



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

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New Paper Describes Failure of Iraq to Halt Enforced Disappearances

ST. PAUL, Minn. & WASHINGTON — Iraq must significantly increase efforts to bring an end to enforced disappearances and strengthen human rights protections, according to a paper released today by the Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT). [*Enforced Disappearances: Ambiguity Haunts the Families of Iraq's Missing*](#) amplifies the voices of family members enduring ambiguous loss after the disappearance of loved ones, and calls on the United States and Iraq's allies to hold Iraq accountable for abuses.

“Through the course of our eight years providing rehabilitative care to more than 3,400 Iraqi torture and trauma survivors in Jordan, a recurring theme has emerged among those who have already endured the worst horrors imaginable: the agony of ambiguous loss—where there is no closure or verification of the loss—due to the enforced disappearance of a family member,” said Marie Soueid, CVT policy counsel and the author of the paper. “For many, life as a refugee or asylum seeker in urban Jordan is already marked by struggle and uncertainty, particularly for those who are denied access to a livelihood. For CVT’s clients, who are survivors of torture or war atrocities, the additional strain of not knowing what’s become of a loved one can be crippling.”

Despite existing prohibitions and the fact that enforced disappearances are crimes punishable under international criminal law, the [*International Committee of the Red Cross \(ICRC\) reports*](#) disappearances in 70 countries and territories around the world. Iraq by its own admission has a history as a state with one of the highest rates of disappearance. Across Iraq, disappearances are perpetrated with impunity, by militias both allied with and opposed to the government and by unaffiliated criminal gangs. Current Iraqi law does not specifically define and criminalize disappearances occurring after 2003 in accordance with international law.

As sectarian tensions and violence increased in 2014, Iraqis once again fled in large numbers to Jordan. Of the 310 Iraqi clients who have taken on the healing journey at CVT since December 2015, more than 25 percent have reported a missing family member who may be a victim of enforced disappearance. Reports to CVT indicate that disappearances are not isolated to one region in the country, but may be occurring in Baghdad, Diyala Province, Kirkuk, Basra and across the country. Given the difficulty of tracking and retaining data on human rights abuses in Iraq, the overall number of disappearances is likely vastly underreported.

“More must be done by those in power, and to that end we recommend steps that Iraq and its allies, particularly the United States, can take to better protect civilians—such as those currently fleeing the

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fighting in Mosul,” added Soueid. “As the Iraqi government attempts to assert control over its territory, it must not only hold the land, but win back the trust of its citizens and ensure their protection and dignity, by investigating and punishing abuses against them—even by the state and its allies.”

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The Center for Victims of Torture is a nonprofit organization headquartered in St. Paul, MN, with offices in Atlanta, GA, and Washington, D.C.; and healing initiatives in Africa and the Middle East.

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