

Praying for all victims of enforced disappearances

"A Voice is heard in Ramah, Rachel crying for her children, refusing to be consoled because they are no more" Mt 2:18

How difficult it is to mourn the loss of a loved one; how much more so when they have been brutally murdered; how unimaginable the pain when they are missing, presumably tortured and killed and you are left with no knowledge of the truth, without even a body to cry over.

This is the situation so many parents, spouses and children find themselves in every day throughout the world. These are the Rachels of today, those who refuse to be consoled, those who demand truth and justice for those they loved.



Mexico: Nitzia and Mita, 16-year-old twins, are looking for their mother, Nitzia Paola Alvarado, who was detained by members of the military on Dec. 29, 2009 along with their uncle José Ángel and their cousin Rocío in the town of Buenaventura, Chihuahua. None of them were taken to a police or military precinct, and they were never seen again.

They, like many others are thought to be indirect victims of the war on drugs and crime launched by President Calderón at the start of his term in December 2006. There are no official figures of how many have disappeared. The only indication of the magnitude of the phenomenon has come from the National Human Rights Commission - an independent government body - in April 2010, when it reported that it had received 5,397 reports of people who have gone missing since the start of the Calderón administration, and that nearly 9,000 dead bodies had never been identified. (Source IPS May 15th 2012)

Philippines: Raymond Manalo, 29, is one of a few abductees who survived to tell his story. Raymond and his brother Reynaldo were taken from their family home by armed men in February 2006. Philippine security forces accused the brothers of being members of the New People's Army, the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Both brothers deny this accusation.

The brothers were held in a cell in a military camp with 12 other abductees, where they were given little food and regularly tortured. "We lived like their slaves." Raymond says, "I still have scars where they branded my skin with searing hot tin cans. They kicked me, smacked me with wood and beat me while pouring running water into my nose... But I didn't want to die. I knew my parents would be looking for me and that thought kept me going. Both me and my brother - whatever they wanted to do, we withstood it."

One day, 18 months after Raymond was taken from his home, the soldiers guarding him at the farm fell asleep, drunk. Raymond and his brother fled.

After his escape Raymond began to speak out about his ordeal. "I wanted to file a case. I wanted to fight and to show that I was a victim who also witnessed crimes—abductions and killings—carried out by the army. I need to expose the human rights violations taking place in the Philippines and help others who have been forcibly disappeared... I have lived a nightmare that will always haunt me and my family's life has been destroyed, yet the government has done nothing to help me. I am free, but I am not really free. I walk around with fear. I want justice for the abuses I experienced, and for those suffered by others who have disappeared." (Source Amnesty International)

A Prayer from the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina

"Jesus, you told the daughters of Jerusalem who wept for you along your painful journey to the cross, not to weep for you but to weep for themselves and their children. They would have to bear the burden of bereavement and tragedy, attacks and injustices. Jesus, you still journey toward the cross whenever state crimes ensue. Mothers still cry out in mourning when their children are executed.

"God of the disappeared and all those bereft of loved ones, we give thanks for each day of simple treasures from those whom we love. It is the shared laughter over coffee, the hug before going to school, the setting sunlight on a loved one's face that make life full of grace. We pray for the humanity of those who have so numbed themselves as to perpetrate such grave crimes. We pray for the sensitivity to cry out when such atrocities occur - wherever they occur, and to whomever - by your grace and through your prayer. Amen."

(from the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, A United Methodist Women Devotional, on the website of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church)

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