

Beat: News

Cyprus: Rights Experts Call for Urgent Solutions for Missing Persons Tragedy

U.N. News Press Release

Cyprus, 12.04.2022, 18:34 Time

new.un.org - 12 April 2022

Human Rights

A top UN-appointed human rights panel issued an appeal on Tuesday for faster progress towards finding the remains of those who disappeared during deadly violence that split the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, decades ago.

The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances said it was urgent now to accelerate “excavations and the identification and return of the remains of the missing”.

The call from the delegation of independent experts came at the end of an official visit at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Fate of loved ones

“While recognizing the considerable achievements, notably due to the longstanding work of the bi-communal Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, the search progress has slowed down in recent years, and significant challenges still remain,” they observed, in a press release from UN rights office, OHCHR.

The panel also noted that after the events of 1963-64 and 1974, which led to the island’s division into communities of Greek Cypriots in the south and Turkish Cypriots in the north, “too many relatives are passing away without knowing the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones”.

Depoliticise The Issue.

The Working Group emphasised that “it is essential to depoliticise the issue of missing persons in Cyprus and genuinely treat it as a human rights and humanitarian issue”.

They added that more effective results can only be achieved through “an unconditional commitment among all concerned stakeholders to fully cooperate towards its solution and to give the rights of victims and their relatives top priority. Time is running out.”

Underlining the need to leave mistrust and resentment behind, to “finally put an end to the anguish and pain of all families”, the panel said that bicomunal initiatives aimed at reconciliation and social cohesion, need to be given full and unconditional support.

Truth for The Victims.

The experts also noted some recent dialogue in Cyprus, especially within the civil society community, on the establishment of a truth-telling mechanism, which could clarify the facts and circumstances of the disappearances.

“Virtually all stakeholders we have met have underlined the importance to establish the truth for the victims, the relatives and the society as a whole”, they said, adding a recommendation to all stakeholders to give due consideration to this idea, which could also be conducive to reconciliation.

Truth and Reparations Paramount.

The experts highlighted that “no progress has been made in relation to criminal investigations and prosecutions for human rights violations resulting in individuals going missing, including possible enforced disappearances”.

The panel pointed out that together with ascertaining the truth, reparations and honouring the memory of those who have disappeared,

Cyprus needed to add accountability.

In relation to prevention of enforced disappearances, the Working Group expressed concern over information they had received “on pushbacks both at sea and at the Green Line”, the demilitarized zone dividing the two communities, since 1964.

While noting the challenges posed by an increased number of arrivals on the island, they recalled that “international law clearly prohibits the return of any person where there are substantial grounds to believe that they would be in danger of enforced disappearance.”

The experts further called for the creation of an adequate legal framework as a measure of prevention of enforced disappearances.

The UN Working Group on the issue is composed of Luciano Hazan (Chair-Rapporteur), Aua Baldé (Vice Chair), Gabriella Citroni, Henrikas Mickevicius Mr. Tae-Ung Bai. The independent experts are neither UN staff, nor do they receive a salary from the Organization.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-20464/cyprus-rights-experts-call-for-urgent-solutions-for-missing-persons-tragedy.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619