



**International Convention for
the Protection of All Persons
from Enforced Disappearance**

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Summary record of the 475th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 20 February 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. de Frouville

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties to the Convention

Additional information submitted by Burkina Faso under article 29 (4) of the Convention (CED/C/BFA/AI/1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Burkina Faso joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that she wished to thank the Chair and the members of the secretariat for all the support they had provided in organizing the present meeting. She hoped for an open and fruitful dialogue that would allow her country to improve its implementation of the Convention.
3. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that, despite the multiple challenges that the country had faced, including an upsurge in terrorist attacks, the humanitarian crisis, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and political and institutional instability, progress had been made in implementing the Committee's recommendations, primarily thanks to the 2019–2022 National Action Plan for Implementation of the Recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review and the Treaty Bodies.
4. A number of legislative bills had been adopted to strengthen protection against enforced disappearance, as detailed in the report. The definition of enforced disappearance set out in the Criminal Code was in accordance with the Convention. The offence was punishable by between 20 and 30 years of imprisonment and a fine of between 500,000 and 20 million CFA francs (CFAF). Perpetrators of enforced disappearance were liable to a life sentence in cases where the person abducted, arrested, detained or kidnapped had disappeared.
5. In accordance with the Criminal Code, a judicial enquiry was opened in response to any allegation of enforced disappearance. The authorities were required to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of complainants, victims and witnesses against any ill-treatment or intimidation and to guarantee reparation for the victims.
6. The Government had established several public institutions whose work contributed to the prevention of human rights violations, including enforced disappearance, and the punishment of those responsible. Those agencies included the National Human Rights Commission, a special unit for counter-terrorism investigations and the fight against organized crime, a unit for combating cybercrime, judicial units specialized in the prosecution of economic and financial offences and organized crime, and a judicial unit specialized in the prosecution of acts of terrorism.
7. Since the additional information had been submitted to the Committee, the following legal developments had taken place: the adoption, on 16 February 2023, of a law amending the Code of Military Justice to allow the deployment in national security operations, in addition to defence and security forces, of military police detachments tasked with registering any human rights violations committed in the course of those operations; the adoption of a law on 10 June 2022 on the determination of the status of martyrs of the nation and veterans with disabilities; and the adoption of a decree on 19 April 2023 on general mobilizations and states of alert.
8. Further significant developments included an increase in the staff of the National Human Rights Commission from 31 employees at the end of 2021 to 59 by the end of January 2024 and an increase in the Commission's budget over the same period from CFAF 592,000,000 to CFAF 613,682,000; the operationalization, on 24 August 2023, of a framework for consultation, monitoring and early warnings concerning cases of alleged human rights violations and abuses which provided a means of coordinating the joint efforts of the Government, the country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other agencies of the United Nations system; the operationalization, since 10 October 2023, of an interministerial working group for monitoring, issuing early warnings and following up on the handling of allegations of human rights violations reported in the context of the fight against terrorism; and the development of a training manual for the volunteer defence force on the protection of human rights,

including protection against enforced disappearance, in the context of the fight against terrorism.

9. Furthermore, 312 supervisors for the volunteer defence force had undergone training and 21,500 of the volunteers had attended sessions on ensuring respect for human rights in the context of operations to combat terrorism. Training had also been provided to 10 agents of the corresponding State judicial agency and 85 lawyers in collaboration with the Bar Association of Burkina Faso on the use of legal instruments for the promotion and protection of human rights. Four trials concerning terrorist cases held in the second half of 2023 had led to 51 convictions and 31 acquittals.

10. The terrorist attacks taking place across Burkina Faso since 2015 were targeting civilians and the national armed forces, internal security forces and the volunteer defence force. The decree of 19 April 2023 had authorized the Government to declare a general mobilization and state of alert for a period of 12 months, from 19 April 2023 to 18 April 2024. The decree also authorized the Government, under certain conditions, to requisition persons, goods and services that were essential for maintaining national security. Furthermore, the decree on the organization, powers and functions of the Command of the National Theatre of Operations permitted authorities to take exceptional measures in the interest of national security, such as the conscription of any able-bodied person above the age of 18 to take part in the fight against terrorism, typically for a fixed period of three months.

11. Under article 512-6 of the Criminal Code, the authorities were required to ensure the protection of complainants and witnesses against all forms of reprisals. Victims had the right to fair and adequate reparation and compensation, including the means necessary for their fullest possible rehabilitation. In the event of the death of a victim of enforced disappearance, torture or similar practices, the victim's dependants were entitled to compensation regardless of whether criminal proceedings were pursued or not. Incommunicado detention was prohibited under the Criminal Code. A law had been adopted on 27 June 2017 to improve the protection of human rights defenders in Burkina Faso against arbitrary searches and intrusions into their homes and places of work.

12. **Mr. Albán-Alencastro** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee would be grateful if the State party could provide statistics on disappearances that had occurred in the country in the context of the armed conflict. It would be useful to know what specific measures had been implemented to develop a database on disappeared persons. The Committee would welcome a response from the State party on reports that State agents were responsible for the majority of disappearances that had occurred in the context of the armed conflict and the fight against terrorism. Information would be appreciated on recurrent practices, patterns and trends concerning disappearances that were attributable to State agents, to the volunteer defence force and to other armed groups or non-State actors. It would be of interest to know the number of cases of disappearances, including enforced disappearances, in which a search and investigation had been initiated, the number of cases that were currently being investigated and how many of them concerned potential enforced disappearance. He wondered what measures had been taken to search for disappeared persons and to ensure that those searches were a priority.

13. He would like to know what measures were in place and which institutions were responsible for ensuring the effective investigation and prosecution of enforced disappearances, both those committed by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State and those committed by persons or groups whose acts were not condoned by the State. It would be useful to know how many persons were currently under investigation, how many of the persons investigated had been formally charged and how many of those people were public officials and how many were non-State actors.

14. He wondered whether any arrest warrants had been issued for persons linked to legal proceedings for the offence of enforced disappearance and, if so, how many of those arrest warrants had been enforced and how many were pending. It would be of interest to know how many convictions had been secured and how many persons had been acquitted in trials for the offence of enforced disappearance.

15. The Committee would welcome information on the steps taken to build the capacity of the State bodies responsible for investigating and prosecuting offences of enforced disappearance to ensure such institutions were equipped to open an investigation as soon as a disappearance was reported. He also wished to know what support those institutions had been given for carrying out investigations in the field and gathering evidence. He would be grateful if the State party could provide information on the financial, human and material resources allocated to State institutions responsible for conducting investigations, prosecutions and searches in cases of enforced disappearance.

16. He wondered what specific measures had been adopted to ensure that family members and any other victims of enforced disappearance had effective access to investigative bodies and their case files and that they were fully informed in a timely and situation-sensitive manner of the progress made in the investigation and search processes.

17. Lastly, he would appreciate information on the measures currently being implemented to ensure that a differentiated approach was taken in the investigation of cases involving victims who were women or children or who belonged to minority groups.

18. **Mr. Diop** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would welcome the State party's response to reports that Fulani people were the primary targets of enforced disappearance. He wondered what proportion of the cases of enforced disappearance recorded by the State party concerned Fulani persons, in how many of those cases a formal investigation had been opened and what the results of those investigations had been. Did the State party have information about any particular factors, such as the location of Fulani people in the country, that contributed to the high number of cases of enforced disappearance among that population group? The Committee would like to know what measures the State party had taken to prevent the internal displacement and exodus to neighbouring countries of Fulani people and to put a stop to the human rights violations they faced, including enforced disappearance.

19. It would be useful to learn what percentage of cases of enforced disappearance were attributable to State security forces and to the volunteer defence force and whether the frequency of cases of disappearance had changed following the declaration of a state of emergency. He wondered which of the country's regions had been most affected and what measures had been or would be put in place to protect the inhabitants of those regions from enforced disappearance.

20. He wished to know whether the State party had established a register of disappeared persons for relatives to consult and what measures had been taken to locate, identify and recover the remains of disappeared persons and to ensure that searches continued until the disappeared persons had been found. The Committee would like to know how many cases had been handled; what measures had been taken to ensure full, exhaustive and effective investigations and enquiries; which State agencies were responsible for searching for missing persons; and what material, human and financial resources had been made available to those agencies.

21. It would also be useful to know, as of 2024, how many disappeared persons had been found alive and how many remains of disappeared persons had been recovered. He wondered which authorities were responsible for identifying the bodies or remains that were found. Did the staff of such institutions have access to specialized training?

The meeting was suspended at 3.45 p.m. and resumed at 4.05 p.m.

22. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that some clarification was in order regarding the references to "armed conflict" and "armed groups/non-State actors" in the list of high-priority themes, as such terms were not appropriate in the context of the ongoing security crisis in Burkina Faso. The terrorist attacks occurring in the country did not constitute a non-international armed conflict. The actions carried out by the national armed forces and internal security forces were counter-terrorism operations.

23. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that no precise statistics were available on the number of disappeared civilians in the context of the fight against terrorism. However, the criminal investigation units and public prosecutor's office had systematically investigated all complaints from relatives of people presumed to have disappeared. There were currently 80 open cases concerning around 150 people. All information relating to allegations of

enforced disappearance was submitted to the relevant public prosecutor's office. To date, 190 cases of disappearances had been recorded among members of the national armed forces and the volunteer defence force.

24. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that no recurrent patterns or trends had been observed regarding disappearances attributable to the national armed forces, the internal security forces or the volunteer defence force. The majority of allegations of enforced disappearances attributed to those groups were linked to counter-terrorism operations and national security concerns. The operations of the volunteer defence force were always overseen by members of the armed forces or the internal security forces; members of the volunteer defence force did not have the power to make arrests.

25. The neutralization of terrorists in the field sometimes led to erroneous reports of cases of enforced disappearance, as relatives were not always aware that an individual was an active member of a terrorist group. In addition, some civilians joined terrorist groups without their relatives' knowledge, leading relatives to report their disappearance. As the majority of terrorists either did not carry identification documents or carried stolen identity documents, it was often difficult to determine who should be informed when an individual was arrested for terrorism-related offences.

26. Terrorists often kidnapped and killed civilians, including humanitarian workers, as well as State agents, as means of spreading terror, exerting control and weakening resistance among the local population. They also forcibly recruited young people as combatants and weapons carriers, leading their relatives to report them as disappeared persons. The fact that the locations of the mass graves in which terrorists often buried civilians were unknown was another factor.

27. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that criminal investigation police units worked under the direction of the public prosecutor, who reported to the *tribunaux de grande instance* (courts of major jurisdiction). A judicial unit specialized in the prosecution of terrorism-related offences and a special counter-terrorism unit had been established in 2017 and 2018, respectively, and both had nationwide jurisdiction. As the fight against terrorism also called for the use of new technologies, a central unit for combating cybercrime had been created in 2020 to provide expertise in areas such as data analysis and the geolocalization of the mobile telephones of suspected terrorists and of disappeared persons.

28. A number of cases had been closed because the disappeared persons had been found. Examples included 6 women who had been kidnapped in the region of Aribinda, 10 members of the defence and security forces, and several foreign nationals.

29. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that defence and security forces were deployed in the field to carry out search and sweep operations and patrols and to cross-check information in an effort to apprehend perpetrators of enforced disappearance. The police had special intervention units which included medical personnel and criminal investigation officers. A medical centre equipped with a surgical unit was frequently called upon to assist with cross-checking information.

30. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that counter-terrorism operations did not target any specific population or ethnic groups. The aim of such operations was to protect the lives and assets of all persons living in Burkina Faso. The Fulani were not concentrated in any specific area of the country, and there were no measures specifically designed to protect Fulani people as opposed to other members of the population of Burkina Faso. It was unknown whether there had been an increase in the number of disappeared persons in recent years.

31. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that the European Union was funding a programme for strengthening the military and local justice systems under which training and equipment had been provided to build up the technical and operational capacities of the country's criminal investigation units and military police detachments. A special mechanism, with initial funding in the amount of US\$ 850,000, had been set up to enable the offices of the public prosecutor and other relevant bodies working in the field to combat terrorism more effectively. Five training courses on identification techniques had also been organized for

forensic doctors, and equipment had been provided for forensic units in regional hospitals thanks to another project funded by the European Union.

32. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that, when human remains were located following terrorist attacks against defence and security forces, the surrounding area was always searched to check for survivors and other casualties. If the whereabouts of any members of those forces remained unknown, administrative and judicial measures were taken to establish the circumstances leading to their disappearance. In some cases, no documentation permitting the identification of a deceased person was found with his or her remains. A range of forensic identification techniques were used in such cases, including autopsies, morphological analysis of skeletons and DNA analysis. To that end, the prosecutor's office of the Ouagadougou court of major jurisdiction had requested the services of a forensic pathologist and the installation of a biometric analysis laboratory. Since the start of 2023, the remains of 163 persons presumed to have been members of the national defence or security forces had been collected for forensic analysis. A total of 450 family members of missing persons had provided DNA samples for use in comparative analyses for identification purposes. The State had previously had to commission such testing abroad, but the entire process could now be carried out in Burkina Faso.

33. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that the Government had set up two working groups in response to allegations of human rights violations and abuses reported in the context of the fight against terrorism. The first worked in collaboration with the local branch of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, while the second was an interministerial body. The work of the two groups had enabled the Government to strengthen its protection of civilian populations in the field and to improve the way in which it handled allegations of violations.

34. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that the special unit for counter-terrorism investigations and the fight against organized crime had received nearly 1.5 million euros from the European Union to strengthen its investigative capacity. The funds had been used to purchase investigation and sampling equipment and criminal analysis software and to carry out a visit to Belgium to study best practices. Mobile phones had also been purchased to strengthen the logistical and operational capacity of the military police detachments that were deployed alongside forces engaged in operations in order to record any human rights violations that occurred.

35. **Mr. Albán-Alencastro** said that, in the light of the delegation's description of the situation in Burkina Faso as a security crisis rather than an armed conflict, it would be helpful for the Committee to know, in the interests of greater clarity, which term the Government would use to characterize the confrontations between government forces and groups such as Ansar al-Islam, Islamic State West Africa Province, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims.

36. It would be useful to know how many of the 80 investigations currently in progress concerned missing members of the national security forces or volunteer defence force and how many concerned missing civilians. Given that civil society organizations had reported events that they described as arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances perpetrated by State agents and the volunteer defence force, he would be interested to know how the State party characterized its use of detention in the context of the fight against terrorism. It would also be helpful to know whether the authorities took measures to keep the relatives and friends of detained persons informed of their whereabouts. In the light of the declaration concerning non-State actors in the context of the Convention made by the Committee in 2023, he also wished to know what the State party's stance was with respect to the involvement of the volunteer defence force in the arrest and detention of persons suspected of having committed an offence.

37. The delegation had mentioned that the State party had located a number of people who had been reported missing. He would like to know how many of them had been found alive. It would be helpful to know what measures were taken to guarantee the independence of the investigations carried out by State security forces, especially in cases where members of those forces were allegedly responsible for the disappearance of the person they were attempting to locate. In that regard, he would be interested to know whether any specific steps

were taken to ensure that any person alleged to have been involved in a disappearance could not participate in the search operations.

38. Although it had been indicated that the Government did not possess historic statistics on enforced disappearance, the delegation might like to comment on reports alleging that 364 persons belonging to the Fulani people had disappeared between 2022 and 2023. It would be useful to know how many times the State party had been unable to identify a body that had been found without documentation and whether or not all investigations were closed following the issuance of a judicial declaration of absence. Lastly, he wished to know whether the delegation could indicate how many remains of civilians had been located in recent years and whether the authorities employed the same forensic and biometric techniques to identify them as were used for remains that were presumed to belong to members of the national defence and security forces.

39. **Mr. Diop** said that he wished to know whether the Government was of the opinion that the country's traditional judicial institutions and police forces were capable of bringing the phenomenon of enforced disappearance under control at a time when the State party was engaged in an ongoing fight against terrorism. He wondered whether those organizations had sufficient resources to conduct effective searches and investigations and to bring those responsible to justice. Since judges were reportedly struggling to keep up with the volume of work demanded of them, he would also be interested to learn whether any other agencies had been set up to support the work of the judiciary. It would be useful to know how often the State party conducted civil investigations under the Personal and Family Code provisions on missing persons, since dealing with such cases under civil law could serve to take some of the pressure off the criminal justice system.

40. He would like to know whether the sole mandate of the volunteer defence force was to fight terrorism or whether its mission was also to maintain order. For example, it would be helpful to learn whether its members were authorized to make arrests, carry out searches and implement judicial orders. Lastly, he wished to know what measures the State party was taking to determine the whereabouts of the well-known political and social figures Ablassé Ouédraogo, Daouda Diallo and Evrard Somda, who had reportedly been apprehended in broad daylight but whose whereabouts apparently remained unknown.

41. **Mr. Ravenna** said that, with respect to the State party's efforts to combat terrorism, he wished to know whether members of the volunteer defence force habitually carried arms and received military training. It would also be helpful to learn whether the Government had made a military assessment of the operational capabilities of the terrorist groups. Lastly, he would like to know whether the trials of persons accused of terrorism took place in civil courts, military courts or special courts composed of civil and military judges.

42. **Ms. Villa Quintana** said that she would welcome further information on the 190 cases of enforced disappearance which the delegation had said had been recorded in the context of the fight against terrorism. She would be interested to know what the current status of those cases was. Given that the delegation had mentioned the difficulties involved in identifying terrorists who had either false identity documents or no documents at all, it would be useful to learn whether the State party had considered establishing additional identification mechanisms based on, for example, fingerprints. In that regard, she also wondered whether the State party had created or was in the process of creating ante-mortem and post-mortem biometric databases. When human remains were found, what procedures were used to determine whether or not they had been victims of enforced disappearance?

43. Lastly, she understood that a decree granting immunity to members of the security forces for acts committed in the fight against terrorism had been issued in 2021. She would appreciate it if the delegation could confirm whether such a decree did indeed exist and, if so, could provide further information on its content and purpose.

44. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that the Government did not consider that Burkina Faso was engaged in a non-international armed conflict because, although groups such as Ansar al-Islam and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara were indeed active in the country, government forces were not fighting an organized armed group bound by the obligations of international humanitarian law. The fact that the country had been the target of terrorist attacks did not necessarily mean it was in a situation of armed conflict. The

Government viewed the attacks as criminal offences to be dealt with under national law. To that end, steps had been taken to pass specific anti-terrorism legislation. The Government was also aware that its traditional institutions were not in a position to cope with the scale of the terrorist activities taking place; hence the creation of the special judicial unit responsible for the prosecution of terrorist acts and the special unit for counter-terrorism investigations and the fight against organized crime.

45. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that, according to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the groups involved in a non-international armed conflict must be under responsible command and exercise such control over a part of a territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations and to implement international humanitarian law. The situation in Burkina Faso could not therefore be described as a non-international armed conflict; doing so would create an anomalous situation in which only one of the parties – the Government – would be bound by international humanitarian law.

46. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that on, 18 January 2024, the Government had announced that it was taking appropriate measures to combat a coordinated effort to destabilize the nation's institutions. As a result, the National Intelligence Agency had made a number of arrests, including that of Evrard Somda. Following an appeal contesting his detention lodged by Mr. Sombda's family, judicial proceedings had been initiated. The authorities were aware of Mr. Sombda's whereabouts.

47. Ablassé Ouédraogo and Daouda Diallo had been called up to serve their country in the fight against terrorism. Under a decree invoking the constitutional duty of citizens to participate in the defence and maintenance of territorial integrity, all physically able male citizens over 18 years were obligated to participate in those efforts. The families of both men were aware of their whereabouts. Certain parties had challenged the lawfulness of the decree in court. However, in respect of all the measures it was taking to combat terrorism, the Government was committed to safeguarding the rights established in the Constitution and the international legal instruments to which Burkina Faso was party.

48. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that the statute of the national armed forces stipulated that all military personnel must comply with the law and all national and international regulations governing their conduct. The military prosecutor's office was duty-bound to investigate any offence believed to have been committed by a member of the armed forces. In no way could it therefore be said that the armed forces enjoyed immunity.

49. Steps taken to ensure that members of the volunteer defence force did not commit human rights violations included the fact that they operated under the supervision of the national defence and security forces at all times. The volunteer defence force had been created because the State forces did not have sufficient human resources to combat the threat of terror across the entire territory on their own. Civilians who became members of the volunteer defence force each received a month of training, which included instruction on handling weapons and respect for human rights. Following their training, some volunteers were deployed in conflict areas alongside and under the orders of the national armed forces. Others remained in their home villages and towns, under the supervision of the internal security forces, where they were assigned the role of monitoring the security situation and collecting intelligence. Those locally deployed volunteers supported the response teams sent by the national defence forces in the event of a terrorist attack, but they did not make arrests.

50. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that the primary mission of the volunteer defence force was to protect the rights of civilian populations. The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights worked closely with the Ministry of Defence to ensure that all volunteers received adequate training in the field of human rights. Furthermore, with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, a special manual had been produced to raise the volunteers' awareness of the human rights challenges that they might encounter during operations, including in relation to issues such as abduction, enforced disappearance, torture and discrimination. To date, 312 supervisors in the volunteer defence force had received training based on the manual, which they then passed on to volunteers on the ground. Over 1,500 volunteers had received direct training on human rights in the context of their anti-terrorism operations.

51. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that it was not uncommon for small groups of terrorists to carry out armed attacks on rural villages. The defence and security forces were often unable to react in time to prevent such attacks, during which terrorists killed villagers, looted and drove out local population groups. The volunteer defence force had been established to strengthen the State's capacity to counter those terrorist activities and thereby fulfil its duty to protect its civilian populations.

52. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that there were currently 80 open investigations into the whereabouts of 150 civilians who had been reported missing by their families or friends. A total of 180 members of the defence and security forces and volunteer defence force were also missing. It would be left to the courts to decide whether any of those cases amounted to enforced disappearance. All the missing persons mentioned earlier who had been successfully located had been found alive.

53. The Personal and Family Code provisions on missing persons were designed to protect the rights of their families. Under those provisions, the judge – sometimes acting on the request of a family member – could instruct a public prosecutor to conduct an investigation into the whereabouts of a missing person. After one year, if the person's whereabouts were still unknown, the judge would issue a preliminary declaration of absence, enabling appropriate arrangements to be made concerning the missing person's assets and, where necessary, the custody and support of his or her children. After 10 years had passed, the judge would issue a final declaration of absence, which had the same legal effect as a declaration of presumption of death.

54. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that persons reported missing by their families had sometimes left their homes to join armed terrorist groups or had been forcibly recruited by such groups. Furthermore, many of the terrorists who were neutralized during operations conducted by the national armed forces could not be identified because they had not been carrying identification documents. The authorities were therefore aware that their missing persons lists included many members of terrorist groups and that a good number of them might in fact be dead.

55. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that claims that criminal acts had been committed by members of the security forces were investigated by public prosecutors under the direction of courts of major jurisdiction, while cases concerning members of the national armed forces were investigated by military prosecutors. To guarantee independence, investigations into members of the defence and security forces were never assigned to prosecutors based in the same locality. Furthermore, prosecutors enjoyed full independence with respect to the investigations that they chose to initiate; no outside parties, including the Government, could interfere in their work or prevent a prosecutor from conducting an investigation. Twelve members of the volunteer defence force were currently being held pending investigation by military prosecutors.

56. The 190 disappearances registered in the context of the national fight against terrorism concerned members of the defence and security forces who had gone missing following terrorist attacks. The 163 bodies that had been found were assumed to belong to members of the defence and security forces, although identification procedures were still ongoing.

57. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that the Government could not accurately gauge the overall operational capacity of the terrorist groups on its territory. It had nonetheless been concluded, from the assessments made by defence and security forces during anti-terrorism operations, that such groups continued to pose a real threat.

58. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that the central mission of the national armed forces was to defend the country's borders, while the internal security forces were trained to operate throughout the national territory. However, owing to the complexity of the terrorist threat, the armed forces had been obliged to extend their operations to the country's interior regions. For the same reason, the activities of not just the security forces but also those of park rangers and customs officers had taken on an increasingly military character.

59. **A representative of Burkina Faso** said that terrorism in his country was not linked to a particular religion, ethnic group or geographic region. Not one region in the country had escaped the scourge of terrorism. There had been attacks on both mosques and churches, and

suspected terrorists of various ethnicities were currently standing trial in Ouagadougou. The figures cited by the Committee in relation to alleged disappearances of Fulani persons paled in comparison to the thousands of people who had been killed or had gone missing as a result of terrorist activities in recent years. The Government therefore categorically denied that its fight against terrorism was in any way ethnically motivated.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.