

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM



Intervention of

H.E. Philippe Kridelka, Deputy Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations

Interactive Dialogue of the Report of the Secretary General on Missing People in the Syrian Arab Republic

New York, 28/03/2023, 15:00 – 18:00

3 minutes statement

Secretary-General,
High Commissioner,

At the outset, I would like to reiterate our most sincere condolences to the Syrian people following the earthquake of February. While the death toll has reached unthinkable proportions, many families are still looking for their missing relatives.

Belgium would like to thank you for convening this very useful interactive dialogue. We are grateful for the report of the Secretary-General, in which he asks UN member states to establish a **new institution for missing persons in Syria**. In doing so, the Secretary-General supports the long-standing call from families to clarify the fate and whereabouts of their missing loved ones.

United Nations estimates indicate that more than 100,000 persons are missing as a result of the current conflict in Syria. As ICRC points out, this is a hidden tragedy that affects more people than the missing persons themselves: the pain caused by not knowing what happened to a family member or a loved one is unbearable. Women are often

disproportionately affected by the financial and administrative consequences of the disappearance of their husband. Entire communities can suffer if the main providers goes missing and families are left to fend for themselves. Syrians have the **right to know** what has happened to their missing relatives and friends. Parties to a conflict have an obligation, under international humanitarian law and human rights law, to provide information and assist efforts to bring families back together.

We recognize and support the work of existing entities at the national and international levels, such as the ICRC and various UN entities, as well as the efforts of victims and family associations in the search for missing persons. However, the sheer scale and complexity of the issues at hand is too much for any of these entities to make enough progress. Even the necessary enhanced coordination among the various actors will not suffice to provide families with satisfying answers.

For Belgium, the added value of a new, independent institution focused entirely on clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and on providing support to the families is **clear**: it would build on existing efforts, galvanize the work of relevant actors, compile existing information and act as an entry point for anyone looking for answers.

Belgium commits itself fully to the establishment of a new institution for missing persons in Syria, guided by the **humanitarian imperative** that this hidden tragedy entails. People have gone missing in Syria in different circumstances, as a result of the actions of **all parties to the conflict**. This endeavor does not aim at pointing fingers, but at resolving a pressing humanitarian issue for all Syrians : providing closure, after more than 10

years of conflict, to all who suffer from not knowing the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones.

Mr. High Commissioner, [as you have explained,] your team has conducted many consultations in the process of drafting the report of the Secretary-General.

Could you elaborate on the most important elements and key requests made by the families of victims regarding the set-up and functioning of this new institution for missing persons in Syria?