

STATEMENT BY EDWARD M. MEZVINSKY
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ON MISSING PERSONS

The United States Government is in strong support of action by the Human Rights Commission on the tragic and continuing problem of disappeared persons. Reports from various parts of the world evidence continuing excesses by law enforcement or security authorities, sanctioned directly or indirectly by governments, resulting in the disappearance of persons for political reasons. Thus, in recent years, thousands, even tens of thousands of persons, have disappeared without a trace in countries under authoritarian regimes. They disappear because security forces have been given nearly unlimited power to arrest, search, interrogate, torture, imprison and even execute without accountability. The relatives of these people live in fear and anguish, unable to obtain information about the whereabouts and fate of their loved ones. We regard these politically sanctioned kidnappings as one of the most serious governmental abuses of human rights confronting the international community.

The Human Rights Commission at this session has taken action on this problem with regard to one country. That is to be commended. Now the Human Rights Commission must act on the same problem with regard to other countries. We must act to ensure that no nation in the world today can engage

with impunity in politically-sanctioned abductions, secret detentions and murders of their citizens. We must act to ensure that law enforcement and security authorities are punished for such excesses. We must act to ensure that searches for missing people are conducted and that information about their fate is made available to their relatives. We must act to protect the human rights of those arrested and detained.

Even in situations of national emergencies, there is no basis under domestic or international law for governments to engage in abductions, torture or murder. Terrorism, which we strongly condemn, cannot be halted in governmental campaigns of counter-terror. Governments are responsible for the safety and protection of their citizens. They are responsible for rendering an accounting of the whereabouts and fate of those apprehended. It is therefore incumbent upon the Human Rights Commission to act by endorsing a resolution on disappeared persons which hopefully will make such egregious practices alien to the experience of any nation.