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Missing persons

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 7/28, adopted on 28 March 2008, requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on missing persons before its tenth session. The present report contains information on the action by the General Assembly on missing persons; the panel discussion on the question of missing persons held at the ninth session of the Human Rights Council, on 22 September 2008; the rights of families to know the fate of their relatives reported missing during armed conflicts; and the assistance provided to States and recent measures taken to address issues relating to missing persons by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Commission on Missing Persons and the Council of Europe.

* The present report was submitted late in order to include the latest information.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 7/28, requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on missing persons before its tenth session. The Secretary-General submitted a report dated 18 August 2008 on missing persons to the General Assembly (A/63/299). That report covered the thematic subjects of (a) measures to prevent persons from going missing; (b) the right of families to know; (c) the use of forensic methods and DNA forensic sciences in searching for and identifying missing persons; and (d) missing persons and the issue of impunity. The contents of the report were essentially based on responses to a note verbale addressed to States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.
2. The General Assembly took note with appreciation of the above-mentioned report and adopted resolution 63/183 on missing persons without a vote. In the resolution, the Assembly called on States parties to an armed conflict to take measures to prevent persons from going missing in connection with the conflict and to account for persons reported missing as a result of such situations. It also called on those States to determine the identity and fate of persons reported missing in connection with the armed conflict and, to the greatest extent possible, provide their family members with information on their fate. It urged States to encourage intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to provide appropriate assistance as requested by concerned States, and welcomed the establishment and efforts of commissions and working groups on missing persons. Without prejudice to States' efforts to determine the fate of missing persons in connection with armed conflicts, the Assembly requested States to take appropriate steps in terms of the legal situation of missing persons and the needs of their family members. It also stressed the need for the issue of missing persons to be part of peacebuilding processes, with reference to all justice and rule of law mechanisms. The Assembly also welcomed the panel discussion on the question of missing persons held by the Human Rights Council at its ninth session.

II. EXPERT PANEL DISCUSSION ON MISSING PERSONS

3. The present report builds on the developments since the report of the Secretary-General on missing persons, submitted to the General Assembly in August 2008, taking into account the contents and requests made by the Council in its resolution 7/28. The Council decided, in its resolution 7/28, to hold a panel discussion on the question of missing persons and to invite prominent experts. The panel discussion was held on 22 September 2008 during the ninth session of the Council.
4. The panel was composed of Cordula Droege, Legal Adviser, Legal Division of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); Vefaeddin Ibayev, Judge of the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan; Karyne Minasyan, Director of the Human Rights Center for Prisoners of Wars, Hostages and Missing in Action and Coordinator in Armenia of the International Working Group for prisoners of wars, hostages and people missing in action; Marco Sassoli, Professor, Geneva Academy on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law; Michel Veuthey, Professor and Vice-President of the International Institute of Humanitarian Law (San Remo Institute); and Kathryine Bomberger, Director-General of the International Commission on

Missing Persons. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was represented by the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. The panel was moderated by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva, Luis Alfonso de Alba.

5. The panel's main objective was to raise awareness of the issue of persons reported missing in connection with armed conflicts, highlighting the human rights aspects and their implications. Several important issues were discussed, in particular, the need for all parties to a conflict to cooperate with each other and to establish adequate mechanisms, institutions, laws and capacities, while taking into account that civil societies, families and supporting associations and national human rights commissions have a role to play in these mechanisms and institutions. The need to pay special attention to the legal status of the relatives of persons reported missing, in particular, on issues relating to their civil status, inheritance or pension rights, and the obligation of States to provide necessary assistance to those affected by the issue in order to reintegrate them into social life was highlighted.

6. The panel also aimed to identify practical recommendations to address the issue of missing persons, as well as best practices. A report providing a summary of the contents of the panel discussion on the question of missing persons has been submitted to the Council (A/HRC/10/10).

III. THE RIGHT OF FAMILIES TO KNOW THE FATE OF THEIR RELATIVES REPORTED MISSING DURING AN ARMED CONFLICT

7. As highlighted during the expert panel discussion, any debate on the issue of missing persons should benefit from the conclusions and recommendations of the International Conference of Governmental and Non-Governmental Experts, organized in 2003 by ICRC, entitled "The missing: action to resolve the problem of people unaccounted for as a result of armed conflict or internal violence and to assist their families". The Conference elaborated on issues relating to information-management and the processing of files on persons reported missing, the management of human remains and support for families.

A. Information-management and the processing of files

8. The Conference observed that coordination of the activities of all those involved and the sharing of information would increase the effectiveness of any action taken to ascertain the fate of unaccounted persons. Measures proposed included ensuring that the information collected on persons unaccounted for is comprehensive, yet limited to that which is necessary for the purpose identified and is impartially collected and processed; sharing information on the methods and objectives of the data collection and processing procedure by those involved; exchanging the information collected among those involved, without endangering victims, the persons collecting the information or the sources of information; centralizing the information collected to increase the possibility of informing the families on the fate of their members; and respecting the relevant standards and principles with regard to the protection of personal information whenever information, including medical and genetic information, is managed and processed.

B. Management of human remains

9. With regard to the management of human remains and information on the dead, the Conference observed that the main responsibility for the proper handling of all the dead and for providing information to the families with a view to preventing anxiety and uncertainty lies with Government authorities and armed groups. Measures that could be taken include ensuring that all feasible steps are taken to identify the human remains of those who died and to record their identity; avoiding obstruction of, interference with or impediment to the identification of human remains; issuing death certificates; ensuring that all those involved respect the legal rules and professional ethics applicable to the management, exhumation and identification of human remains; ensuring that forensic specialists, whenever possible follow standard procedures when exhuming and identifying human remains; ensuring adequate training for all persons collecting information on the dead and handling human remains; and beginning a process of exhumation and identification only once a framework has been agreed upon by all those concerned. Such a framework includes the establishment of protocols for exhumation; ante-mortem data collection; autopsies; identification based on scientifically valid and reliable methods and technologies and/or customary, clinical or circumstantial evidence that is deemed appropriate and has been previously adopted by the scientific community; and appropriate means of involving communities and families in exhumation, autopsy and identification procedures.

C. Support for families

10. The Conference also recommended that measures to respond to the material, financial, psychological and legal needs faced by families awaiting clarification of their family members' fate be taken. Those measures include the provision of targeted assistance with the aim, as soon as circumstances allow, of promoting the self-sufficiency of families; addressing the legal situation of persons unaccounted for and the consequences for family members, including in terms of property administration, guardianship and parental authority; ensuring children receive special support and protection and, in particular, taking measures to reunite unaccompanied children with their families; ensuring that the needs of single heads of families are given special attention, taking into consideration the specific needs faced by women in such situations; ensuring that the families of persons unaccounted for benefit from support programmes in order to adapt to their situations and come to terms with the events; and psychological support, and, whenever necessary and feasible psychiatric treatment, to be provided to those in need.

IV. MEASURES TO CLARIFY THE IDENTITY AND FATE OF PERSONS REPORTED MISSING DURING ARMED CONFLICTS

11. As highlighted by the Council in its resolution 7/28, necessary measures should be taken, in a timely manner, to determine the identity and fate of persons reported missing in connection with armed conflict. This responsibility is borne by States authorities and armed groups and entails, first of all, a commitment to implement international legal instruments, including the four Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols thereto, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. That commitment could also be demonstrated by the signing and ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

A. Tracing activities

12. Efforts made in this regard by ICRC and the International Commission on Missing Persons should be noted. The tracing activities carried out by ICRC during armed conflict and other situations of violence include collecting information about people unaccounted for and the circumstances under which they disappeared from their families, direct witnesses, the authorities and any other reliable sources. This information is crucial when tracing a person and establishing his or her fate. Such searches are made in places of detention, camps for internally displaced persons and refugees, morgues and remote areas.

13. Tracing activities also include supplying the authorities with lists of people unaccounted for, together with information on the circumstances in which they disappeared, requesting information on the location of graves and asking the authorities to allow for the recovery and identification of bodies. The tracing process also involves maintaining a constant dialogue with the authorities or armed groups in order to clarify the fate of missing persons.

B. Collection, protection and management of data on missing persons

14. In its resolution 7/28, the Council recognized the need for the collection, protection and management of credible and reliable data on missing persons according to international and national legal norms and standards, and urged States to cooperate with each other and with other concerned actors working in this area, inter alia, by providing all relevant and appropriate information related to missing persons. In this regard, ICRC manages information and processes files on missing persons in many of the situations in which it operates. A standard software application that can be adapted to various situations allows ICRC to store, process and consult information on missing persons while ensuring a high level of data security and confidentiality of information.

15. OHCHR is in the process of developing a publication on the subject of human rights and archives. In this regard, a draft rule of law tool for post-conflict States on the subject of archives has been prepared with a view to its eventual publication. The publication will cover, inter alia, issues relating to truth-seeking and the right to know, including information relating to locating missing persons.

16. Locating missing persons and/or finding information about them requires searches of all possible records. Those of local government units, such as the police, are important, as is information that can be derived from cemetery and morgue records. The above-mentioned draft emphasizes that it is important to hypothesize about what happened to the person before, during and after the disappearance; if the working assumption is that the government was responsible for the disappearance, which government structure was probably involved at each stage of the process and what kinds of records were created should be determined. The draft notes that databases developed and maintained by non-government organizations during the conflicts, as well as by other organizations, such as ICRC or United Nations organizations, may also contain useful leads.

17. The issue of data management is also relevant to exhumation projects in the search for missing persons. While oral reports may provide information about possible sites of grave or mass graves, records of military or other government personnel who may have been assigned to,

for example, digging graves or who were involved in transportation to or from the site, may also provide or corroborate information. The draft notes that, while the identification of remains currently tends to be based on DNA testing, medical and dental records are nevertheless helpful in the identification of remains of missing persons if there is no known DNA from the missing person or there is no living survivor to provide DNA for comparison.¹

V. PROVISION OF APPROPRIATE ASSISTANCE TO CONCERNED STATES

18. In its resolution 7/28, the Council urged States and encourages intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to take all necessary measures at the national, regional and international levels to address the problem of persons reported missing in connection with armed conflicts and to provide appropriate assistance as requested by the concerned States. In terms of provision of appropriate assistance, the model law on missing persons, developed by ICRC, offers a framework legislation that is suited and sufficiently extensive to help national authorities to bring legislation into line with the requirements of international law. The framework is based on principles of international humanitarian law and other branches of international law, and international human rights law treaties, applicable in all circumstances. The model law is not meant to be exhaustive, but simply to present a framework tool providing the basis for identifying the areas in which measures have to be taken. Depending on the context and the legislative situation, some of the measures may already have been taken, while others may need to be developed. The model law could therefore be used in its entirety or in part by national authorities seeking to enhance the legal framework preventing people from going missing and to solve the problems of relatives and to uphold their rights.

19. The purpose of the model law is to aid in the development of proposals and recommendations with the aims of better preventing disappearances and of protecting the rights of missing persons and their relatives. References to provisions of international humanitarian law are included in an annex to the document.

20. The model law is accompanied by an article by article commentary to help the lawmaker in his work. As with any framework legislation or proposal for action, adjustments will need to be made in accordance with national needs. The model law proposal is organized into a number of chapters, covering the following areas:

(a) General provisions, which include the objective of the legislation and definitions of terms, such as missing person and relative of the missing person;

(b) Basic rights and measures relating to the rights of persons deprived of their liberty, the rights of relatives of persons deprived of their liberty and the rights of relatives to know what happened to the missing person;

(c) The legal status of missing persons and the rights associated thereto, issues involved in declaring a person to be missing, the rights of relatives in terms of civil status and any entitlement to financial assistance or social benefits;

¹ See also A/63/299, sect. IV.

(d) Issues relating to the tracing of missing persons, provisions pertaining to the issuing of identity cards or similar documents, determining the authority in charge of tracing missing persons, setting up a national information bureau to work with the national missing persons authority and the registry of information on missing persons, submitting tracing requests, beginning and ending tracing, access to information on missing persons and protecting data;

(e) The rights of the deceased, covering such matters as the obligation to search for and recover the dead, the registration of deaths, the handling of mortal remains, burials and exhumations, and the handling of unidentified remains;

(f) A chapter on criminal liability setting out the acts that must be recognized as criminal offences under national legislation, and a mechanism for prosecutions;

(g) A section devoted to specifying the authority in charge and another to final provisions.

21. The model legislation comprises 27 articles accompanied by commentaries and three annexes: a model certificate of absence, a model certificate of death, and references to provisions of international humanitarian law.

22. With regard to assistance to States, the Secretariat of the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe has produced a draft recommendation on principles concerning missing persons and the presumption of death, according to which, a fair balance must be struck between the interests of missing persons and of those left behind as well as others with a legitimate interest, particularly with regard to the latter's legitimate interests relating to property and inheritance rights, pension and life insurance rights, the right to enter into a new union (marriage, registered partnership or similar union), parentage and parental rights, and so on. Furthermore, the introduction of the concepts of disappearance and of presumption of death or, as the case may be, the improvement of the existing legislation on this topic, is considered to be of great benefit, in particular for family members who are left behind, as it would clarify their legal position and status.

23. According to the Council of Europe draft recommendation, death is the precondition for the application of the law of succession, for the existence of an inheritance, a testator and an heir, and also for the payment of a survivor's pension or a life insurance policy. Death also automatically terminates marriage (including registered partnerships or similar unions in some Member States) and the corresponding system of marital/partnership property, enabling the survivor to enter into a new relationship without any risk of bigamy.

24. The draft recommendation aims at providing Governments of Member States with assistance in dealing with cases of missing persons. The text is without prejudice to legal obligations of Member States under international humanitarian law or international human rights law and should not be construed as a pretext for easily declaring someone dead. Its principles could be of use in a post-conflict situation, particularly for those with a legitimate interest in declaring someone dead.

VI. RECENT MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF MISSING PERSONS

25. In its resolution 7/28, the Council urged States and encourages intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to take all necessary measures at the national, regional and international levels to address the problem of persons reported missing in connection with armed conflicts and to provide appropriate assistance as requested by the concerned States. Although a great deal of information in this regard is contained in the report of the Secretary-General on missing persons (A/63/299), there have been subsequent developments.

26. In Nepal, on the International Day of the Disappeared on 30 August 2008, ICRC and the Nepal Red Cross Society published the names of more than 1,200 people reported missing by their relatives between 1996 and 2006. ICRC appealed to the Government of Nepal to clarify the fate of those who went missing during the country's 10-year armed conflict. In February 2007, ICRC published a list of 812 names of missing persons, which resulted in 33 families learning the fate of their loved ones. It also organized two seminars, beginning on 14 December 2008 at the Institute of Medicine in Kathmandu, to enhance forensic skills for the accurate identification of human remains.

27. On 3 October 2008, ICRC and the State Commission on Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing Persons of Armenia signed a framework agreement to help clarify the fate of thousands of people who went missing in connection with the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. The agreement will provide a basis for the collection of detailed data on the missing persons from their families. Ante-mortem data typically include photographs and details of the physical characteristics of missing persons, as well as personal effects and clothing they may have been wearing at the time of their disappearance. The information is transmitted to the authorities to assist with future identification of remains. Similar agreements were signed, in April 2008 with the State Commission on Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing Persons of Azerbaijan, and with an equivalent body in Nagorny Karabakh, on 20 October 2008. It has been estimated that more than 4,000 families are still waiting for news of relatives missing in connection with the Nagorny Karabakh conflict.

28. On 16 October 2008, ICRC reported that a memorandum of understanding aimed at clarifying the fate of persons reported missing in connection with the 1980-1988 war had been signed by the Government of Iraq, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and ICRC. Although both Governments had already attempted to determine what happened to those still unaccounted for, it was the first time a document of this nature was signed by both countries with ICRC. The document establishes a clear framework for collecting information and for sharing it between the two countries, and for handing over mortal remains, tasks to be performed by experts from both countries with the support of ICRC. Following the signature of the memorandum on 16 October 2008, 41 Iranian human remains in Iraq and 200 Iraqi human remains in Iran were transferred to their respective homelands on 30 November 2008.

29. Since the beginning of the conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation in August 2008, ICRC has been providing assistance to approximately 500 people who have approached it in Tblisi, seeking its help in searching for missing relatives. In October 2008, ICRC continued to receive tracing requests from people trying to locate missing family members. It reported some progress in its efforts; from 30 August to December 2008,

over 300 individuals had been reunited with their loved ones, in the Tbilisi, Gori and Tskhinvali areas. No progress was made during the period in solving the fate of 2,250 missing persons since the previous conflicts in Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia).

30. On 9 December 2008, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ICRC and the Red Cross Society launched a campaign to speed up the identification of children separated from their parents and to facilitate family reunification. The head of the ICRC Central Tracing Agency for the Democratic Republic of the Congo reported that the initial results had been positive. The efforts were in response to concerns that, among the 250,000 persons displaced in North Kivu as a result of the fighting there since August 2008, many children could have been separated from their parents. ICRC reported that it had registered 134 children since the end of October 2008, but expressed concern that the actual number could be considerably higher. The vast Red Cross network is being used in the country both to register stranded children and to receive the tracing requests of families having lost contact with their children. The details are then broadcast throughout North Kivu on four local radio stations, three times a day. Explanatory posters are displayed in Red Cross offices in the field and in various public places to inform families about the service. In addition, ICRC displays photographs of lost children in areas with a high concentration of displaced people, such as schools, churches and childcare centres, as well as camps for the displaced.

31. ICRC also reported that the International Tracing Service, which opened its archives of 50 million documents on Nazi persecution to the public in November 2007, had, as at November 2008, received 1,300 visitors from 24 countries, including 330 researchers, 100 journalists and 290 victims of Nazi persecution and members of their families. It was also reported that the Service, located in Bad Arolsen in Germany, had in the same period received a total of 11,300 enquiries from 77 countries, of which 2,920 from scholars and journalists. The Service is governed by the 11-nation International Commission for the International Tracing Service under the 1955 Bonn Agreements and the amendments thereto of 2006. ICRC manages the Service on behalf of the International Commission, serving victims and families.

32. ICRC is also working jointly with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on a manual designed for parliamentarians for the implementation of the resolution adopted by IPU at its 115th Assembly on Missing Persons.

33. ICRC also organized the first and second meetings of medico-legal institutes from the Iberoamerican and the Asia-Pacific regions respectively, to promote communication, coordination and cooperation between those institutions for improved management and identification of human remains, including for disaster response. The meetings were organized jointly with medico-legal institutes of Peru and of Melbourne, Australia, respectively.

34. The International Commission on Missing Persons hosted a conference in Belgrade from 28 to 30 November 2008, where more than 100 representatives of associations of families of missing persons, Government institutions from the region, and parliamentarians and human rights organizations met to discuss issues pertinent to determining the fate of missing persons from the armed conflicts of the 1990s in South-East Europe. It was estimated that over 17,000 persons are still missing from these armed conflicts. Key conclusions from the conference included a call for Governments in the region to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and to sign agreements on the

exchange of information concerning missing persons and to cooperate in the search for them; for prosecutors and courts at all levels in countries in the region, to do their utmost to ascertain the whereabouts of mass graves; that the removal of human remains from a primary clandestine burial site to a secondary one be made an indictable offence; and that the protection of witnesses at all stages of any investigation be ensured.

35. The Commission also received a high-level delegation of 19 experts working on the issue of enforced disappearances in Colombia at its headquarters in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 20 to 25 November 2008. The Colombian delegation attended presentations relating to the Commission's experiences and expertise in strengthening institutional capacity, creating viable legislation and enhancing the technical means to locate, recover and identify missing persons. It also stressed the importance of including civil society in all aspects of the process and ensuring that family associations of missing persons are fully informed.

VII. MISSING PERSONS AND THE RULE OF LAW

36. In its resolution 63/183, the General Assembly stressed the need to address the issue of missing persons as part of peacebuilding processes, with reference to all justice and rule of law mechanisms, on the basis of transparency, accountability and public involvement and participation.

37. On the issue of impunity, the International Commission on Missing Persons suggests that the human rights, rule of law and transitional justice dimensions of the missing persons issue be taken into account more fully. In this regard, the Commission cooperates with national and international criminal tribunals through regular progress updates and, if requested, by written depositions and testimony, in certain cases. The Commission's assistance in judicial proceedings is subject to data protection and other procedural safeguards. It also provides seminars and presentations on its work to investigators, prosecutors and judges to inform them of the assistance it provides to Governments on the issue of missing persons, and on how that assistance can contribute to the process of criminal justice in the field of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The last such event was held on 18 December 2008.

38. A study published in 2006 in the International Review of the Red Cross entitled "The missing and transitional justice: the right to know and the fight against impunity", could constitute a useful basis for an analysis of the relationships between the issues of missing persons and transitional justice. The study looks at the ways in which transitional justice mechanisms may support the right of families to know the fate of their relatives, and how the issue of missing persons can be reconciled with an effective fight against impunity. The study concludes that clarification of the fate of persons unaccounted for, as a result of an armed conflict or other situations of violence, is an important issue that needs to be considered in any multidimensional and multi-stakeholder effort to address societies in transition. When peace or other settlements are negotiated, they should receive at least as much attention as other issues, such as refugees and displaced persons, land and property, or human rights and conflict resolution, in parties' efforts to repair their past. The opening of mass graves, the identification of bodies, the establishment of the circumstances that led to death and clarification of the facts are all necessary steps for families to complete their mourning process, for victims to obtain reparation and, in the long term, for peoples and communities to come to terms with their past and move forward in peace.

39. In order to deal properly with the issue of missing persons, the various bodies and institutions involved in transitional justice should endeavour to cooperate. Ad hoc international tribunals or truth and reconciliation commissions, which have a limited lifespan, should give thought from the outset to means and methods of gathering and classifying information and evidence that could make it readily exploitable for both judicial proceedings and attempts to trace the missing. They should allow for effective and practical means of passing on their legacy once their work has ended, and in particular give families and their representatives access to their archives. Similarly, forensic activities deployed by international tribunals should be carried out not only for the purposes of collecting evidence with criminal prosecution in mind, but also to find answers for the families of missing persons. Finally, national authorities should be encouraged and supported through capacity-building initiatives in their resolve to address genuinely the issue of missing persons and thus comply with the requirements of international humanitarian law. Only then can there be hope that families will finally fulfil their right to know the fate of missing relatives and receive appropriate reparation.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

40. **It is essential that additional measures be taken by States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to prevent persons from going missing, to establish the right to know, collect, protect and manage credible and reliable data on missing persons, to develop their forensic science capacities and to address impunity.**

41. **The issue of missing persons is particularly severe in the context of armed conflict. Measures should be taken to minimize this phenomenon, which should be addressed at the national, regional and international levels, as well as in peacebuilding processes, with reference to all justice and rule of law mechanisms, including the judiciary, parliamentary commissions and truth-seeking mechanisms, on the basis of transparency, accountability and public involvement and participation.**

42. **The right of families to know the fate of missing persons should be respected at all times. Such families, victims groups and civil society should be involved in mechanisms or institutions aiming at solving issues related to missing persons.**

43. **Support should be provided for forensic sciences as a component in investigations of human rights violations. Access to independent forensic investigations of violations of human rights and humanitarian law should also be improved. Appropriate mechanisms should be created to continue the recovery and identification process beyond the mandate of judicial and non-judicial mechanisms.**

44. **Contacts between independent forensic experts and judges, prosecutors and lawyers should be enhanced. Technical assistance and training of forensic experts in States where this expertise is not available or not developed sufficiently should be increased.**

45. **The collection, protection and management of credible and reliable data on missing persons, in accordance with international and national standards, should be encouraged, and technical assistance and training should be made available as needed.**
