



International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

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Committee on Enforced Disappearances

Nineteenth session

Summary record of the first part (public)* of the 321st meeting**

Held via videoconference on Monday, 14 September 2020, at 3.30 p.m. Central European Summer Time

Chair: Mr. Ayat

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document CED/C/SR.321/Add.1.

** No summary records were issued for the 317th to 320th meetings.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

Consideration of additional information submitted by States parties

Additional information received from Iraq under article 29 (4) of the Convention (CED/C/IRQ/AI/1)

1. **The Chair** said that, for the current meeting, the Committee had originally scheduled a dialogue with the Government of Iraq on the additional information submitted by the State party under article 29 (4) of the Convention, but that it had recently been informed that eight members of the Iraqi delegation had contracted the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and that the rest of the delegation too had been required to go into quarantine as a result. The State party had thus expressed its regrets and requested that the Committee should postpone the dialogue. On behalf of the Committee, he wished the members of the Iraqi delegation a prompt recovery.
2. Since even the unaffected members of the delegation had been placed in quarantine and were in separate places of confinement, they would not be able to take part in a dialogue in appropriate conditions. The Committee considered it important to allow members of country delegations to gather in a single place to coordinate their replies. Additionally, it was technically impossible to guarantee Internet connections in sufficient numbers and of high enough quality in Baghdad to allow the members of the delegation to participate in a dialogue. In view of the exceptional circumstances and the fact that the situation was a case of force majeure, the Committee had thus agreed to postpone the dialogue.
3. However, given the urgent need to pursue its cooperation with Iraq and the fact that the agenda for its 2021 sessions was already full, the planned dialogue must take place before the end of 2020. Thus, instead of closing its nineteenth session on 25 September 2020 as originally planned, the Committee would suspend the session and resume it at the earliest possible date in order to hold the dialogue with the Government of Iraq and adopt its concluding observations on the additional information submitted by the State party.
4. He wished to draw the attention of stakeholders to the fact that the earliest possible date would not necessarily be as soon as desirable, for a number of reasons. Firstly, a sufficient number of members of the Iraqi delegation would need to be in a position to gather to take part. Secondly, the Committee, like all treaty bodies, was working under extremely restrictive conditions, as the COVID-19 pandemic obliged its members to work remotely, using electronic platforms that systematically posed technical challenges. The quality of the Internet connections used by Committee members often varied hugely from one day to the next, and technical issues arose with the equipment that they used to participate in online meetings, notwithstanding the efforts made by the secretariat's very capable technical staff. Thirdly, the inconveniences resulting from Committee members' remaining in their home countries reduced their availability to concentrate on the work of the Committee and impeded their ability to work effectively. On the one hand, the fact that they were spread over numerous time zones meant that some had to begin work at 5 a.m. while others finished their day after 1 a.m. On the other hand, since their presence in their home countries made it impossible to fully curtail their usual professional activities, they had to combine their obligations in their home countries with their activities as members of the Committee, not only during meetings but also while carrying out long hours of preparatory work. Committee members did so without any form of compensation.
5. The treaty bodies faced another limitation, as access to simultaneous interpretation services was limited owing to a lack of resources. Currently, interpretation could be provided for just two meetings a day, of two hours each, which had to cover the combined needs of all the committees whose sessions overlapped. The use of the online platform for simultaneous interpretation, Interprefy, entailed very high costs at a time when the United Nations was facing a severe cash flow crisis. The postponement of any planned activities had huge implications for the management of the monetary and technical resources that were available and required an enormous coordination effort within the secretariat.
6. He was raising these concerns to highlight the need for improvements to enable the Committee to carry out its functions in the current context. For its part, the Committee would not allow such circumstances to reduce it to silence and inaction, but it was also important for stakeholders to be aware of the constraints that it was facing and for them to

assume their responsibilities. The treaty bodies were but one part of a complex system that involved many actors; if one part failed, the entire system would fail. All parts of the system must do their best, in the interests of the human rights of all. The Committee thus called on States, non-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions, the United Nations and all other stakeholders to fulfil their obligations.

The public part of the meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.