

## **International Conference**

***“Enforced and involuntary disappearances in dictatorship and authoritarian past and contemporary settings: a social, legal, and historical appraisal of transitional and transformation policies and mechanisms”***

### ***Opening Remarks***

***By***

***Ambassador Vincenzo Del Monaco***

*13, 14 and 15 December 2021*

*Venue: MAK Albania Hotel, Illyria I,  
Tirana*

***I understand this is taking place in a hybrid form, so we have the Minister of Justice connected remotely, as well as the German Ambassador and other distinguished participants.***

***Honourable Minister, Your Excellences, Honourable Rector of the University of Tirana, Distinguished speakers and panellists, Dear participants,***

I welcome you with great satisfaction today for the opening of this international conference on the issue of enforced disappearances and missing persons.

By getting together and engaging in concerted action, we support the Albanian State and the Albanian society to address effectively this crime of the communist regime.

Reconciliation through recognition and redress is the moral ingredient of social peace here and anywhere else. Today’s international conference can act as a catalyst for further action and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the donor of this project, represented here by the Ambassador of Germany, for its generous financial contribution. Dear Peter, this conference would not be possible without your utmost support.

I also wish to thank once again the co-organizer of this conference – the Centre for Justice and Transformation at the University of Tirana, established with support of the Presence to foster academic debate, precisely in this field.

And, of course, my team, my excellent team, who, faced with numerous challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, were able to bring together this extraordinary panel, both online and for us we who are here in-person.

I love being amongst such a diverse and fascinating group of scholars, practitioners, advocates, and high-level officials gathered here today. I recognize the enormous value of your expertise and of the exchange of experience, being convinced that academic research can add a valuable perspective through its unique approach to finding the truth: analytical rigour, ethical drive and the use of empirical information.

Over the course of the next three days, the issue of enforced and involuntary disappearances will be examined from all perspectives reflecting the different realities many societies both within and beyond the OSCE region experienced in restoring freedom and democratic rule.

Through interactive panel discussions and presentations of cutting-edge research papers from around the world, participants will be able to explore and rethink the issue of the missing in different national contexts from an inter-disciplinary point of view.

Because addressing the issue of enforced disappearances and missing persons effectively is not a simple administrative matter. All institutions have a key role to play, together with the academia, with civil society, with international partners, the OSCE, the UN Family, and all the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is in this spirit, Albania ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances and other international legally binding treaties. On numerous occasions, the Country reaffirmed its commitment to investigate and punish the crimes and violations of human rights committed under the communist regime, and to search, locate and identify remains of persons executed by the regime.

However, as my colleagues informed me, not one single case seems to have been solved successfully to date. Justice and reconciliation is still pending for the relatives of an estimated six thousand persons classified as missing because of judicial or extrajudicial imprisonment or executions carried out between 1945 and 1991. Evidence suggests that the relatives of the missing are often compelled to undertake identification and, in some cases, perform arduous excavation of suspected mass graves single-handedly.

Working closely with the Albanian institutions and civil society, the Presence has been involved in enhancing institutional capacities, supporting legislative and policy-making efforts as well as the promotion of academic and policy debate on the issue of missing persons in Albania.

We supported the creation of the specialized Centre for Justice and Transformation at the University of Tirana whose kind co-operation in organizing this conference could not be overstated. And through the establishment of the Centre, the Presence supported a great number of young Albanian researchers who undertook study projects in various fields of transitional justice.

Last month, together with the University of Tirana we launched a first of its kind interdisciplinary Master programme in Transitional Justice aimed to foster research and public awareness about social, political, and legal issues related to transitional justice.

Most recently, in view of fostering inter-agency cooperation to advance the identification and recovery of the bodies of missing persons, the Presence held a technical workshop. And for the first time, all relevant national and international bodies gathered around to discuss the issue and enhance their co-ordination efforts.

Now, I trust that this conference will serve as a platform for an honest and open debate on ways in which addressing the past will pave the way forward.

Lastly, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to the relatives of missing persons who are here to share their experience in uncovering the truth about the disappearances of their beloved ones over the next few days.

I am convinced that by listening to your testimonies, acknowledging your pain and struggle, and truly embracing your experience and expertise has a potential to help us to identify gaps and opportunities in implementing effective and meaningful solutions on the ground to alleviate the pain and provide restorative justice and reconciliation.

No strategy, policy or mechanism would be effective if it did not reflect your experience and serve to protect the dignity of your relatives.

I therefore thank you for your kind participation; I renew my gratitude to my team, and I wish everyone an engaging and fruitful conference. Thank you very much!