



General Assembly

Distr.: General
14 February 2024

Original: English

Seventy-eighth session
Agenda item 31
Prevention of armed conflict

International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the tenth report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.



Report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011

Summary

The present report is the tenth prepared by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 for submission to the General Assembly pursuant to its resolution [71/248](#), paragraph 50 of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the resolution establishing the Mechanism ([A/71/755](#)) and paragraph 37 of Assembly resolution [75/193](#).

In a period marked by many different regional priorities and emergencies, as well as an increasingly challenging funding situation, the Mechanism continued to demonstrate its unique value as a justice facilitator in the accountability ecosystem for international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. It responded to an unprecedented level of demand from competent jurisdictions, leveraging the advances made in its structural investigation and offering a growing variety of services in support of investigations and prosecutions of such crimes. The expanding volume and quality of its support have led to justice outcomes and new justice opportunities in several jurisdictions concerning various international crimes, perpetrator groups and communities of victims/survivors. The Mechanism also remains committed to maximizing its assistance for future justice opportunities that are compatible with its mandate and to leveraging its work in support of broader justice objectives, in particular efforts to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, to the extent possible.

An active role of victims/survivors remains central to the Mechanism's pursuit of inclusive justice. It has further expanded and diversified its engagement with civil society actors. Its rights-based victim/survivor-centred approach is given concrete expression through dedicated thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives. Furthermore, the Mechanism remains committed to sharing lessons learned and best practices with accountability actors who work towards the investigation and prosecution of core international crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as in other conflict situations.

I. Introduction

1. The tenth report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 covers the Mechanism's activities from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2024.

2. The General Assembly created the Mechanism in December 2016 with a mandate to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses, and to prepare files in order to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings, in accordance with international law standards, in national, regional or international courts or tribunals that have, or may in the future have, jurisdiction over those crimes.

3. The Mechanism made progress on the implementation of its strategic plan for the period 2023–2025, which is aimed at further establishing the Mechanism as a crucial entity supporting and promoting current and future accountability efforts in the eyes of victims/survivors of core international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism achieved this progress through the significant support that it provided to justice actors; the continued development of its thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives; the strengthening of internal processes; and extensive engagement with Syrian civil society organizations, including victim/survivor associations.

4. Demand from competent jurisdictions and assistance provided by the Mechanism, in its role as a justice facilitator that supports current and future investigations and prosecutions of core international crimes, reached unprecedented levels. As at 31 January 2024, the Mechanism had received 344 requests for assistance from 16 competent jurisdictions and assisted 166 distinct national investigations. In addition, it increased its proactive sharing of information, data sets, evidentiary modules and analytical products with national war crimes units to support their work. These efforts were supported by the continued progress of the Mechanism's structural investigation. The Mechanism's central repository of information and evidence now contains some 246 terabytes of data, the usefulness of which has been augmented through the deployment of additional, enhanced digital information management tools. The Mechanism also made substantial progress across the strategic lines of inquiry within its structural investigation, which continue to deliver critical building blocks for current and future justice opportunities.

5. While preserving the confidential nature of its substantive work, the Mechanism can publicly refer to its support to several important justice outcomes during the reporting period. For instance, in Germany, the Mechanism provided evidence in support of the investigation leading to the conviction on 23 February 2023, by the Berlin Higher Regional Court, of a Palestinian-Syrian for war crimes and murder for firing a warhead into a crowd of civilians in Damascus in 2014. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. In Sweden, the Göteborg District Court convicted a Swedish national on 29 March 2023 of war crimes for posting photographs of severed heads in Raqqah, Syrian Arab Republic, with disparaging comments. The sentence is currently under appeal. The Mechanism supported the investigation by providing information and analysis on the use by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) of a square in Raqqah for violent punishments and for displaying the corpses of victims.

6. The Mechanism can also refer to its support for numerous ongoing criminal proceedings. For instance, it supported several investigations conducted by the French judicial authorities by providing information, evidence and analytical products. One of the investigations led to the indictment of three senior Syrian officials, on 29 March 2023, for complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes for their responsibility

in the disappearance and death of two Franco-Syrian nationals. Another investigation led to the issuance of arrest warrants, on 18 October 2023, against four high-ranking Syrian generals for complicity in deliberate attacks against the civilian population and injury to life as war crimes for their responsibility in attacks conducted in Dar'a in June 2017. A third investigation, on chemical weapons attacks conducted in Duma and eastern Ghutah in August 2013, resulted in the issuance, on 15 November 2023, of arrest warrants against four senior Syrian officials on charges of complicity in crimes against humanity and in war crimes. The Prosecution Office reportedly lodged an appeal against the arrest warrant concerning the President of the Syrian Arab Republic. On 20 November 2023, the Paris Court of Appeal confirmed the indictment of a senior Jaysh al-Islam official and former spokesperson for complicity in war crimes in the form of the recruitment of child soldiers and participation in a group formed for the purpose of committing war crimes. The Mechanism supported the related investigation by providing information and evidence. In Germany, the Federal Prosecutor's Office, on 3 August 2023, arrested a Syrian national accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes in the form of torture and enslavement in relation to the mistreatment of civilians in Tadamun, Damascus. The Mechanism supported the related investigation with information and evidence, including geolocation analysis. Through the conduct of investigative activities and the provision of critical evidence that allowed the addition of war crimes charges, it also facilitated the investigation into crimes committed in south Damascus in 2013 and 2014 that led, on 8 December 2023, to the indictment of two Syrian nationals for membership in one or more foreign terrorist organizations and war crimes in the form of the taking of hostages resulting in the death and killing of protected persons. Similarly, the Mechanism was involved, through providing critical witness evidence, analytical work and background research, in supporting the investigation that led to the indictment, on 2 January 2024, of another Syrian national for membership in a foreign terrorist organization, war crimes against persons and property, and murder. The Mechanism also provided evidence in support of the ongoing trial, before the Frankfurt Higher Regional Court, of a Syrian physician prosecuted for sexual violence, torture, and the killing of civilians as crimes against humanity. In Sweden, the judicial authorities, on 2 January 2024, indicted a former senior officer of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces for aiding and abetting war crimes, in the context of indiscriminate attacks conducted by the Forces in Hama and Homs Governorates in 2012. Support by the Mechanism included an evidentiary module on the commencement of the non-international armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

7. The Mechanism anticipates providing further significant support to justice actors in the upcoming reporting period. For instance, it is preparing to support the case before the International Court of Justice on the *Application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Canada and the Netherlands v. Syrian Arab Republic)* with information and analysis generated through its line of inquiry on detention-related crimes. The Mechanism anticipates that work being conducted within its line of inquiry on ISIL-related crimes concerning the conscription, enlistment and use of children by ISIL in hostilities in the Syrian Arab Republic, including associated harms inflicted in the course of these events, will be of significant use to multiple competent jurisdictions, building on assistance already provided through this line of inquiry. The Mechanism also continues to make progress on its line of inquiry on unlawful attacks and anticipates that its case file on conventional and chemical attacks in 2017 will be of value to justice actors.

8. On the basis of its victim/survivor-centred approach, the Mechanism further developed and implemented its dedicated thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives, such as clarifying the fate of missing persons. It continued to strengthen internal processes designed to integrate these strategies across all aspects of its work. In particular, the Mechanism advanced the implementation of a child- and youth-sensitive approach in its work, by developing a written strategy and

accompanying implementation plan and by organizing the Mechanism's first direct engagement with children affected by events in the Syrian Arab Republic to explain its mandate and hear their views on priorities regarding justice.

9. The Mechanism significantly expanded and intensified its cooperation with civil society actors, which make critical contributions across the full breadth of the Mechanism's work and are important enablers of a victim/survivor-centred approach. During the reporting period, the Mechanism used three key engagements with civil society actors to strengthen its two-way dialogue with these organizations on its work related to crimes committed by ISIL. The first of these was part of the Lausanne platform process, hosted by Switzerland and the Netherlands, in June 2023. The Mechanism continued the dialogue in two further annual meeting formats that it organized with civil society actors, following their successful introduction in 2022. At the Geneva consultation, held in September 2023, the Mechanism specifically sought the perspectives of victim/survivor associations and individuals on its ISIL-related work. At its accountability workshop, held in November 2023, the Mechanism discussed, with civil society organizations from affected communities, challenges related to the documentation of core international crimes connected with ISIL. Moreover, recognizing the importance of creating spaces to hear different priorities of and challenges faced by distinct groups affected by crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Mechanism initiated a series of 12 online meetings. This enabled the Mechanism to reach civil society organizations and victim/survivor associations representing communities, in particular marginalized communities, with which the Mechanism had not previously engaged.

10. The Mechanism welcomed the decision of the General Assembly, in its resolution [77/301](#), to establish the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons in the country and to provide support to victims, survivors and the families of those missing, in close cooperation and complementarity with all relevant actors. The Mechanism noted that that development represented a substantial breakthrough, honouring the unwavering efforts of civil society organizations, victim/survivor associations and families who had persistently called for an international humanitarian response. The Mechanism also welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution [77/301](#) ([A/78/627](#)), containing the terms of reference of the Institution. The Mechanism remains ready to cooperate with this new institution focused on the right to know, as requested by the General Assembly and in accordance with the complementary mandates of the two entities, and looks forward to its operationalization in 2024.

11. On 25 April 2023, the Head of the Mechanism presented the ninth report of the Mechanism ([A/77/751](#)) to the General Assembly, in a plenary meeting under the agenda item entitled "Prevention of armed conflict". She provided an update on the Mechanism's progress in the implementation of its mandate, which was followed by a debate during which the majority of States voiced support for the Mechanism and its work. The next annual debate is scheduled for 24 April 2024.

12. The Mechanism continues to follow closely the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the challenges facing Syrian communities abroad. It shares the grave concerns expressed by the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations representatives regarding the innumerable and incessant challenges that the Syrian people face. The Mechanism urges all States to work towards ending impunity for crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

13. The Mechanism is operating in an increasingly challenging financial environment, with the current programme budget insufficient to meet the resourcing

required to maintain the scope and nature of its work across its structural investigation and respond to the growing demand for its services from competent jurisdictions. These challenges are aggravated by an uncertain outlook regarding voluntary contributions that would allow the Mechanism to maintain its current capacity.

II. The Mechanism's central repository of information and evidence

A. Collecting information and evidence on serious international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic

14. The Mechanism continued to expand and enhance its central repository during the reporting period. In 2023, the Mechanism initiated 120 collection activities. It received documentation from information providers, conducted its own witness interviews and collected materials from the Internet. The Mechanism's evidence-gathering benefited from its ability to conduct field missions in order to meet with sources, conduct witness interviews and receive other evidentiary materials. The Mechanism also received evidence remotely, where necessary and appropriate, including by conducting remote witness interviews. The Mechanism identified and engaged with new sources and strengthened its existing relationships with key sources and information providers. Materials gathered by the Mechanism during the reporting period are of high value to both current and future investigations and prosecutions.

15. In gathering information and evidence, the Mechanism pursued its engagement with a broad range of providers, notably States, international organizations, United Nations system entities, non-governmental organizations and individuals, including witnesses and potential witnesses. All such materials relied upon by the Mechanism in its work are the subject of the Mechanism's independent review. The Mechanism continued to cooperate extensively with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and continued to benefit from the transfer of material from the Commission. The Mechanism also benefits from the Commission's assistance in contacting and liaising with sources and potential witnesses, in support of criminal investigations in national jurisdictions. The Mechanism received additional materials from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) during the reporting period as mandated in OPCW decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 dated 27 June 2018 and in line with the terms of the memorandum of understanding signed between OPCW and the Mechanism on 26 September 2018. Cooperation between the two organizations remains strong. The Mechanism is also receiving support from a growing number of States to advance its structural investigation and case file-related work.

16. As noted in its eighth and ninth reports to the General Assembly, the Mechanism received early access to classified materials contained in the archives of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism pursuant to the applicable conditions prescribed in the Secretary-General's bulletin ([ST/SGB/2019/4](#)). Access to classified material and information received from Member States, and to material subject to conditions placed by third parties, was only granted to the Mechanism where the United Nations Secretariat had received express consent from the Member State or third party concerned. In line with its terms of reference, which contain specific reference to the collection of information and evidence from the Joint Investigative Mechanism, the Mechanism requested copies of certain material contained in the archives through the framework provided in the Secretary-General's bulletin. Upon receiving consent related to classified material and information received from Member States and to material subject to conditions placed by third parties, and

following completion of the procedures set out in the bulletin, including the approval of the Secretary General, the Mechanism received copies of certain material contained in the archives in December 2023.

17. Also in December 2023, the Mechanism received access to classified materials contained in the archives of the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Members of the Mechanism were granted in-person access to consult certain materials relating to the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Ghutah area of Damascus on 21 August 2013. The Mechanism's access was subject to receipt by the Secretariat of express consent from Member States and entities that provide classified information to the Mission, as well as the completion of necessary internal procedures by the Secretariat, including the approval of the Secretary-General. Consistent with its terms of reference and line of inquiry on unlawful attacks, the Mechanism will request copies of material contained in the archive in the next reporting period.

18. The Mechanism maintained its efforts to initiate cooperation with the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic in line with its commitment to independence and impartiality. However, it has yet to receive a response from those authorities. The Mechanism will continue to reach out to all States that may, according to publicly available information, possess relevant evidentiary materials.

B. Processing evidence

19. The Mechanism further improved and increased its capacity to process collected information and evidence, prioritizing effective and efficient solutions for the handling of large and complex volumes of material. It maintained its focus on three strategic areas, namely, the effective exploitation of complex and multimedia data and Internet materials, the management and upgrading of core information and analysis systems, and the execution of information governance, information security and data protection processes and initiatives.

20. Since the establishment of its Internet Resources Unit in 2021, the Mechanism has continuously increased its capacity for effective exploitation of complex and multimedia information and evidence as well as materials derived from Internet sources. During the reporting period, the Mechanism developed and integrated several novel technologies, systems and processes that enhance its ability to access, search, preserve and process Internet data sets, including those from social media and the deep web. Moreover, the Mechanism is deploying advanced review and analysis systems, providing investigators, analysts and legal officers with essential tools for efficient, large-scale data exploitation.

21. To meet the demands of managing and exploiting an extensive video repository, the Mechanism has developed and enriched its multimedia processing pipeline. The pipeline now facilitates the large-scale ingestion and normalization of video and utilizes advanced artificial intelligence and computer vision technologies for machine-assisted review and analysis of video and audio content. For example, by leveraging newly available open-source toolsets, the Mechanism increased the pipeline's capacity to automatically transcribe and translate speech from collected multimedia content. The Mechanism thus further advanced its efforts to accelerate and automate tasks that were previously conducted manually. This remains an essential step for effectively processing the large volumes and complexity of collected information and evidence.

22. In addition, the Mechanism extended and improved the infrastructure for a digital analysis platform, increasing its abilities to identify connections between events, organizations, locations, individuals and other elements. A number of data sets

have been migrated into the data analysis system to allow analysts to generate complex analyses and visualizations. The Mechanism is working to establish a robust core data model and further engage with the platform to perform applicable tasks. The Mechanism further improved efficiency by using automation to streamline the collection and preservation processes. The Mechanism also significantly improved its disaster recovery capacities and processes, further reinforcing the integrity of its information and evidence.

23. To bolster its information governance, the Mechanism is developing a data protection implementation plan, further improving its approach to data protection and harmonizing it with the approaches of other United Nations entities. The Mechanism also conducted an assessment of its capacity for long-term digital preservation and archiving to ensure the future accessibility, integrity and authenticity of its information assets. The Mechanism further introduced new processes and systems, implementing new robust security controls and improving existing ones. Key initiatives included a new access control management policy, a new process for secure disposal of information storage media, and the implementation of a security information and event management solution for central monitoring of security events.

24. The Mechanism continues to coordinate with other similarly mandated entities, including by sharing strategies, tools and processes at the operational level to achieve collective efficiencies. This approach is essential for the United Nations to effectively govern and manage the large quantities and significant complexity of its collected information and evidence.

III. Facilitating justice

A. Analysing evidence and building case files

25. The Mechanism made further significant progress in its analysis of information and evidence in its central repository in the context of projects across its current lines of inquiry and its active case file. The Mechanism's lines of inquiry are focused on detention-related crimes, crimes by individuals associated with ISIL and unlawful attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic. Its active case file relates to a series of chemical and conventional attacks that occurred in 2017. The Mechanism's lines of inquiry and its case file-related work reflect its commitment to an inclusive approach to justice that necessitates giving specific attention to categories of victims/survivors that have historically been overlooked and crimes that have been insufficiently documented. While the Mechanism made meaningful progress across its lines of inquiry and its active case file during the reporting period, the work is challenging because of the breadth and complexity of the events and structures at issue. The Mechanism's capacity to maintain such a pace in the future is dependent on sustaining current resourcing levels. The outlook is precarious at the present time, given the Mechanism's current dependence on short-term appointments, extrabudgetary funding and staff performing multiple functions across various demanding portfolios.

26. As part of its line of inquiry on detention-related crimes, the Mechanism further developed its dedicated analysis of the experiences of individual detainees through an intersectional lens. The Mechanism continued to generate analytical products on detention structures and crimes, which it shared with multiple jurisdictions. It completed a report containing a gender analysis of the Syrian detention system that explores detention-related crimes from a gender perspective in the context of Syrian society. The report is being used to deepen the Mechanism's understanding and integration of gender issues from an intersectional perspective and implement its gender strategy and victim/survivor-centred approach. Building on its analysis, shared

products and engagement with competent jurisdictions, the Mechanism collected and analysed further evidence to bolster and fill evidentiary gaps through targeted investigations and collections. In addition to supporting national criminal investigations, the Mechanism's work on this line of inquiry is directly relevant to the case brought against the Syrian Arab Republic under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment before the International Court of Justice, which the Mechanism is preparing to support.

27. Regarding its ISIL-related line of inquiry, the Mechanism advanced work on an evidentiary module on the conscription, enlistment and use of children in hostilities by ISIL in the Syrian Arab Republic, including through targeted investigative work to fill evidentiary gaps in its central repository. The analytical and investigative report that will form the central piece of the module will factually assess the methods of recruitment of ISIL, the nature of its training, the operation of its training camps, the different ways in which it used children in hostilities, and the impact of these experiences on children. The report will also seek to establish the differing experiences of children in their recruitment, training and use in hostilities depending on the intersecting elements of their identities, including their religion, nationality, gender and age group. The report, and the evidence gathered to prepare it, further advance the integration of the Mechanism's thematic strategy on children and youth into its structural investigation. It is anticipated that the evidentiary module, which will include the report, evidence upon which it relies and a list of those evidentiary records, will be ready to be shared with competent jurisdictions in the first half of 2024. Various other products prepared in the context of this line of inquiry were also shared with competent jurisdictions during the reporting period.

28. Concerning its line of inquiry on unlawful attacks, the Mechanism significantly advanced work on its case file involving a series of chemical and conventional attacks that occurred in 2017. Following the completion of a comprehensive independent review of information and evidence held in the central repository, the Mechanism narrowed the scope of its case file to focus its investigative resources on evidentially stronger allegations. The Mechanism is now conducting a targeted investigation to close evidence gaps identified through its intensive review process.

B. Frameworks for sharing and cooperation

29. The Mechanism's activities are supported by numerous cooperation frameworks with a myriad of relevant actors, from civil society organizations to international organizations, United Nations bodies and State entities. Because of the nature of the Mechanism – a United Nations entity without law enforcement authority relying on the cooperation of information providers – such cooperation frameworks are important for the Mechanism to fulfil its mandate. They foster the Mechanism's collection and preservation endeavours, as well as its ability to conduct investigative activities in a growing number of States. At the time of reporting, the Mechanism had concluded 91 cooperation frameworks. Such frameworks are not a prerequisite for cooperation with the Mechanism, and its collaboration with relevant actors reaches well beyond these 91 frameworks.

30. Cooperation with information providers has taken on a new shape since February 2023, as the Mechanism strengthened its investigative activities in support of its lines of inquiry and in response to requests for assistance concerning domestic criminal investigations and prosecutions. Collaboration with information providers has become multifaceted, extending beyond instances of collection of data sets for preservation for future justice opportunities and encompassing the targeted collection of evidence directly relevant to active investigations, the identification of witnesses for interviews conducted by the Mechanism, dynamic and ongoing engagement to

nurture evolving investigations, and the proactive sharing of information regarding the presence of alleged perpetrators on the territories of States able to prosecute them.

31. Importantly, through new consultations and workshops, the Mechanism has worked towards further developing a two-way dialogue with information providers defending the interests of victims and survivors and with civil society organizations run by representatives of the communities that are directly affected by the crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic and involved in accountability efforts. The Mechanism considers this dialogue to be critical for advancing its understanding of the perspectives and needs of victims/survivors and affected communities regarding justice priorities and for exploring existing barriers to documentation and access to justice and possible strategies for addressing them. It is also an effective vehicle for directly informing concerned actors of the Mechanism's work and strengthening cooperation to best support justice opportunities.

32. Cooperation discussions with States to access relevant materials in their possession yielded important results. The Mechanism's central repository is increasingly enhanced by high-value evidence provided by domestic judicial authorities. This material not only feeds the Mechanism's lines of inquiry, it also directly benefits investigations conducted in competent jurisdictions.

C. Sharing information and evidence with competent jurisdictions

33. The Mechanism is assisting numerous investigative, prosecutorial and judicial authorities investigating and prosecuting core international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic, both in response to requests for assistance and on its own initiative.

34. The frequency of requests for assistance submitted to the Mechanism has further accelerated, with 344 requests for assistance from 16 competent jurisdictions received by 31 January 2024. The Mechanism determined that it did not have a mandate to entertain 4 of the 344 requests for assistance that it received, while it processed and closed 267 of them. Work is ongoing for another 37 requests and will soon begin for the remaining 36 pending requests. The 344 requests for assistance submitted to the Mechanism pertain to 256 distinct investigations or prosecutions, of which 166 have already been assisted by the Mechanism through the sharing of information, evidence and/or analytical products.

35. The Mechanism received 102 new requests for assistance between 1 February 2023 and 31 January 2024 alone while working on a total of 135 requests during that period. The scope of the Mechanism's assistance in response to requests from competent jurisdictions continues to evolve. From single instances of support in past years, the Mechanism is increasingly devoting time and resources to provide continuous support to active investigations by conducting periodic searches for new relevant materials in its central repository, renewing open-source investigations to find information unavailable before, providing newly developed analytical products, re-engaging with information providers about changes in their consent or willingness to provide evidence and offering other forms of assistance.

36. In response to the demands of competent jurisdictions, the Mechanism has also intensified its analytical and investigative activities tailored to ongoing domestic investigations and prosecutions. A total of 42 discrete analytical products prepared by the Mechanism have now been shared in support of judicial proceedings. Thanks to the increase of resources dedicated to responses to requests for assistance, 29 per cent of the responses submitted by the Mechanism during the reporting period included value-added investigation, such as engagement with witnesses, witness interviews or

the identification and collection of directly relevant evidence for the specific domestic investigation.

37. The Mechanism also maintained its proactive sharing operations, providing information and materials of relevance to competent jurisdictions on its own initiative. Building on the 19 proactive sharing activities conducted prior to 31 January 2022, the Mechanism conducted an additional 25 such activities in support of justice efforts during the reporting period.

38. In addition, there has been a significant growth of sharing activities performed by the Mechanism for judicial purposes, both proactively and in response to requests for assistance – from 117 in the previous cycle to 182 during the reporting period. The Mechanism’s capacity to maintain the same volume and scope of support in the future will require the existing level of resourcing to be maintained.

IV. Mechanism-wide developments

A. Update on thematic strategies

Victim/survivor-centred approach

39. The Mechanism’s victim/survivor-centred approach has remained at the core of its work. The Mechanism continued to meaningfully operationalize its commitment to focusing on the experiences, perspectives and priorities of a broad range of victims/survivors of international crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic from a rights-based perspective. A key methodological component for developing this approach is ongoing dialogue with victim/survivor associations, individuals and civil society organizations, utilizing various modalities of engagement. In addition, thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives are specific expressions of the victim/survivor-centred approach in the Mechanism’s work, with the integration of thematic strategies explicitly incorporated as a core priority in the Mechanism’s strategic plan for the period 2023–2025.

40. The Mechanism’s commitment to inclusive justice has been prevalent in its work to support justice opportunities, with the Mechanism facilitating a clear focus on thematic issues such as gender, and children and youth, within the accountability ecosystem for crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. For example, at the request of a competent jurisdiction, the Mechanism facilitated peer-to-peer engagement on trauma-centred interviewing techniques and procedures and supported justice actors in strengthening their victim/survivor-centred approaches in specific justice initiatives. The Mechanism has also maintained its practice of sharing experiences on its thematic strategies and associated tools with a range of justice actors, including civil society, the International Criminal Court, United Nations commissions of inquiry, other United Nations accountability mechanisms and national justice actors.

41. The Mechanism continued to develop its two-way dialogue with a variety of accountability and justice actors. Engagements with civil society actors in the past year included the annual Lausanne platform, and the annual consultation with victim/survivor associations and individuals followed by its workshop with civil society organizations focused on documentation work. The Mechanism used these convenings to present and discuss its ISIL-related work. A series of 12 online convenings were also held with specific groups and communities, many of which have to date received less attention in documentation and accountability efforts. In addition, the Mechanism engaged directly, for the first time, with children affected by events in the Syrian Arab Republic, to explain its work and gather children’s

perspectives on justice priorities. Key findings and insights arising from these engagements are being integrated into the Mechanism's substantive work, the provision of support to jurisdictions and the refinement of future engagements with victims/survivors and civil society organizations. In the past year, strategic consideration has also been given to consolidating the Mechanism's distinct strategies on victim/survivor-centred approaches, gender, and children and youth for more efficient mainstreaming into daily workflows.

Integrating gender perspectives

42. The Mechanism's gender strategy and accompanying implementation plan provide overall guidance for the Mechanism to integrate a gender analysis into all its work to address the adverse impact of the discriminatory gender hierarchy and create additional opportunities for inclusive justice as a result. The Mechanism has been involved in continued outreach and engagement during the reporting period, following the strategy's public release in 2022, to collaborate with other stakeholders on effective strategies for the integration of gender perspectives. This included accommodating requests from affected community civil society actors for a series of online consultations focused specifically on the Mechanism's gender strategy.

43. The Mechanism's internal working group on gender and the victim/survivor-centred approach facilitated the implementation of a gender-sensitive approach across all sections. The Mechanism has reinforced its contextual understanding of the impact of gender factors on detention-related crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic through the preparation of a dedicated report examining the role of gender in the Syrian detention system.

44. Foundational gender training was provided to staff joining the Mechanism to assist in developing the skills and competencies necessary to effectively integrate gender perspectives into their work.

Integrating child- and youth-sensitive perspectives

45. The Mechanism further advanced its efforts to integrate a child- and youth-sensitive perspective into its work. The Mechanism finalized the first iteration of its written strategy and accompanying implementation plan on children and youth, which serves to record the steps that it has been taking since the start of its work and provides strategic direction for moving forward. In 2024, external consultations will be conducted with child- and youth-focused organizations and experts to further refine and strengthen the strategy prior to public release. The Mechanism is also developing child-friendly materials to accompany the publication.

46. The Mechanism organized or participated in several initiatives focused on effectively addressing crimes against children during the reporting period. Notably, for the first time, the Mechanism engaged directly with Syrian children to explain its mandate and gather child perspectives on justice and accountability. A tailored framework, devised in collaboration with a child-focused organization, provided the foundation for ensuring rights-based, meaningful and safe interaction. This included developing a child-friendly methodology and materials to interact effectively with the child participants, as well as robust safeguarding and security for the process.

47. The Mechanism's internal working group on children and youth facilitated the implementation of a child- and youth-sensitive approach across all sections. Bespoke training on child interviewing was devised with an external partner and provided to investigators and witness support staff. The ISIL-related line of inquiry provides an example of the integration of a child- and youth-sensitive lens into the Mechanism's structural investigation. With a focus on the enlistment, conscription and use of children in hostilities and the broad range of harms inflicted as a result, the Mechanism

has worked to identify and fill evidence gaps relating to children and youth, to centre the experiences of child and youth victims and to reflect the intersectional aspects of their experiences throughout its implementation of the project.

Broader justice objectives: missing persons

48. The Mechanism's contribution to clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in the Syrian context is guided by its commitment to a victim/survivor-centred approach and the right of families of those missing to know what happened to their loved ones. In line with General Assembly resolutions [76/228](#) and [77/230](#), the Mechanism continued to identify additional avenues for assisting in the search for the missing. Further to the decision of the General Assembly to establish the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Mechanism contributed to consultations with Member States and United Nations entities, as well as other international and civil society organizations, on how to operationalize the Institution, in close consultation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Mechanism is prepared to cooperate with the Institution, as appropriate within its mandate and available resources. Cooperation could include in particular the sharing of information relevant to the search for the missing, through modalities that would safeguard the specific mandate of the new institution, while meeting the needs of victims, survivors and the families of those missing.

49. The Mechanism continued the implementation of its preliminary system for tagging information and evidence to capture information regarding missing persons. Through this system, the Mechanism has been able to share relevant information to help clarify the fate and whereabouts of persons missing in connection with events in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

B. Operational support

50. Operational support involves providing services relating to witness and victim/survivor protection and support, security and language assistance. During the reporting period, the Mechanism further strengthened its protection capability through the use of extrabudgetary resources, by exploring cooperation with Member States willing to relocate witnesses to or resettle them on their territory and through collaboration with other United Nations and non-United Nations entities to facilitate witness protection and support. The Mechanism operationalized best international practices in its protection and support services, including in interactions with cooperating witnesses who have relayed serious and credible concerns for their security. It continued to develop and refine relevant procedures concerning the protection of and psychosocial support for witnesses, including reviewing procedures to align them with the Mechanism's strategies related to gender, children and youth. The support and protection services adhere to a victim/survivor-centred approach, integrating the Mechanism's overarching principles and strategies.

51. The Mechanism further enhanced its referral capabilities, emphasizing the paramount importance of prioritizing the safety and well-being of victims/survivors and witnesses in its services. Extensive efforts were made to map available medical, psychological and psychiatric services in regions where victims and witnesses are situated. This meticulous mapping ensures adherence to a robust referral protocol and confirms the accessibility of services for beneficiaries. As part of an ongoing commitment to refining referral capabilities, the protection team facilitates opportunities for victims and witnesses to offer feedback on referral services. This feedback loop contributes to the continual improvement of service mapping and enhances the overall quality of referrals.

52. Security is integrated into all areas of the Mechanism's operations, from consultations with interlocutors hosted in Geneva to operations in the field. The Mechanism worked closely with the Safety and Security Section of the United Nations Office at Geneva to ensure the physical security of both staff members and the premises while further strengthening its relationship with the United Nations Department for Safety and Security to ensure the safe planning and conduct of field missions. The Mechanism ensured that its staff received appropriate training on safe and secure approaches in field environments and was planning women's security awareness training for its female staff in the upcoming period.

53. Interpretation and translation support was provided or facilitated for field missions, witness interviews, consultations with civil society organizations and victims/survivors, outreach and work on the Mechanism's analytical products. In addition to Arabic and English, languages supported included French, German, Kurdish (Bahdini/Kurmanji) and Turkish. The Mechanism was able to build its own roster of Arabic interpreters, as well as a translation roster for different languages, including Arabic. Guidance on gender-related terminology was updated for use by all staff.

C. Funding

54. Pursuant to paragraph 35 of General Assembly resolution [72/191](#), the Secretary-General has included the Mechanism in the proposed programme budget since 2020. There has been no increase in the level of staff resources since then. In paragraph 31 of its resolution [78/222](#), the Assembly urged the Secretary-General to include further necessary resources to address the Mechanism's significantly increased workload since 2020 and ensure the effective discharge of its mandate.

55. While the Mechanism continued to utilize extrabudgetary resources to complement insufficient regular budget resources, thereby ensuring the implementation of its mandate, its trust fund is gradually being depleted. For 2024, no firm pledges exist to fully cover the needs identified in its strategic plan. A sustained, structural increase of resources allocated through the programme budget would reduce this funding shortfall and put the Mechanism in a more promising position to maintain both the existing pace at which it is progressing its structural investigation and the level of assistance that it is providing in line with the increasing demand for its services from competent jurisdictions.

D. Team

56. The Mechanism has further advanced its recruitment efforts. At the end of the reporting period, 54 of the 60 approved regular budget posts were encumbered. By the end of the reporting period, an additional 28 posts were being funded by voluntary contributions, which enabled the Mechanism to maintain the progress of its structural investigation and its level of assistance to competent jurisdictions, further advancing the implementation of its mandate.

57. The Mechanism is actively implementing initiatives to provide support for staff exposed to potentially traumatizing materials. Capacity-building programmes tailored to the requirements of middle management staff have been instituted with the aim of equipping leaders with the requisite skills and knowledge for effectively overseeing teams engaged in handling sensitive content. In addition, structured support sessions are conducted for staff following critical incidents, fostering a supportive environment conducive to processing and coping with challenging experiences. Recognizing the profound impact of trauma exposure, the Mechanism has established in-house counselling services that are readily accessible. These

services offer confidential and professional support, underscoring the Mechanism's commitment to ensuring the mental health and resilience of its personnel that confront demanding work contexts.

V. Recommendations

58. The Mechanism seeks cooperation to fulfil its mandate and maximize its impact, as set out below.

A. Cooperation with the United Nations and with other international organizations

59. The Mechanism requests the United Nations and other international organizations:

(a) To ensure that the Mechanism has full access to materials held within the United Nations system concerning crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic and to put in place necessary arrangements to that end;

(b) To ensure that relevant United Nations agencies coordinate and cooperate fully with the Mechanism, including through the timely execution of requests for information and assistance;

(c) To engage in dialogue with the Mechanism to promote coordination across the humanitarian, human rights and accountability spectrum with a view to sharing information systematically with the Mechanism;

(d) To share with the Mechanism information regarding effective humanitarian referral pathways to assist victims/survivors of international crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic and to facilitate access to support services where possible;

(e) To engage with the Mechanism on its victim/survivor-centred approach and associated strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives, such as helping to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, in order to facilitate inclusive justice by surfacing and addressing the experiences of a broad range of victims/survivors;

(f) To ensure that other initiatives within the United Nations system involving the investigation, documentation and/or prosecution of crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic take into account the Mechanism's mandate and promote cooperation between and the mutual benefits of such initiatives and the Mechanism to the greatest extent possible;

(g) To ensure the inclusion of the Mechanism in relevant consultations in connection with its mandated functions of collecting, consolidating, preserving and analysing information and evidence of core international crimes, including topical questions related to information governance and management, records and archives management, and data protection.

B. Cooperation with States

60. The Mechanism requests Member States:

(a) To increase support to the Mechanism through the regular budget and complementary voluntary contributions to address the Mechanism's significantly increased workload since 2020 and ensure the effective discharge of its mandate;

- (b) To ensure broad cooperation and engagement with the Mechanism and to implement any agreements and frameworks required to that end in a timely manner, in consultation with the Mechanism;
- (c) To coordinate the efforts of relevant national actors and raise awareness of the Mechanism's mandate to facilitate its work;
- (d) To ensure that initiatives concerning the documentation, investigation and prosecution of crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic take into account the Mechanism's mandate to support impartial, independent and inclusive justice;
- (e) To ensure, if needed, that efficient and effective procedures are in place to facilitate access to their territories for the Mechanism;
- (f) For States hosting Syrian refugee communities, to provide information and facilitate cooperation between the Mechanism and domestic agencies and local actors that are relevant to the Mechanism's work;
- (g) To consider entering into cooperative agreements with the Mechanism to provide witness protection and support-related services necessitated by the Mechanism's work;
- (h) To engage with the Mechanism on how it can assist national justice actors in addressing the experiences of a broad range of victims/survivors and achieving more inclusive justice, in line with its victim/survivor-centred approach.

C. Cooperation with civil society

61. The Mechanism requests civil society:

- (a) To share with the Mechanism all available information and evidence relevant for facilitating accountability processes and, where required, access to witnesses and potential witnesses, in a timely manner;
- (b) To engage with the Mechanism regarding coordination strategies for documentation work concerning past and ongoing crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic;
- (c) To engage with the Mechanism on its victim/survivor-centred approach and associated strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives, such as helping to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, in order to facilitate inclusive justice by surfacing and addressing the experiences of a broad range of victims/survivors;
- (d) To assist the Mechanism in reaching out to other civil society actors, in particular victim/survivor associations, and to foster an overall understanding of the Mechanism's mandate and work;
- (e) To share with the Mechanism information regarding effective medical and psychosocial services to assist victims of international crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic and to facilitate access to such services as required.

VI. Conclusion

62. During the reporting cycle, the Mechanism made considerable progress towards its objective of facilitating inclusive justice for the most serious crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. While the situation in the country remains volatile and the humanitarian conditions extremely difficult, the efforts of the Mechanism and its many Syrian and international partners to hold accountable those

responsible for core international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic continue unabated. The Mechanism is now serving some 16 competent jurisdictions and is further deepening and intensifying its trusted partnerships with Syrian civil society, Member States and international organizations. In a time of multiple impunity crises across the globe, and at a moment when the region has once again been brought to the brink of a wider conflagration, the Mechanism provides considerable value to competent jurisdictions, which remain committed to demonstrating the scale, complexity and gravity of crimes committed in the country. In this context, the Mechanism has been able to apply its own limited resources effectively and efficiently, leveraging its central repository and structural investigation and responding to the continually increasing demand from competent jurisdictions, on the basis of a victim/survivor-centred approach towards more comprehensive and inclusive justice.

63. Victims/survivors of international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic and their families remain at the heart of the Mechanism's work. In 2023, the Mechanism further expanded its multifaceted engagement with civil society, including through its now annual, dedicated consultations with victim/survivor associations, and workshops to deepen the cooperation with civil society organizations specializing in the documentation of core crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as new online convenings. The Mechanism has also continued to share lessons learned and best practices from its pioneering work in facilitating justice in the context of the Syrian situation, with various interested stakeholders pursuing accountability in other contexts, where such experiences remain in high demand.

64. The Mechanism is deeply committed to facilitating broader justice objectives, as enshrined in its mandate and the underlying goal of General Assembly resolution [71/248](#) to pursue practical steps towards justice for all victims and the prevention of future violations. It is fully conscious of, and sensitive to, the intersections between its criminal accountability-focused work and such broader justice objectives and is eager to take steps to support them where possible and in line with its mandate. In the upcoming period, the Mechanism will be particularly committed to supporting the operationalization of the newly established Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, where appropriate and when requested, within the limits of its resources.

65. While the demand for its assistance keeps growing, the Mechanism notes with concern that the continued level of hostilities in the Syrian Arab Republic is not matched by the same level of collective determination from the international community to bring an end to the conflict and the related violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses. The role of the Mechanism may have become ever more important in this context, but it will not be a substitute for a comprehensive solution to ensure fulsome accountability for the range of crimes that have been and continue to be committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

66. The Mechanism is grateful for the support extended to it by States, the United Nations system, other international organizations, civil society actors and individuals. It is especially grateful to Syrian civil society, including victim/survivor associations, for its indefatigable pursuit of comprehensive justice. In line with the letter and spirit of its mandate, the Mechanism will continue to pursue all available opportunities for meaningful justice whenever and wherever they arise.