

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to hold hearing on enforced disappearances in El Salvador

- *The IACHR will receive information from civil society organizations on disappearances perpetrated by gangs and State agents in the context of the State of Exception.*
- *The organizations will request that the IACHR continuously monitor the situation and El Salvador to ratify international conventions, improve search processes for disappearance victims, and establish a specialized Commission to work on this issue.*

Washington DC, November 1, 2023.- The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) is scheduled to hold a public hearing on November 9 at its Washington DC headquarters to address the deficiencies in the search for disappeared persons and challenges in criminal investigations of **disappearances perpetrated by gangs and organized crime** in El Salvador in the framework of militarized security policies, as well as **enforced disappearances committed by State agents** (police, military and prison guards) during the implementation of the State of Exception, effective since March 2022.

"The militarized model of fighting crime seems like an easy solution, but it perpetuates cycles of violence, and does not help to create a safe environment for the population in the long term," says Victoria Barrientos, lawyer at the Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF).

Between 2019 and 2022 alone, there were at least 6,400 reports of disappearances by gangs, and during the State of Exception there have been at least an additional [209 cases of enforced disappearance](#), according to Salvadoran human rights organizations. "The State of Exception in El Salvador has generated patterns of enforced disappearance derived from the over 5,000 arbitrary detentions reported to human rights organizations, because in many of these cases the authorities deny information about where these people are detained and what their situation is," adds Verónica Reyna, Director of Human Rights at the NGO Passionist Social Service (SSPAS).

During the hearing, civil society organizations Asociación Salvadoreña por los Derechos Humanos (ASDEHU), Alerta Raquel, Cristosal, Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la UCA (IDHUCA), Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho (FESPAD), the Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF), the Organization of Salvadoran Women for Peace (ORMUSA), and the Passionist Social Service (SSPAS), will request that the IACHR recommend to the State of El Salvador the following priority actions:

1. **Public recognition of disappearances.** The State must publicly acknowledge disappearances as a phenomenon that entails State responsibility, avoiding the stigmatization of the affected families and communities.
2. **National Policy Against Disappearances.** A national policy against disappearances should be implemented. This policy should include the creation of a national registry of disappeared persons, a possible General Law on Disappearances, and the establishment of a new Search Commission. This new institution would oversee determining the whereabouts of disappeared persons in the current context, while the Attorney General's Office would continue the criminal investigation and prosecution of disappearance cases.
3. **Immediate search strategies.** Until the creation of a new Search Commission, the Attorney General's Office and other relevant institutions should implement immediate search strategies with the participation of the victims' families and communities.

4. **Gender focus.** Particular attention should be given to the disappearances of girls and women, with a gender perspective applied to disappearance cases.
5. **Ratification of International Conventions.** The State of El Salvador should ratify the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.
6. **Access and transparency in the Registry of Persons Deprived of Liberty.** El Salvador should maintain an up-to-date and publicly accessible registry of persons deprived of liberty, including those detained in the context of the State of Exception, and provide information to family members with total transparency.

Disappearances are a devastating State practice, one that was carried out systematically during El Salvador's internal armed conflict decades ago, and which are continuing to occur in the current context. "It is essential to guarantee the non-repetition of disappearances [as they were committed during the conflict], a pattern which left thousands of people missing, and most of whom have still not been found," emphasizes David Morales of Salvadoran NGO Cristosal.

In 2021, the IACHR urged El Salvador to [adopt measures ensuring compliance with international standards in cases of missing persons, focusing on the investigation, systematization and collection of information](#). Additionally, in 2022, the UN Committee against Torture (CAT) recommended [prompt and impartial investigation and punishment of allegations of enforced disappearances committed by military and police personnel during the State of Exception declared in March 2022](#).

The IACHR's public hearings are an opportunity for dialogue, accountability, and continuous improvement in the human rights situations of countries in the Americas. The State of El Salvador is expected to participate in the November 9th hearing and report on the measures they are taking to address the phenomenon of disappearances in the current country context.

**Public hearing, in-person and virtual
"Enforced Disappearances in El Salvador"**

**Thursday, November 9, 2023
7:30 am El Salvador/8:30 am Washington DC**

**1889 F Street NW, Washington DC 20006
Livestream will be transmitted via IACHR's website (www.oas.org/es/cidh/)**

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