

Ladies and gentlemen, greetings.

Allow me to convey the voices and suffering of the families of victims of enforced disappearance and the missing in Iraq. Since its first cycle, Iraq received 8 recommendations related to enforced disappearance. I will summarize my intervention in bullet points to make efficient use of time:

There are no accurate statistics or government or civil studies that document the numbers and data of the missing in a clear manner. Although the Iraqi government is striving to establish a unified database, Iraqi civil society has not yet been granted access to the outcomes of these efforts. Iraq urgently needs a national registry of the missing.

The Iraqi government's approach to victims of enforced disappearance varies over time. Victims who disappeared before 2003 have received official recognition from the Iraqi state, largely due to statements by senior officials asserting that there are no missing persons post-2003. However, post-2003 victims suffer from clear discrimination. This is rooted in Article 10 of the Supreme Criminal Court Law, which addresses the crime of enforced disappearance only for the period from 1967 to 2003. Moreover, compensation and redress programs are limited and fail to provide comprehensive justice for post-2003 victims, as they only cover a select few, mainly government employees who went missing during official duties.

The families of victims of enforced disappearance suffer from neglect and a lack of legal remedies. The legislative framework still lacks a unified law to address their situation. Successive Iraqi governments have proposed several drafts of a law to protect persons from enforced disappearance, the latest of which was issued by the current Iraqi Council of Ministers on July 6, 2024. However, this law has yet to be discussed in Parliament, and the victims' families have not been involved in the drafting process. We do not expect it to be voted on during the current parliamentary session due to political complexities. Furthermore, the available drafts fall short of expectations, lacking essential support mechanisms for the families and omitting clear procedures for search and investigation. The draft must be improved and involve victims and specialized organizations in its formulation. Neither legislators nor the government have developed mechanisms to provide financial or psychological support to victims. Our organization conducted a survey involving more than 1,000 relatives of victims, revealing that 86% suffer from chronic health and psychological conditions, while 93% stated they had received promises during election periods in exchange for their votes, highlighting rampant political exploitation. Additionally, 92% of women have become the sole providers for their families.

The search and investigation procedures are cumbersome and superficial, failing to provide families with clarity about the fate of their loved ones. Instead, these processes impose further burdens on their already strained lives. Searching often requires families to fund the investigations themselves, and bureaucratic delays between government departments prolong the process. In reality, no genuine, comprehensive mechanism exists for efficient search operations, and only a small fraction of the thousands of missing persons have been accounted for.

Enforced disappearances continue to occur, with documented cases reported sporadically. From 2023 to 2024, we recorded 16 verified cases of enforced disappearance in Samarra, Salah al-Din Governorate. Meanwhile, media sources indicate that the actual number could be significantly higher, reporting as many as 60 cases. However, we only include verified cases in our official records based on our own sources.

Iraq has only one national team specialized in opening mass graves, recovering remains, and conducting genetic analysis to identify victims. There are approximately 85 mass graves across the country, nearly half of which are located in Al-Anbar Governorate. However, only three graves have been opened there due to a lack of specialized personnel and insufficient funding. Therefore, the need to form additional teams is critical.

Some political figures from previous Iraqi governments have claimed that the missing persons are ISIS affiliates who fled and lost all means of communication. Such allegations, lacking any supporting evidence, only serve to endanger the victims' families and incite hate speech against them and the organizations working in this field.

As a result of these issues, victims' families suffer from the absence of support or assistance. The lack of transparent search and investigation procedures has led many families to fall victim to scams. They receive anonymous calls from individuals claiming to have information about their missing loved ones, demanding sums that sometimes exceed \$20,000 in exchange for information. We have documented cases where 12 families paid these sums, and 60 others were approached but could not afford to pay. None of these families received any information, exacerbating their financial and psychological distress. Most of these families have seen their living conditions deteriorate due to the loss of their breadwinners and the absence of state support. Consequently, many women are forced into low-paying jobs, and their children are deprived of education, having to work to meet basic needs. The psychological toll is severe, with many women experiencing suicidal thoughts, depression, and a loss of hope.

Finally, the issue of enforced disappearance in Iraq is closely tied to the problem of mass graves. Estimates suggest the presence of over 85 mass graves, with the likelihood of more being discovered. Hundreds of the missing are believed to have been executed, making it imperative for the Martyrs Foundation—Department of Affairs and Protection of Mass Graves to intensify its efforts to address this file.

Let me conclude with the demands of the victims' families:

- Enact legislation to address enforced disappearance comprehensively, involving victims' families and specialized organizations. This law must include provisions for effective and well-funded search and investigation mechanisms and comprehensive programs to support victims financially, psychologically, and socially.
- Establish an independent national authority to support victims and their families. This authority should document cases of enforced disappearance, provide financial and psychological assistance, and be responsible for creating a national registry of the missing, supported by sustainable funding.
- Increase the number of national teams specialized in opening mass graves and analyzing remains, and provide them with the necessary training and equipment. A sufficient budget

must be allocated to support these teams, ensuring the acceleration of investigations and the accurate uncovering of facts.