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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 eleventh 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 eleventh 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](#).

This report comes at a time of significant change in the Syrian Arab Republic following the end of the rule of Bashar Al-Assad in early December 2024. For the first time in the 14 years since the outbreak of a violent conflict that led to one of the most severe situations of mass atrocities in history, there is an opportunity to deliver on the international community's commitment to comprehensive justice and accountability.

When creating the Mechanism in 2016, the General Assembly, in its resolution [71/248](#), stressed the need for any political process aimed at resolving the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure credible and comprehensive accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses committed in the country in order to bring about reconciliation and sustainable peace.

With that aim and in the light of its mandate, the Mechanism visited the Syrian Arab Republic for the first time in late December 2024 and has had positive initial engagements with the caretaker authorities since then. Nonetheless, the Mechanism is still awaiting formal authorization to start operating in the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with its mandate.

The new realities and subsequent needs have further exacerbated the Mechanism's funding and resource limitations. Its assessed contributions have not changed since the Mechanism was first included in the regular budget of the United Nations in 2020, despite support from Member States for additional resources to be allocated. In 2024, the General Assembly, in its resolution [79/185](#), urged the Secretary-General to include further necessary resources to address the Mechanism's significantly increased workload since 2020 in particular to meet the growing demands from competent jurisdictions, to be able to facilitate access to justice for victims, survivors and witnesses while ensuring their safety and protection, and to respond to the increased need to preserve existing information and evidence at risk of loss or destruction. The Mechanism's funding gap in voluntary contributions for 2025 is estimated at \$7.5 million, subject to modification pending further assessment of additional resource requirements arising from the developing situation on the ground in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Mechanism remains committed to facilitating and expediting 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 the most serious crimes under international law. At the time of reporting, the Mechanism had received 437 requests for assistance from 16

jurisdictions, including requests related to the proceedings initiated by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Canada regarding the alleged violations by the Syrian Arab Republic of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

The Mechanism continues to facilitate inclusive justice, ensuring that its work in the Syrian Arab Republic and beyond is guided by its victim/survivor-centred approach that integrates two-way dialogue with civil society and affected community organizations and its thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives.

I. Introduction

1. The eleventh 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 2024 to 31 January 2025.
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. Over the reporting period, 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 in supporting and promoting current and future accountability efforts for victims/survivors of core international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism achieved this progress through the significant support provided by the Mechanism to justice actors; the continued development, implementation and improvement of its inclusive justice approach, including thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives; the strengthening of internal processes; and meaningful engagement with Syrian civil society organizations, including victim/survivor associations.
4. The events of 8 December 2024 have increased hope that comprehensive justice for the Syrian people is achievable. The Mechanism was created in 2016 to prepare for this very situation. Since its establishment, the Mechanism has worked effectively with Syrian individuals and representatives of civil society organizations, who have been at the forefront of accountability efforts, as first responders on the ground, documenters, witnesses and advocates. They continue to demand comprehensive justice and accountability continue.
5. Since beginning its work, the Mechanism has reported regularly to the General Assembly on its efforts to initiate cooperation with the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic in line with its commitment to independence and impartiality. Despite those efforts, the Mechanism had never received a response from the authorities. On 21 December 2024, exactly eight years to the day on which the Mechanism was created by the Assembly, the Head of the Mechanism visited Damascus for the first time, following authorization from the caretaker authorities. After constructive discussions with the caretaker authorities, he visited the terrorism courts in Damascus and was shown examples of large volumes of documentation in need of preservation, including the original Caesar files. He further met with a number of Syrian civil society representatives, who underscored their demand for an inclusive and comprehensive justice process moving forward.
6. Following this initial visit, the Mechanism deployed a liaison officer based in the Resident Coordinator Office in Damascus and formally requested permission for the Mechanism to deploy and conduct operations in the Syrian Arab Republic in furtherance of its mandate. The Mechanism is awaiting a formal response from the caretaker authorities. Subject to receiving formal approval from the relevant authorities, the Mechanism aims to open a field office in Damascus to maximize its operational work. The feasibility of this also depends on sufficient resources being made available to the Mechanism for this purpose.

7. The Mechanism has continuously coordinated with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic on matters of mutual relevance arising from the events in the country in December 2024, noting that each entity's mandate is distinct but complementary. The Mechanism continues to benefit from the sharing of information and evidence by the Commission and remains ready to assist the Institution, as appropriate.

8. Once permitted, the Mechanism plans to assess evidence preservation needs and priorities on the ground in the Syrian Arab Republic with a view to advancing investigations against perpetrators affiliated with the Assad regime and other relevant groups. The Mechanism will seek to promote coordination among relevant actors, including third-State jurisdictions, working on such investigations.

9. The Mechanism made significant progress across all areas of its work. Its central repository of information and evidence contains approximately 280 terabytes of data, having benefited from 154 collection activities conducted in 2024. The usefulness of that data has been augmented through the continued deployment of streamlined and automated digital information management tools. The Mechanism also made progress across the strategic lines of inquiry within its structural investigation, which continue to deliver critical building blocks for current and future justice opportunities, including on detention-related crimes linked to the rule of Bashar Al-Assad, crimes committed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and unlawful attacks, including the use of chemical weapons. As at 31 January 2025, the Mechanism had received 432 requests for assistance from 16 competent jurisdictions and assisted with 304 distinct national investigations. In addition, it increased its proactive sharing of information, data sets and analytical reports with national war crimes units to support their work, which has led to an increased number of investigations, arrest warrants, cases and convictions in third-State jurisdictions.

10. To facilitate a broader range of justice and accountability efforts, on 6 December 2024, the Mechanism released, on its website, a public redacted version of a detailed report analysing the widespread and systematic commission of torture, ill-treatment and related violations across more than 100 government detention facilities controlled by the Assad regime. Based on detailed narratives provided by hundreds of former male and female detainees, corroborated by other evidence, including the Caesar photos, medical forensic reports and hundreds of Syrian government documents, the report contains descriptions of consistent patterns of inhumane detention conditions, physical torture and profound psychological harm, including gender-based crimes and crimes targeting detainees on intersecting grounds. This analysis provides a glimpse of the paper trail of evidence of the systematized mass torture and killings committed in the detention facilities during the rule of Bashar Al-Assad over the course of more than a decade.

11. The Mechanism's commitment to inclusive justice remained key during the reporting period. Efforts aimed at further developing and operationalizing the Mechanism's thematic strategies, which are specific expressions of its rights-based victim/survivor-centred approach, continued. A review of the Mechanism's gender strategy was initiated, comprehensive internal consultations on its child and youth strategy were conducted, and external consultations were also launched. Mechanism-wide capacity-building on thematic issues also continued. The Mechanism also strengthened its protection and support capabilities and frameworks.

12. During the reporting period, the Mechanism continued to prioritize effective dialogue and cooperation with civil society actors, including representatives of victim/survivor associations, who make critical contributions across the full breadth of the Mechanism's work and play an important role in the development of its

victim/survivor-centred approach. The Mechanism held two in-person convenings with civil society actors, alongside its regular online meetings, to strengthen the two-way dialogue on key aspects of its work. Participants from communities affected by crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic shared their experiences and priorities, emphasizing the importance of justice and accountability.

13. On 24 April 2024, the former Head of the Mechanism, Catherine Marchi-Uhel, presented the tenth report of the Mechanism ([A/78/772](#)) 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. In May 2024, Robert Petit took up his functions as the newly appointed Head of the Mechanism. The next annual debate of the General Assembly on the work of the Mechanism is scheduled for 29 April 2025.

14. The Mechanism continues to follow closely the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. It shares the commitment expressed by the Secretary-General to helping Syrians to build a country where reconciliation, justice, freedom and prosperity are shared realities for all, as a path to sustainable peace. The Secretary-General has reiterated that all international mechanisms to advance the protection of human rights and accountability for crimes committed must be able to carry out their vital work in the Syrian Arab Republic, a sentiment echoed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Accordingly, the Mechanism urges all States to work towards building a future Syrian Arab Republic based on justice and the rule of law, ensuring that perpetrators of the worst crimes under international law are held to account in fair and independent proceedings.

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

15. The Mechanism continued to expand and enhance its central repository of information and evidence during the reporting period. In 2024, the Mechanism initiated 154 collection activities. It received documentation from information providers, conducted its own witness interviews and collected materials from the Internet. The Mechanism gathered evidence during the missions that it conducted for the purposes of meeting with sources and conducting witness interviews. It also conducted witness interviews and received other forms of evidence at the duty station. The Mechanism gathered evidence remotely where necessary and appropriate, including by conducting a limited number of remote witness interviews. The Mechanism identified and engaged with new sources and strengthened its relationships with existing ones. The Mechanism’s evidence collection efforts were primarily conducted in furtherance of its strategic lines of inquiry, its active case file and its responses to requests for assistance from competent jurisdictions. In relation to those activities, the Mechanism sought to strengthen its holdings, including by collecting materials relevant to crimes against children and gender-based crimes and evidence linking crimes to perpetrator groups.

16. In gathering information and evidence, the Mechanism continued to engage with a broad range of providers, notably States, international organizations, United Nations system entities, non-governmental organizations and individuals, including witnesses and potential witnesses. The Mechanism continued to cooperate with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and received

materials from the Commission during the reporting period. 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 also continued to engage and cooperate regularly with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). 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, the Mechanism received materials from OPCW during the reporting period relating to the Mechanism's active case file regarding chemical and conventional attacks that occurred in 2017. In this context, the Mechanism is engaging with OPCW in order to maximize the Mechanism's capacity to analyse and integrate OPCW materials recognizing the challenges posed by the classification and handling of the respective information. The Mechanism has also requested additional materials concerning the investigation by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission on the use of a toxic chemical in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017. These materials are critical to the Mechanism's case file.

17. As previously reported, in December 2023, the Mechanism received partial 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 partial, 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 United Nations Secretariat of express consent from the Member States and entities that had provided classified information to the Mission, as well as to the completion of necessary internal procedures by the Secretariat, including approval by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Consistent with its terms of reference and strategic line of inquiry on unlawful attacks, the Mechanism requested copies of certain materials contained in the archives. Thereafter, upon receiving consent related to classified material and information received from the Member States concerned and to material subject to conditions placed by third parties, and following the completion of the aforementioned necessary internal procedures, the Mechanism received copies of certain materials contained in the archives in December 2024.

18. Following the end of the rule of Bashar Al-Assad, the Mechanism requested that the caretaker authorities in the Syrian Arab Republic permit Mechanism personnel to access Syrian territory in furtherance of the Mechanism's mandate to collect and preserve evidence. The Mechanism is awaiting a response.

19. The Mechanism will continue to reach out to other States that may, according to publicly available information, possess relevant evidentiary materials, including States that oppose the Mechanism's mandate.

B. Processing evidence

20. The Mechanism made further advancements in its ability to handle and process large volumes of complex information and evidence. It maintained its focus on three main strategic areas: effectively maximizing the exploitation of Internet resources; managing and upgrading core information and analysis systems; and developing information governance processes involving information security, information management and data protection.

21. During the reporting period, the Internet Resources Unit strengthened its capacity for exploitation of complex multimedia information and evidence, including materials derived from open-source channels. The Mechanism enhanced and

automated its multimedia processing pipeline, further incorporating advanced artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies to capture key insights from multimedia data, such as videos, images and audio files. Moreover, the Mechanism improved the quality of its analytical products by integrating specialized data analysis and geolocation services and mapping, which ensure higher levels of analytical accuracy and precision.

22. The Mechanism also continued to improve its digital analysis infrastructure, enhancing automation to streamline collection and preservation processes. One significant development during the reporting period involved the debut of a process for regularly auditing the Mechanism's digital vault. The process was designed with automation in mind and serves to ensure that the information and evidence held in the Mechanism's digital vault remain uncorrupted and unaltered.

23. Furthermore, the Mechanism proceeded to enhance its disaster recovery capabilities and its ability to respond to unexpected events. It developed a robust solution to automate the rebuilding of search indices, improving the searchability and findability of information and evidence within the central repository. This solution will enhance the repository's resilience during scheduled maintenances or system outages. The Mechanism also strengthened its protocols for ensuring the safety, security and recoverability of information and evidence in the event of a disaster. These developments collectively underscore the importance that the Mechanism continues to place on ensuring the overall integrity, accuracy and longevity of its data.

24. The Mechanism remained engaged in its information governance efforts during the reporting period. It established a comprehensive information governance policy and is on track to implement key data protection measures in accordance with the recent bulletin on the subject by the Secretary-General. It conducted its second wide-scale inventory of its information assets and continued to develop information security procedures related to the secure disposal of media and the effective response to information security incidents. The Mechanism also introduced a process for returning evidence to its source upon request and established a framework for the long-term records management of the information and evidence in its repository.

25. The Mechanism is committed to engaging with external partners and sharing insights with the accountability community in pursuit of collective efficiency. In October 2024, the Mechanism hosted a closed workshop focused on building open-source investigative capacities. The online event brought together panellists and participants from across the globe to discuss best practices in open-source capacity-building. The Mechanism's outward-facing approach continues to be fundamental for fostering growth, efficiency and collaboration with other entities with comparable mandates.

III. Facilitating justice

A. Analysing evidence and building case files

26. During the reporting period, the Mechanism made significant progress in its analysis of information and evidence within its strategic lines of inquiry, concerning detention-related crimes linked to the rule of Bashar Al-Assad, crimes by individuals associated with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and unlawful attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic, and its active case file, relating to a series of chemical and conventional attacks that occurred in 2017. The Mechanism's strategic lines of inquiry and its case file-related work continue to reflect its commitment to inclusive justice, under which proactive attention is given to categories of victims/survivors

that have historically been overlooked and to crimes that have been insufficiently documented.

27. Within its strategic line of inquiry on detention-related crimes, the Mechanism completed an overarching report on the detention system of the former Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The report contains an analysis of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and related violations in government detention facilities controlled by the Assad regime. In the crime pattern analysis, consideration is given to intersectional factors affecting detainee experiences consistent with the Mechanism's thematic strategies on gender, and on children and youth. It also contains a description of the government structures involved in inflicting those types of harm and an examination of the roles played by those structures in various aspects of the detention process from arrest, through continued detention, to release or the death of detainees due to torture or ill-treatment. An annex to the report contains details regarding specific detention facilities, including their parent/hierarchical unit and, where available, their geocoordinates. A confidential version of the report and earlier analytical reports prepared by the Mechanism on specific Syrian regime entities and detention sites (entity-specific reports) were shared with the applicant parties to the proceedings initiated against the Syrian Arab Republic before the International Court of Justice under the Convention against Torture. The Mechanism's entity-specific reports were relied upon by the Paris Assize Court, which entered a conviction against Ali Mamlouk, Jamil Hassan and Abdel Salam Mahmoud on 24 May 2024 for complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes for their responsibility in the disappearance, torture and death of two French-Syrian nationals and the confiscation of their home. In December 2024, the Mechanism released on its website a public redacted version of its overarching report on the detention system of the former Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, with a view to contributing to a wider range of justice and accountability efforts. That version of the report is expected to be translated into Arabic during the next reporting cycle.

28. In relation to its strategic line of inquiry on crimes by individuals associated with ISIL, the Mechanism completed its report on the recruitment, training and use by ISIL of children in hostilities in the Syrian Arab Republic, which contains an examination of the ideological foundation for the practices of ISIL; the different tactics that ISIL employed to recruit children; the formal military training that ISIL provided to children and the distinctive and common features across its training programme for children; the various ways in which ISIL used children in hostilities; and the range of harm that children who were recruited or used in hostilities by ISIL suffered as a result of their experiences. To accompany the report, the Mechanism also prepared legal analysis examining the different categories of crime that apply to the facts set out in the report; the profiles of training camps in specific governorates in the Syrian Arab Republic; and a data set with the names of persons of interest who played a role in the recruitment, training and use of children in hostilities. The report and related materials described above have been shared with multiple competent jurisdictions to assist them in their work. At the request of a competent jurisdiction, the Mechanism also adapted an earlier brief that had been completed in 2022 to support charges of crimes against humanity for ISIL-related conduct in the Syrian Arab Republic. A Mechanism staff member provided testimony regarding the analysis in the brief before the Stockholm District Court in the case against Lina I., who was subsequently convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment. In the case against Lina I. as well as in an earlier judgement issued by the Court on 20 June 2024, the Court relied upon another brief completed by the Mechanism in 2020, in which it had determined that there was a non-international armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic as at the end of December 2011.

29. Concerning its strategic line of inquiry on unlawful attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Mechanism's focus was on making progress on its case file involving a series of chemical and conventional attacks that occurred in 2017. The Mechanism conducted investigative work to close evidentiary gaps identified following an intensive review of materials in its central repository.

30. The Mechanism has experienced a reduction in staffing (as outlined in sections IV.C and D below) for its line of inquiry teams and key support functions across the Mechanism, including language support, information and evidence management, dedicated thematic strategy expertise and other critical support functions. The Mechanism takes witness protection/support and security matters very seriously; accordingly, its work is necessarily constrained by the limits of its current capacity in these areas. Overall, the Mechanism requires additional resources to maintain investigative and analytical work across its three lines of inquiry in 2025, in particular in the light of the significant evidence-gathering opportunities available in the Syrian Arab Republic after the end of the rule of Bashar Al-Assad.

B. Frameworks for sharing and cooperation

31. The Mechanism has continued to expand the number and diversity of relevant actors with whom it cooperates to support its preservation, collection, analysis and sharing activities. By the end of the reporting cycle, 100 cooperation frameworks were in place with a wide range of State entities, United Nations bodies, international organizations and civil society actors. While the frameworks concluded are all aimed at advancing the Mechanism's mandate, they are not a prerequisite for cooperation, and the Mechanism's overall collaboration with relevant actors reaches well beyond them.

32. At the time of reporting, the Mechanism cooperated with 21 States by means of domestic legislation, formal cooperation agreements and informal arrangements. The conclusion of new cooperation arrangements with State entities has allowed the Mechanism to extend its activities to new territories and to maximize its support to competent jurisdictions by building upon new opportunities to collect information and evidence and facilitate ongoing national investigations and prosecutions. Considerable efforts have also been dedicated to negotiating witness protection frameworks with States for extreme cases in which witnesses and information providers would be putting their life at risk to support justice endeavours. Expectations have unfortunately not been met in this regard and, in the absence of the requisite operational State support, the Mechanism had to either pause or stop engagement with high-value witnesses directly relevant to ongoing criminal proceedings when it could not ensure the safety and security of persons willing to cooperate. Over the next reporting period, the Mechanism plans to continue to seek assistance from States in the field of witness protection to ensure the necessary operational support for the successful advancement of its mandate.

33. At the time of reporting, the Mechanism has initiated preparations for a possible cooperation framework with the Syrian Arab Republic to deploy and conduct operations in the country in furtherance of its mandate.

C. Sharing information and evidence with competent jurisdictions

34. The Mechanism has continued to assist numerous investigative, prosecutorial and judicial authorities investigating and prosecuting core international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

35. The number of requests for assistance submitted to the Mechanism has continued to increase, with 437 requests for assistance from 16 competent jurisdictions received by 31 January 2025. Specifically, 93 new requests were received during the reporting period. However, as some requests require continuing assistance and the Mechanism offers periodic searches and additional work on closed requests in the light of the constant growth of its evidence repository and new sources of information, the Mechanism was actually working on 167 different requests during the period. Overall, the Mechanism determined that 9 of the 437 requests for assistance received fell beyond the scope of its mandate, and it has processed and closed 378 requests.

36. The 437 requests for assistance submitted to the Mechanism pertain to 306 distinct investigations or prosecutions; the Mechanism has assisted with 217. The investigations relate to a wide range of core international crimes committed across all governorates of the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 by different alleged perpetrator groups. The assistance provided by the Mechanism has continued to take different forms to more effectively meet the needs of the requesting jurisdictions. Support has included running searches in the Mechanism's central repository, analysing large amounts of data, conducting open-source investigations, developing analytical products, identifying sources and collecting additional targeted evidence. The Mechanism has also assisted with an increasing number of ongoing proceedings by identifying and locating victims and witnesses, conducting witness interviews and facilitating their in-court testimony, as well as by providing expertise in the form of in-court testimony.

37. Despite significant staffing cuts due to its budgetary situation (as outlined in sections IV.C and D below), the Mechanism has further managed to augment its proactive sharing operations, providing information and materials of relevance, including its analytical products, to competent jurisdictions on its own initiative on 40 occasions.

38. The Mechanism cannot publicly disclose information on the vast majority of the cases with which it has assisted due to the confidentiality constraints of its substantive work and of the judicial work of the jurisdictions supported. However, the Mechanism has received permission to publicly refer to its contributions to investigations that led to the issuance of arrest warrants against the former President of the Syrian Arab Republic, other high officials and multiple former ISIL members (France: Ghouta and Nabout cases; Sweden: Osama K. and Al Yarmouk cases); indictments against former senior officials and other individuals or companies (United States of America: Jamil Hassan case; France: Sonia M. and Lafarge cases; Belgium: Hossin A. case); as well as criminal trials against a range of accused persons (Netherlands: Hasna A. and Ahmad al-Y cases; Sweden: Lina I., Mohammed Hamo, Walid al-Zaytoun, Fatoush Ibrahim and Camilla Olofsson cases; France: Dabbagh and Nema cases; Slovakia: Dibdiaková case; Germany: Anwar R., Eyad A., Moafak D., Alaa M., Moustafa M., Ahmad A., and Mohammad A. and Asmael K. cases).

39. The Mechanism has received additional requests for assistance since early December 2024 in the light of recent developments in the Syrian Arab Republic and stands ready to support competent jurisdictions moving forward. Pending a response to its request to deploy and conduct operations in the Syrian Arab Republic in furtherance of its mandate, the Mechanism is planning on exploring options for how to best assist competent jurisdictions in the Syrian Arab Republic itself.

40. The Mechanism looks forward to contributing to future transitional justice processes in the Syrian Arab Republic. All activities of the Mechanism remain guided by the requirements set forth in its terms of reference, including compliance with fair

trial standards and non-application of the death penalty for the offences under consideration.

IV. Mechanism-wide developments

A. Update on the Mechanism's inclusive justice approaches

Victim/survivor-centred approach

41. The Mechanism's victim/survivor-centred approach has remained a compass for its work. Since early December 2024, the Mechanism has been actively monitoring the situation to obtain information and perspectives on the experiences of women and children. The Mechanism has started to reflect on how its inclusive justice framework could be revised in response to the new and evolving contexts in the Syrian Arab Republic. Relevant developments include the possibility of reaching a greater number of victims/survivors and organizations within the Syrian Arab Republic, with a view to ensuring in particular that the experiences of historically overlooked groups, especially women and children, are effectively surfaced, analysed and reflected across all aspects of the Mechanism's work. During the reporting period, despite growing resource constraints, the Mechanism continued to 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. The Mechanism would like to acknowledge the support provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in funding two short-term deployments to continue strengthening the Mechanism's gender and inclusive justice work.

42. The Mechanism has continued its engagement in two-way dialogue with a variety of accountability and justice actors. Engagements with civil society actors in the past year include the annual Lausanne platform, an accountability workshop hosted by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Switzerland that is focused on civil society actors involved in the work of documenting core international crimes, and an annual consultation hosted by the Mechanism with victim/survivor associations and individuals. Both engagements were focused on the Mechanism's work on unlawful attacks, including chemical and conventional attacks. Key findings and insights arising from these engagements have been summarized and shared across the Mechanism for integration into its substantive work and the support provided to jurisdictions, as well as for the purpose of increasing the effectiveness of future engagements with victims/survivors and civil society organizations. More broadly within the accountability ecosystem for international crimes, the Mechanism engaged in a series of fruitful peer-to-peer exchanges with other accountability actors on thematic issues, sharing written guidance and tools, as appropriate, and exchanging operational approaches.

43. The Mechanism has continued to advance its thematic strategies and integration processes. During the reporting period, a review of the Mechanism's public strategy on gender was initiated, and comprehensive internal and external consultations on its child and youth strategy were advanced. Methodologies to support integration into work planning, monitoring and evaluation were further refined, and overarching and project-specific guidance and practical tools continued to be developed and used by staff to achieve efficient streamlining of daily workflows. Owing to resource and staffing limitations (as outlined in sections IV.C and IV.D below), efforts to refine the institutional architecture supporting the work under the Mechanism's thematic strategies in response to lessons learned have been paused.

44. Capacity-building on thematic issues has continued. Foundational training on gender and child rights approaches in accountability work was conducted during the reporting period. The Mechanism also facilitated training across on sexual orientation and gender identity in the context of the Middle East across all its sections. In addition, expert briefings on children and the accountability process and on the role of gender in the Syrian prison system were provided to all staff.

Integrating gender perspectives

45. The Mechanism's gender strategy and accompanying implementation plan, released publicly in 2022, 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 facilitate additional opportunities for inclusive justice as a result. A strategy review was initiated in 2024, including an external consultation on ways to strengthen the approach on persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

46. In early 2024, the Mechanism reported for the first time on its implementation of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, assessing its performance in 2023. The Mechanism surpassed 6 of the 14 applicable performance indicators and met an additional five. The Mechanism's strategy on gender, its enabling gender architecture and the commitment of all its staff to inclusive justice contributed significantly to its positive performance in relation to the Action Plan.

Integrating child- and youth-sensitive perspectives

47. The Mechanism continued to advance its efforts to integrate a child and youth perspective into its work, such as its analytical report on the recruitment, training and use by ISIL of children in hostilities and the broad range of harm inflicted as a result. The report centres the experiences of child/youth victims and captures the intersectional aspects of their experiences.

48. In parallel, following internal consultations, the Mechanism completed a written strategy and accompanying guidance on children and youth, setting out key policy decisions and providing strategic direction for moving forward for all staff. External consultations on the strategy documents commenced in late September 2024, involving approximately 50 United Nations, non-governmental organization and expert interlocutors. Participants welcomed the initiative, expressing hope that it would inform and inspire action more broadly within the international accountability sphere. Substantive feedback received will be reviewed and incorporated, as appropriate, into the strategy documents. Preparations for consulting with affected community organizations in early 2025 regarding the written strategy are ongoing and under review in the light of recent developments in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Broader justice objectives: missing persons

49. 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. The Mechanism welcomed the creation and establishment of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and the appointment of its Head. The Mechanism plans to continue to cooperate with the Institution, within its mandate and available resources.

50. 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 continues 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

51. The Mechanism's operational support involves providing services relating to the protection and support of witnesses and victims cooperating with the Mechanism, security, translation and interpretation. During the reporting period, the Mechanism enhanced its protection capabilities through the further development of internal procedures reflecting best international practices. These practices align protection with support while integrating the Mechanism's victim/survivor-centred approach and thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, ensuring that the rights, needs, safety, dignity and well-being of victims and survivors are at the core of the Mechanism's efforts. The Mechanism implemented the best practices across its protection and support services, including when addressing serious and credible security concerns raised by cooperating witnesses, thanks to the assistance of United Nations and other entities as well as a limited number of Member States willing to relocate or resettle witnesses. Going forward, the Mechanism's protection and support capacity will require continued development and support, in particular in areas where access to witnesses and victims is challenging. In this regard, Member States are encouraged to facilitate assistance in the form of international relocation and resettlement of witnesses, funding to support witness protection costs and specialized personnel and technology.

52. The Mechanism continued to build on its referral capabilities by further refining its service mapping processes. The contact details of local medical, psychological and psychiatric service providers have been updated, expanding the network of available resources for victims/survivors and witnesses. To uphold the Mechanism's unwavering commitment to prioritizing the safety and well-being of all beneficiaries and accessibility of services for them, referrals are conducted only after a thorough needs assessment has been performed and guidance provided to the victims and witnesses. The Mechanism has worked on developing internal procedures and written guidance related to support and referral procedures.

53. Security considerations and relevant assessments are integrated into all areas of the Mechanism's operations, from consultations with interlocutors in Geneva to operations in the field. The Mechanism worked closely with the Department of Safety and Security in Geneva and in the field to ensure the physical security of staff members and premises, both in Geneva and during field missions. The Mechanism ensured that its staff received appropriate training on safe and secure approaches in field environments and is planning to conduct a women's security awareness training session for its female staff members in the upcoming reporting cycle.

54. 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. The Mechanism commenced the preparation of English and Arabic translations of a landmark judgment rendered by the Higher Regional Court of Koblenz, Germany, which found a former high-ranking Syrian official, Anwar R., guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced him to life imprisonment for his role in torture, murder and sexual violence committed when he held his previous position as Head of the Investigation Department of Branch 251 of the Syrian General Intelligence Directorate. The Mechanism's translation projects serve to further develop relations with affected communities and their organizations in the region and to enhance cooperation with other judicial bodies. In addition to Arabic and English, the languages supported included French, German, Kurdish (Sorani/Kurmanji) and

Turkish. The Mechanism maintains its own roster of Arabic interpreters, as well as a translation roster for different languages, including Arabic. A guidance document on gender-related terminology was updated for use by all staff.

C. Funding

55. Pursuant to paragraph 35 of General Assembly resolution [72/191](#), the Secretary-General has included the Mechanism in the proposed programme budget since 2020. In paragraph 31 of resolution [78/222](#) and subsequently in paragraph 32 of resolution [79/185](#), 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. There has been no increase in the Mechanism's resources or staffing since 2020.

56. While the Mechanism continued to utilize extrabudgetary resources to complement insufficient regular budget resources, thereby ensuring the implementation of its mandate, its trust fund was exhausted in 2024. While voluntary contributions were received in 2024, they fell short of the amount required to fully cover the needs identified in the Mechanism's strategic plan. Consequently, the Mechanism was compelled to decline requests for analytical products, limit the scope of searches in the central repository and decline requests for witness interviews, and the average time required to respond to requests has increased. A sustained, structural increase of resources allocated through the programme budget would reduce this funding shortfall and enable the Mechanism to maintain both the existing pace at which it is progressing in its structural investigation and the level of assistance that it is providing in line with the increasing demand for its services from competent jurisdictions. At the time of reporting, the Mechanism's financial gap for 2025 was estimated at \$7.5 million, which included \$3.5 million for a potential ongoing presence in the Syrian Arab Republic. Those estimates are subject to modification and may increase, pending the team's assessment of the situation on the ground.

D. Team

57. At the end of the reporting period, 54 of the 60 approved regular budget posts were encumbered, and an additional 16 posts were funded by voluntary contributions. Owing to the exhaustion of the trust fund in 2024 and related funding gap, a total of 18 extrabudgetary posts were abolished in 2024 either through contract non-renewal or resignation. The current staffing levels jeopardize the Mechanism's capacity to address its significantly increased workload since 2020, in particular its ability to meet the growing demands from competent jurisdictions; to facilitate access to justice for victims, survivors and witnesses while ensuring their safety and protection; to respond to the increased need to preserve existing information and evidence at risk of loss or destruction; and to respond to the additional requirements associated with the end of the rule of Bashar Al-Assad in the Syrian Arab Republic.

58. The Mechanism is aligning its activities with the United Nations System Mental Health and Well-being Strategy for 2024 and beyond. Several initiatives have been implemented, including an annual well-being and employee engagement assessment and a focus group discussion on what well-being means to staff. The results of these initiatives have been shared with teams and leadership and will inform further actions and support strategies. The Mechanism is committed to supporting staff in times of crisis and actively works to prevent vicarious trauma through targeted interventions and continuous support. This commitment ensures that staff well-being is prioritized, fostering a healthy and resilient workforce.

V. Recommendations

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

A. Cooperation with States

60. The Mechanism requests the caretaker authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic:

- (a) To continue constructive engagement and dialogue with the Mechanism;
- (b) To permit the Mechanism to deploy and conduct operations in the Syrian Arab Republic in furtherance of its mandate, in particular to preserve information and evidence at risk of loss or destruction and to make it available to existing and future justice avenues, in accordance with international standards;
- (c) To support the Mechanism's engagement with a broad range of victims/survivors of international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic, in furtherance of inclusive justice.

61. The Mechanism requests Member States:

- (a) To ensure sustainable support to the Mechanism with increased funding through the regular budget and complementary voluntary contributions to address the change in situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Mechanism's significantly increased workload since 2020;
- (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.
- (i) To prioritize accountability for core international crimes in all considerations and support of transitional justice processes in the Syrian Arab Republic;
- (j) To advocate for and support an inclusive and comprehensive transitional justice process in the Syrian Arab Republic.

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

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

(a) 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;

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

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

(d) To ensure that such materials made available to the Mechanism are transferred in a form that retains their evidentiary value and that possible redactions are limited to those strictly necessary;

(e) 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, and to closely coordinate on ongoing and future investigative work to avoid duplicative activities;

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

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

(h) 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.

C. Cooperation with civil society

63. 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 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, 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

64. 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. The Mechanism already assists 16 competent jurisdictions with their investigations and proceedings and remains committed to demonstrating the scale, complexity and gravity of crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. In this context, the Mechanism has been able to apply its 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.

65. After 14 years of atrocities committed and in a context of increasing impunity for international crimes committed across the globe, the Syrian people, the country's caretaker authorities and the international community as a whole are being presented with a historic opportunity to work together to pursue all avenues of the diverse international justice architecture, whether at the national, regional or international level. The Syrian people demand and deserve action aimed at enabling fair and independent criminal proceedings, facilitating truth and reconciliation and building a sustainable and peaceful future for their country.

66. The Mechanism reiterates its deep commitment to supporting this endeavour and to facilitating practical steps towards justice for all victims/survivors and the prevention of future violations. The mandate and role played by the Mechanism have become more important than ever in this context, as a quasi-prosecutorial body laying the foundation for comprehensive accountability for a broad range of crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

67. 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 for its indefatigable pursuit of comprehensive justice.