



**Statement of the 1st Women's Congress on Enforced Disappearances
July 10, 2024 | Dhaka, Bangladesh**

Government must return the disappeared persons and ensure justice, reparation and guarantee of non-recurrence

Whereas, in Bangladesh, enforced disappearance remains unabated with nearly 700 reported victims from 2009 to 2023, many of whom have not yet been located, and those who have resurfaced alive reported experiencing torture and inhumane treatment;

Whereas, the incumbent government systematically allows law enforcement agencies and security forces to use enforced disappearances as a tool to suppress political opposition and silence dissenting voices, creating a climate of fear in the country to sustain authoritarian rule;

Whereas, enforced disappearances notably increased prior to national elections, targeting opposition party leaders and activists, a systematic pattern seen in recent years;

Whereas, while various state and intelligence agency personnel are implicated in these cases of enforced disappearances, the Government of Bangladesh blatantly denies their occurrence and has not signed or ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CPED);

Whereas, CPED recognizes the extreme seriousness of enforced disappearance which constitutes a crime under international law and, when massively or systematically committed, is considered a crime against humanity;

Whereas, enforced disappearance is a continuing offense spanning through administrations as long as perpetrators continue to conceal the fate and whereabouts of persons who have disappeared and these facts remain unclarified;

Whereas, enforced disappearance is a heinous offense that inflicts immeasurable suffering on a large number of victim-survivors and severely impacts women and children as 99% of the disappeared in Bangladesh recorded in Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances database, disappearED-Asia, are male;

Whereas, the economic crisis faced by the families of the disappeared is exacerbated by the fact that many of the disappeared were the breadwinners for their families, leaving women to bear the sole responsibility of raising their children and earning a livelihood;

Whereas, the family members of the disappeared, primarily women—mothers, wives, sisters, and children—face extreme psychological, socio-cultural, mental, financial, and security-related pressure and repression from the state;

Whereas, the victims' families encounter societal stigma, such as neighbors' taunts, social humiliation, difficulties in renting homes, and problems in arranging marriages for their daughters, furthering their psychological ordeal and pressure;

Whereas, the families of the disappeared are deprived of receiving proper and adequate psychosocial counseling and treatment due to financial restraints, and female-headed households struggle to provide adequate nutrition for themselves and their children;

Whereas, due to the impunity granted to state forces and the dysfunctional judicial system, families of the disappeared are deprived of justice, with no visible effort by the authorities to investigate allegations or provide information to the families;

Whereas, women whose husbands have disappeared and their whereabouts remain unknown, consider themselves 'half-widows' and face severe mental trauma, enduring indefinite waiting for information regarding the disappeared;

Whereas, women who are left to seek truth and justice for their disappeared loved ones are subjected to surveillance, intimidation, harassment, and threats by law enforcement and intelligence agencies;

Whereas, the government uses surveillance technology and spyware against members of the victims' families, and protest rallies organized by victim-families are often obstructed by the police;

Whereas, women from victim-families are at the forefront, fighting for the return of their loved ones and seeking justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence.

THEREFORE, be it resolved as it is hereby resolved by the 2024 Bangladesh Women's Congress on Enforced Disappearances:

To sustain the solidarity we achieved during this Congress among women victim-family members in pursuit of a just and equal society, free from enforced disappearance, oppression, inequity and inequality, and state impunity;

To consistently use a gender lens in the pursuit of truth and justice for the victims and the families of enforced disappearance;

To call on the state to immediately return disappeared individuals to their families and bring the perpetrators to justice accordingly;

To call on the state to work towards the issuance of a policy ensuring the safety and security of victim-families, including women and children; and not to obstruct the movements or programs of the victims' families who are searching for their loved ones;

To call on the state to ensure that victim-families do not face any form of harassment from any of its agents in obtaining jobs, enrolling in educational institutions, or renting houses;

To call on the state to introduce a mechanism to ensure that immediate family members are not deprived of access to the right to inherit property, their loved one's bank accounts, and other assets;

To call on the state to provide reparation to the families of victims of enforced disappearances and those who have resurfaced alive;

To call on the state to acknowledge that enforced disappearances happen in the country and conduct independent and impartial investigations into all allegations, ensuring justice to victims and their families, and responding positively to requests by the WGEID to visit Bangladesh;

To request assistance from the United Nations offered by the OHCHR to establish a specialized mechanism to investigate allegations of enforced disappearance in line with international standards;

To call on the state to accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, recognizing the competence of the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances, and adopt national legislation criminalizing enforced disappearances;

To encourage UN Human Rights Mechanisms to take constructive initiatives by engaging multi-stakeholders to cease enforced disappearances, retaliation against families of the disappeared, and hold perpetrators accountable by the Government of Bangladesh.

Adopted on the 10th of June 2024.