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Current Issue: International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

Statement by Switzerland

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland

Enforced disappearances are prohibited under international law and are in contravention of OSCE principles and commitments. International humanitarian law requires each party to armed conflict to take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing and to provide their families with any information on their fate. The practice of enforced disappearance is a particularly heinous violation of an entire range of human rights. The doubly cruel practice doesn't only turn the disappeared person into a victim, but also his or her family and friends.

The fact that enforced disappearances still occur in the OSCE area is disturbing. Equally disturbing is the fact that families continue to wait for more than two decades to learn about the fate of their beloved ones. Therefore, it is a matter to prevent further missing cases and to resolve the cases of persons unaccounted for in a common effort by all actors involved.

The situation is particularly worrisome in Turkmenistan, where the fate of dozens of people is still unknown, including persons who have served their time in prison and should be released. We are also concerned about the practice in the OSCE region of short term disappearances by security forces, when people disappear for several hours or days without being able to inform their family or lawyer. A failure to acknowledge deprivation of liberty by state agents and a refusal to acknowledge detention constitute an enforced disappearance, even if it is of a short duration. The disappeared, being placed outside the protection of the law, find themselves in a situation of vulnerability

and are at a particularly high risk of abuse. Scientific evidence shows that concrete measures applied in practice from the first moment of detention, such as access to a lawyer and notification of family, are the most effective in reducing torture and other ill-treatment.

On the occasion of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances we call on all OSCE participating States to immediately take measures to stop the cruel, inhuman and unlawful practice of enforced disappearance. We appeal to investigate all cases of alleged enforced disappearances, disclose the whereabouts of the disappeared or their mortal remains, to establish contacts with their next of kin, to respect their relatives' right to the truth and fight impunity.

Finally, we encourage all OSCE participating States to cooperate closely with the Red Cross Movement and to ratify the UN Convention against Enforced Disappearance, which sets out a specific, binding legal framework to protect all persons from enforced disappearance.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.