



**Kingdom of Belgium**

Speech by H.E. Mr Marc Pecsteen,  
Permanent Representative

At the United Nations Security Council

**Briefing**

**"Missing persons in armed conflict"**

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Mr President,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We would like to thank you for bringing us together to discuss the important issue of missing persons in armed conflict. As Reena Ghelani and Peter Mauer have stressed, this issue firmly belongs on the Council agenda. The impact of disappearances on individuals, families and communities is one of the most devastating and persistent consequences of armed conflict. The uncertainty and the search for answers can last for several generations, marking the history of entire communities - even at the risk of causing further conflict.

Providing an appropriate response to these challenges has a profound impact on our ability to introduce stability or lasting peace in post-conflict environments. Belgium believes that the foundations of this response are: (1) prevention and early management in the event of disappearances, (2) the fight against impunity, and (3) international cooperation.

Firstly, **prevention and early management in the event of disappearances** are obviously in the interests of the individuals and their families, as well as in the interest of the States. If action is not taken swiftly, the work involved in looking for missing persons increases, as does the suffering of the families as they wait for answers. It is important to understand what this prevention means in practice, and we welcome the fact that the resolution adopted today sets out several concrete measures, such as keeping a record of detainees, facilitating exchanges of information between members of separated families, collecting information on missing persons and the deceased, mapping burial sites and treating human remains that allow identification in an appropriate way. This often involves relatively simple measures that **can have a huge impact if they are implemented at the start of a conflict**. Taking these measures will limit human suffering, preserve the fabric of society and lessen the resentment that could lead to new tensions.

This brings me to my second point: several of these examples fall within the provisions of **humanitarian law and human rights**, which aim to prevent disappearances and deal with the

consequences when they do occur. There must be consequences for non-compliance with these obligations.

**Enforced disappearances**, whether or not in an armed conflict situation, are unacceptable and can be classified as crimes against humanity. In this context, Belgium welcomes the efforts of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and calls on States to adhere to the **International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance** and implement this convention in their national legislation. This international legal framework regulates the obligations of States, in particular prosecutions and punishments against the perpetrators of enforced disappearances, as well as compensation for the victims and their families. We are convinced that **peace and reconciliation efforts are undermined if entire families are left ignorant of the fate of their loved ones, with no prospect of compensation and with a climate of impunity pervading these disappearances.**

Lastly, I would like to stress **the importance of international cooperation** in preventing disappearances and dealing with the consequences of disappearances. We must not only coordinate our efforts and exchange information on missing persons, we must also guarantee exchanges of experiences between the existing mechanisms. In this context, we welcome the tireless work of the ICRC and the Central Tracing Agency. Belgium also encourages the ICRC "Missing Persons Project" initiative, insofar as it has the specific goal of improving the sharing of information, advice and experience and the preparation of technical standards that can be used by all the States and stakeholders involved.

Mr President,

I would like to conclude by congratulating you on your initiative in calling this meeting and on the resolution we have the honour of co-sponsoring. Its adoption by consensus reflects an international agreement on the issue of missing persons, namely that this is a humanitarian issue that remains a global challenge and requires a coherent response.

Thank you.