and strategies relating to electoral violence and enforced disappearance, including against vulnerable groups.

D. Online platform operators

79. The Working Group recommends that online platform operators develop strategies for effective and close cooperation with civil society and human rights institutions for strengthening the use of these platforms for detecting and reporting on early signals of enforced disappearances in election periods.

E. The international community, including intergovernmental bodies involved in electoral support

80. The Working Group recommends that the international community, including intergovernmental bodies involved in electoral support:

(a) Consider adding in its capacity-building and technical training activities modules specifically related to the prevention and eradication of enforced disappearances in the context of elections;

(b) **When supporting early warning and response systems in a country, take into consideration the issue of enforced disappearances and facilitate discussions on early warning signs, forms and triggers to enhance effective monitoring, reporting and prevention.**
