

Disappeared But Not Forgotten

Statement In Commemoration Of International Day Of The Victims Of Enforced Disappearances

30 August 2021



Joanna Mamombe

Every year on 30 August, the National Transitional Justice Working Group (NTJWG) joins fellow Zimbabweans, the local human rights community, and the rest of the world in commemorating the United Nations International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. The commemoration of this day serves to call upon all governments across the world to have a firm commitment to combating impunity for enforced disappearances, to speak up against the practice and tolerance of enforced disappearances which undermine the respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The commemoration of this day also draws attention to the fate of individuals who disappeared at the hands of the state and those whose whereabouts are unknown to their families, legal representatives and the nation as a whole.

In Zimbabwe, activists, human rights defenders, journalists and members of the opposition political parties have often become victims of enforced disappearances, a tactic that is often used to silence opposition and criticism. According to the United Nations, in 2019 alone 49 cases of abductions and torture were reported in Zimbabwe, without investigations leading to perpetrators being held to account.

In 2020, this disturbing trend continued, and it was reported that three female opposition activists Joanna Mamombe, Cecilia Chimbori and Netsai Marowa had been forcibly disappeared in Harare, assaulted and dumped 48 hours after their abduction. Following their enforced disappearance, the trio was arrested and persecuted for speaking out about their experience amidst accusations of lying about their ordeal.

Equally disturbing was the abduction of a second-year media student Tawanda Mucieihwa who was abducted in Bulawayo on 30 July 2020, a day before planned demonstrations which had been called by what is now known as the July 31 Movement. Despite evidence pointing to the involvement of a local popular car hire company, no meaningful investigations have been carried out and no arrests have been made.

Zimbabwe's history of violence is characterised by enforced disappearances as seen during the Gukurahundi massacres in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces from early 1983 to late 1987 and during the various epochs of election-related violence. Despite the overwhelming evidence of enforced disappearances, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) has often dismissed reports of cases of enforced disappearances without thoroughly investigating the cases. As a result, perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions. Zimbabwe has neither signed nor ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances which puts an obligation upon state parties to take appropriate measures to criminalise enforced disappearance, investigate occurrences and prosecute the perpetrators. This reluctance to ratify international instruments prohibiting enforced disappearances has only served to encourage a culture of impunity and injustice for victims and survivors of enforced disappearances and their families.

As the nation pursues national healing and reconciliation there must be accountability, truth-telling and justice for the victims, survivors of enforced disappearances and their families. There must also be deliberate efforts to put in place measures to guarantee non-recurrence.

The NTJWG, therefore, calls for the following:

- Ratification and domestication of the International Convention on Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances by the GoZ.
- The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission together with the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission must carry out a transparent and independent investigations of the circumstances surrounding unsolved cases enforced disappearances such as the case of Itai Dzamara who was forcibly disappeared in 2015.
- The GoZ should criminalise enforced disappearances with a high penalty for the perpetrators.
- The National Prosecuting Authority must prosecute all perpetrators of enforced disappearances.
- The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission must provide platforms for victims, survivors of enforced disappearances and their families to discuss their experiences to bring closure and healing.

<https://www.thezimbabwean.co/2021/08/disappeared-but-not-forgotten/>

Download the NTJWG fact sheet [here](#).