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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 ninth 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 ninth 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 Assembly 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](#).

The Mechanism continues to demonstrate its value as a justice facilitator in the accountability ecosystem for international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. During the reporting period, it advanced its structural investigation and provided increased support to the work of jurisdictions investigating and prosecuting such crimes. The targeted expansion of the Mechanism's central repository, its deepening analytical work and its timely responses to a steady flow and high volume of requests for assistance from competent jurisdictions are complemented by efforts to further develop the Mechanism's operational capacity at headquarters and in the field. The Mechanism is working to maximize the assistance it can provide for future justice opportunities that are compatible with its mandate, and to leverage its work in support of broader justice objectives, in particular efforts to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons.

The Mechanism continues to foster the active role of victims/survivors in the pursuit of inclusive justice. It has further expanded and diversified its reciprocal engagement with civil society actors and bolstered its rights-based victim/survivor-centred approach that is given concrete expression through dedicated thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives. The Mechanism furthermore 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 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 hereby submits its ninth report to the General Assembly. The report covers the Mechanism's activities from 1 February 2022 to 31 January 2023.

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. Six years after its creation, the Mechanism continues to demonstrate the value it adds to justice efforts concerning the most serious crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. Its work is built on an expanding central repository of information and evidence. The Mechanism is continually refining the process of identifying and analysing relevant material to be more effective and efficient through the use of digital tools and new data management approaches. The Mechanism's analytical work is progressing across all strategic lines of inquiry, advancing the Mechanism's structural investigation.

4. The Mechanism, in its role as a justice facilitator that supports current and future investigations and prosecutions of core international crimes, has concluded 83 cooperation frameworks with a range of stakeholders. The utility of the Mechanism's expertise, analytical products and operational support is evident in the increased number of requests for assistance it receives from competent jurisdictions. At the time of reporting, the Mechanism had received 242 requests for assistance from 15 jurisdictions and assisted 130 distinct national investigations. The Mechanism has also proactively shared information, data sets, evidentiary modules and analytical products with national war crimes units to support them in their work.

5. Inclusive justice remains the key objective towards which the Mechanism's core work is oriented. It is reflected in the vision of the Mechanism's new strategic plan for 2023–2025, which is to further establish 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. In order to achieve this vision, the Mechanism is reinforcing and diversifying its engagement with victims/survivors, incorporating their insights into its work and informing them about its impact as a justice facilitator. A further expression of this fundamental, victim/survivor-centred approach is the Mechanism's ongoing development and implementation of dedicated, comprehensive thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives, such as clarifying the fate of missing persons. In October 2022, the Mechanism made its gender strategy public, engaging on its content with stakeholders during events in Geneva, The Hague and New York.

6. The Mechanism was able to further expand and intensify its cooperation with civil society actors, who continued to make critical contributions across the full breadth of the Mechanism's work and are important enablers in ensuring a victim/survivor-centred approach. Civil society organizations are crucial sources of information and evidence and engage closely with the Mechanism on various aspects of its substantive work, including its strategic lines of inquiry and thematic strategies. The Mechanism's engagement with Syrian civil society actors as part of the Lausanne platform process, hosted by the Netherlands and Switzerland in July 2022, allowed

the Mechanism to seek views on key aspects of its structural investigation. The Mechanism also introduced two new, annual meetings with civil society actors. At the first “Geneva consultation”, held in June 2022, the Mechanism specifically sought the perspectives of victim/survivor associations and individuals on justice and criminal accountability, focusing on its strategic line of inquiry on detention-related crimes. In line with its victim/survivor-centred approach, the Mechanism has also committed to updating victims/survivors participating in these consultations on how their insights have been incorporated into the Mechanism’s work. At its first “Accountability workshop”, held in November, the Mechanism discussed with specialized civil society organizations the challenges related to the documentation of core international crimes in relation to the same strategic line of inquiry. Through its various multilateral and bilateral cooperation formats, the Mechanism is committed to deepening trust and cooperation with its civil society interlocutors and to capturing the diversity of the perspectives shared and contributions made.

7. The continuing tragedy of missing persons in the Syrian Arab Republic has been identified as a primary obstacle to justice in the eyes of the many victim/survivor groups with which the Mechanism has engaged to date, reinforcing the Mechanism’s commitment to identifying additional ways and means to assist on this crucial issue. The Mechanism contributed to consultations with Member States, United Nations entities and other international and civil society organizations regarding the possible establishment of a new international body, to work in cooperation and complementarity with existing mechanisms to clarify the fate and whereabouts of persons reasonably believed to be missing in the Syrian Arab Republic and to provide adequate support to victims, survivors and the families of those missing. In parallel, the Mechanism also continues to take preliminary steps to identify and make available to other relevant actors information regarding missing persons.

8. On 1 April 2022, the Head of the Mechanism presented the eighth report of the Mechanism (A/76/690) to the General Assembly, in a plenary meeting under the agenda item entitled “Prevention of armed conflict”, and provided an update on the Mechanism’s progress in the implementation of its mandate. The update was followed by a debate during which the majority of States voiced support for the Mechanism and its work.¹ The next annual debate is scheduled for 25 April 2023.

9. 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 the Syrian people face, and urges all States to work towards ending impunity for crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

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

10. The Mechanism continues to expand and enhance its central repository of information and evidence. In 2022, the Mechanism initiated 111 collection activities, including important remote collections from information providers and open-source collections from the Internet. The Mechanism also increased its field mission work, using these missions to gather evidence that it could not receive remotely and connect

¹ See A/76/PV.65.

with sources it had been unable to reach during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Mechanism oriented its evidence-gathering around the active strategic lines of inquiry within its structural investigation and the requests for assistance received from competent jurisdictions. The Mechanism thereby ensures that it collects and preserves evidence that could be of high value to current and future investigations and prosecutions.

11. 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 cooperates with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and continues 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 also received additional material from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) during the reporting period.

12. As noted in its eighth report 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 Secretary-General's bulletin ([ST/SGB/2019/4](#)). Upon receipt by the Secretariat of express consent from the Member State or third party concerned, the Mechanism was given access to the following: (i) classified material from the Member State, and (ii) material subject to conditions imposed by the Member State or the third party. In line with its terms of reference, which refer specifically to the collection of information and evidence from the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, and in order to further its structural investigation, the Mechanism requested copies of material contained in the archives through the framework provided in the Secretary-General's bulletin and sought assistance directly from Member States that had consented to the Mechanism accessing materials provided by them. At the end of the reporting period, the Mechanism had received materials from one Member State and was in the process of arranging the collection of material from another Member State. The Mechanism continues to prioritize the collection of additional records contained in the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism archives.

13. 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, including States that oppose the Mechanism's mandate.

B. Processing evidence

14. During the reporting period, the Mechanism further improved its ability to preserve, process, secure and manage information and evidence, focusing on three key areas: exploitation of Internet resources; deployment of core information and analysis systems; and development of information security, information management and data protection processes.

15. Following the launch of an Internet resources unit in 2021, the Mechanism increased its capacity to meaningfully exploit information and evidence obtained from Internet resources. During the reporting period, the Mechanism increased the availability and utility of Internet exploitation processes and toolsets for the use of investigators, analysts and legal officers. The Mechanism also made significant gains

in efficiency related to the acquisition and effective preservation of Internet materials, both at scale and in individual instances. The Mechanism further constructed and implemented the envisioned “pipeline” to channel video and multimedia data into a suitable platform for further analysis. The new procedure allowed the automation of various tasks previously executed manually by information management officers.

16. In addition, the Mechanism developed the infrastructure for two new digital analytical platforms. The first, a video and multimedia platform, along with the “pipeline” described above, is aimed at advancing the Mechanism’s capacity for collaborative video and imagery review and analysis at scale, making review of these materials more efficient. The second, a data analytics platform, greatly increases the Mechanism’s ability to track connections between information, evidence and analytical activities. During the reporting period, the Mechanism initiated preparations for the integration of the new platforms and conducted a pilot project to automate the detection of duplicate videos. Alongside these two initiatives, the Mechanism completed necessary upgrades to its physical and digital evidence vaults, enhancing their security, capacity and efficiency.

17. The Mechanism also further developed its information governance processes and capacities, including information security, information management and data protection. In another major initiative, the Mechanism upgraded its file and record management architecture, partnering with other United Nations entities and following best practices, to design and deploy a pioneering approach to digital records management in the Secretariat environment. The Mechanism deployed an advanced information protection system, enabling more control over and security for the Mechanism’s files, resources and devices, including mobile device management, file-level encryption, and log analysis and management. The Mechanism also commissioned and received an information security audit, a business impact analysis and recommendations for its data protection strategy.

18. The Mechanism continued its practice of providing technical assistance to, and fostering technical cooperation with, other entities mandated to advance accountability efforts, including actors in the United Nations system, in particular with regard to efforts related to the collection of large volumes of digital data. These efforts are mutually beneficial, resulting in greater capacity and efficiency across different entities.

III. Facilitating justice

A. Analysing evidence and building case files

19. During the reporting period, the Mechanism furthered the analysis of information and evidence in its central repository in the context of projects across its three active strategic lines of inquiry, namely detention-related crimes, crimes by individuals associated with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and unlawful attacks against civilians and civilian objects. While no new case files were opened, this effort advanced the Mechanism’s structural investigation and existing case files, and allowed it to support competent jurisdictions both proactively and in response to requests for assistance.

20. The Mechanism remains committed to an inclusive approach to justice, which necessitates paying special attention to categories of victims/survivors that have historically been overlooked and crimes that have been insufficiently documented. Accordingly, in line with its victim/survivor-centred approach, the Mechanism continues to ensure the systematic integration of its thematic strategies on gender and on children and youth into its analytical work throughout the life cycle of each project it undertakes.

21. As part of its strategic line of inquiry on detention, the Mechanism completed an assessment of information generated through its comprehensive intersectional process of evidence review relating to the experiences of individual detainees. It will utilize this assessment to inform analytical and investigative work moving forward. In parallel, the Mechanism continued to generate analytical products on detention structures and crimes, which have been shared with multiple jurisdictions. The Mechanism is also prepared to provide information and analysis relevant to the legal action brought against the Syrian Arab Republic under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, as part of the joint initiative announced by Canada and the Netherlands in March 2021 and referred to in the Mechanism's previous report.

22. Within the scope of its line of inquiry related to ISIL, the Mechanism completed an evidentiary module to support crimes against humanity charges for conduct related to ISIL in the Syrian Arab Republic. This module, which comprehensively considers intersectional characteristics such as gender and age, has been shared with multiple competent jurisdictions and has been associated with one of the Mechanism's open case files on which it anticipates providing further assistance to a national jurisdiction. Several additional related and stand-alone products, including analytical and expert reports, were created and shared with competent jurisdictions during the reporting period. For example, in its judgment delivered on 9 January 2023, the District Court of Solna in Sweden relied upon the Mechanism's analytical work relating to the situation of girls in areas controlled by ISIL. The District Court convicted two Swedish nationals who had joined ISIL for their respective roles in taking children to a war zone and the girls' forced marriage and rape in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2013 and 2014. The Mechanism has now focused its strategic line of inquiry on a project that further advances the integration of its thematic strategy on crimes against children and youth in the context of conduct related to ISIL.

23. With regard to its strategic line of inquiry on unlawful attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Mechanism prioritized advancing a case file on unlawful attack incidents that occurred in 2017 and involved the alleged use of chemical and conventional weapons, including against medical facilities. During the reporting period, the Mechanism collected and analysed further evidence to reconstruct the incidents included in the case file and identify evidentiary gaps that merit targeted investigation.

24. The Mechanism continually assesses the progress of its investigative and analytical work to identify opportunities to open additional case files whenever the necessary conditions are met, subject to the availability of sufficient resources.

25. The Mechanism continued to leverage technology to enhance its analytical working methods through cross-sectional collaboration, including via the use of new technology and the identification of new ways to use existing technology.

B. Frameworks for sharing and cooperation

26. The Mechanism is able to rely on a large and growing number of cooperation frameworks concluded with a wide array of relevant actors. It continued to engage with new potential information providers and State entities to establish additional cooperation arrangements aimed at expanding its central repository, broadening its capacity to conduct collection and investigative activities and fostering its support to ongoing accountability efforts. By the end of the reporting cycle, 83 cooperation frameworks were in place with civil society actors, State entities and international organizations. However, formalized frameworks are not a prerequisite for cooperation with the Mechanism, and the Mechanism's collaboration with relevant actors extends well beyond the 83 frameworks concluded.

27. The Mechanism has devoted special attention to identifying and engaging with civil society organizations representing and defending the interests of victims and survivors. Cooperation with such actors furthers the Mechanism's understanding of victim/survivor perspectives and justice needs in accordance with its victim/survivor-centred approach. It also ensures that information important to victims and survivors is preserved and facilitates their engagement with competent jurisdictions. The Mechanism has also focused on advancing its cooperation with Syrian civil society actors addressing the interests of underrepresented groups of victims/survivors. Developing relationships with individuals and entities that are not accustomed to collaborating with the United Nations or accountability bodies, and tailoring cooperation to the varied circumstances of its interlocutors, still require continual and dedicated efforts, which the Mechanism is determined to sustain in the long term.

28. The Mechanism's investment in cooperation discussions with States to access relevant materials in their possession and to operate on more territories has yielded results. The fulfilment of the Mechanism's mandate is now enhanced by its cooperation with 17 States by virtue of domestic legislation, formal cooperation agreements and informal arrangements. The Mechanism has also assisted the judicial authorities of three additional States in the absence of cooperation frameworks.

C. Sharing information and evidence with competent jurisdictions

29. The Mechanism has continued to assist 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 at its own initiative.

30. The number of requests for assistance received by the Mechanism increased during the reporting period, with 242 requests for assistance from 15 competent jurisdictions received by 31 January 2023. The Mechanism determined that it did not have a mandate to entertain 3 of the 242 requests, and processed and closed 168 requests. Work is ongoing for 53 requests and will soon begin for 18 pending requests. The 242 requests for assistance submitted to the Mechanism pertain to 195 distinct investigations or prosecutions, of which 130 have already been assisted by the Mechanism through the sharing of information, evidence and/or analytical products.

31. Beyond responding to requests for assistance from competent jurisdictions, the Mechanism has significantly developed its proactive sharing activities, providing information and materials of relevance to prosecutors and judges at its own initiative and making available completed analytical products and evidentiary modules to multiple justice actors to support their work. Building on the 15 such activities conducted prior to 31 January 2021, the Mechanism conducted an additional 19 proactive sharing activities in support of justice efforts during the reporting period. The open dialogue established with national war crimes units and the authorities investigating crimes falling within the Mechanism's mandate, as well as the constructive discussions around their work, challenges and needs, have proved essential to the success of the Mechanism's justice facilitation role.

32. The Mechanism continues to offer competent jurisdictions an expanding array of assistance. In addition to sharing pieces of information and evidence from its central repository of information and evidence, conducting witness interviews, translating key materials, identifying and locating witnesses for interviews by national authorities and geolocating crime scenes, the Mechanism has also supported criminal proceedings by mobilizing its investigative resources to fill evidentiary gaps. A total of 36 discrete analytical products prepared by the Mechanism, including legal briefs and expert reports, have now been shared in support of judicial proceedings.

The Mechanism has also continued developing tailored analytical reports upon request by competent jurisdictions and started testifying in court about its work.

IV. Mechanism-wide developments

A. Update on thematic strategies

Victim/survivor-centred approach

33. The Mechanism's victim/survivor-centred approach operationalizes its commitment to focusing, as a core part of its daily work, 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 methodology for the development of this approach is ongoing dialogue with victim/survivor associations, individuals and civil society organizations utilizing various modalities of engagement.

34. In addition to the Lausanne platform, a central feature of the Mechanism's two-way engagement with Syrian civil society organizations since its inception, the Mechanism broadened its outreach in 2022 through dedicated, complementary meetings. The Mechanism held the first annual consultation specifically for victim/survivor associations and individuals, soliciting participants' perspectives on justice and criminal accountability regarding its strategic line of inquiry on detention-related crimes. During the reporting period, the Mechanism also held its first accountability workshop with specialized civil society organizations to discuss challenges in documenting core international crimes and the analytical work related to the same strategic line of inquiry.

35. These complementary engagements and numerous other Mechanism outreach activities provided opportunities to directly hear from those affected by the crimes and violations within the Mechanism's mandate and to answer questions about its work. Direct engagement with victims/survivors also progressed the Mechanism's development and implementation of its thematic strategies on gender, children and youth, and broader justice objectives, as concrete expressions of its victim/survivor-centred approach.

Integrating gender perspectives

36. The Mechanism's gender strategy demonstrates how it is integrating 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. In response to requests from civil society actors and other experts and practitioners, the Mechanism publicly released technical and abridged versions of its gender strategy and implementation plan in Arabic and English. The Mechanism benefited from extensive input from civil society actors, victims/survivors, advocates, practitioners, academia and United Nations partners in developing the strategy. Through the public release of the strategy, the Mechanism seeks to promote effective strategies and methodologies for integrating a gender analysis, and to learn from others through ongoing engagement. The Mechanism welcomes the interest in the gender strategy being expressed by actors working on the Syrian and other conflict situations.

37. During the reporting period, the Mechanism's internal working group on gender and the victim/survivor-centred approach facilitated significant progress on each section's action plan for implementing the gender strategy. The Mechanism also conducted its first internal evaluation focusing on integrating gender into core workflows.

38. The Mechanism continued to implement the gender strategy by building a gender-competent institutional environment. For example, following internal workshops with staff, the Mechanism provided internal written guidance on how to assess gender competence in Mechanism recruitments in alignment with the Secretariat framework. New Mechanism staff members continued to take foundational gender training to assist them in developing the skills and competencies necessary to effectively integrate gender perspectives into their work.

Accountability for children and youth

39. The Mechanism further advanced its efforts to integrate a child and youth perspective into its work. Building on progress described in previous reports, the Mechanism refined its draft strategy and implementation plan on children and youth, including through the development of tools to ensure that all strategic lines of inquiry incorporate a child and youth perspective.

40. In 2022, the Mechanism developed a methodological package to guide anticipated engagement with Syrian children and youth. The package is aimed at enabling engagement that is rights-based, meaningful and safe. As part of this process, the Mechanism is working to formalize cooperation agreements with civil society organizations that focus specifically on children and youth. The integration of child and youth perspectives has also been at the core of the several engagements between the Mechanism and Syrian civil society actors, including victims/survivors. These interactions have strengthened the Mechanism's understanding of contextualized, child-specific priorities in the documentation of crimes, as well as the priorities and perspectives of child and youth victims/survivors.

41. The Mechanism participated in several initiatives, events and conferences addressing the importance of centring crimes against children in international criminal accountability efforts. By doing so, the Mechanism is contributing to creating and strengthening opportunities for mainstreaming rights-based and child-sensitive approaches in core work on accountability for international crimes.

Broader justice objectives: missing persons

42. 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 the truth about their loved ones. During the reporting period, 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. The Mechanism shared lessons learned and best practices in the context of consultations with Member States and United Nations entities, as well as other international and civil society organizations, on how to bolster such efforts, in close consultation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. It has identified considerable potential for assistance to a new institution, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his report of 2 August 2022 on missing people in the Syrian Arab Republic ([A/76/890](#)), that would be dedicated to clarifying the fate and whereabouts of persons reasonably believed to be missing in the Syrian Arab Republic and to providing adequate support to victims, survivors and the families of those missing. The main focus of the Mechanism's assistance would be sharing information relevant to the search for the missing, through modalities that would safeguard the humanitarian nature of such a new institution while maximizing relevant information available to assist in the search.

43. The Mechanism continued the implementation of its preliminary system for tagging information and evidence to capture information regarding missing persons,

and is conducting a lessons learned exercise on tracking and sharing information related to the missing. Through this system, the Mechanism has been able to increase its sharing of relevant information to help to clarify the fate and whereabouts of persons missing in connection with events in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. However, the establishment of a new, dedicated institution would enable the Mechanism to share relevant information more systematically and more extensively, in particular with a view to meeting the needs of victims, survivors and the families of those missing. The Mechanism stands ready to provide additional support regarding this critical issue if so requested and should the General Assembly decide to establish such a new body to work in cooperation and complementarity with existing mechanisms, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General.

B. Operational support

44. Operational support involves providing services relating to witness and victim/survivor protection and support, security and language assistance. During the reporting period, the Mechanism focused on strengthening its capacity to ensure the implementation of the victim/survivor-centred approach by conceptualizing the support and protection services available to different categories of victims/survivors and witnesses. The Mechanism continued to incorporate best practices in witness protection into its protection and support services. It also continued to develop standard operating procedures, and the deployment of protection and psychosocial services, through an intersectional approach that allows for an effective response based on the individual characteristics and safety needs of victims/survivors and witnesses. The Mechanism continues to increase its referral capacities and ensure that services prioritize the safety and well-being of victims/survivors and witnesses. All support and protection services are tailored to ensure that victims/survivors and witnesses are not exposed to secondary and repeat victimization due to their interaction with the Mechanism. The Mechanism continues to strengthen its collaboration with other United Nations and non-United Nations entities to facilitate witness protection and support.

45. Security is integrated into all areas of the Mechanism's operations. At the duty station, 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. Security has been integrated into activities ranging from consultations with interlocutors hosted in Geneva to investigation planning and operations in the field. Communication channels with United Nations system entities and other security interlocutors in the field continue to be strengthened to better support the planning and conduct of future field missions. Standard operating procedures relating to security were further developed and adapted, incorporating lessons learned from operations to date.

46. Interpretation and translation support were 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, Turkish and Kurmanji. The Mechanism was able to build its own roster of Arabic interpreters, as well as a translation roster for different languages, including Arabic. An internal translation management tool and guidance on Arabic translation of English gender-related terminology were also developed for staff.

C. Funding

47. Pursuant to paragraph 35 of General Assembly resolution [72/191](#), the Secretary-General has included the Mechanism in the proposed programme budget since 2020. The Assembly approved the request for regular budget funding for 2023 in paragraph 41 of its resolution [77/262](#). During the reporting period, the Mechanism utilized extrabudgetary resources to complement regular budget resources and thereby advance the implementation of its mandate. The Mechanism will continue to seek voluntary contributions in support of its strategic plan for 2023–2025 to maintain the level of assistance in line with the demand for its services from competent jurisdictions.

D. Team

48. The Mechanism has further advanced its recruitment efforts. At the end of the reporting period, 51 of the 60 approved regular budget posts were encumbered. Additionally, 27 posts funded by voluntary contributions at the end of the reporting period enabled the Mechanism to maintain its level of assistance to competent jurisdictions and to further advance the implementation of its mandate.

49. During the reporting period, the Mechanism reorganized its investigative staff to optimize the role played by investigators in advancing the Mechanism's analytical and case-building work and to increase the efficiency of the investigative support the Mechanism provides in response to requests for assistance from competent jurisdictions.

50. The results of an internal assessment on exposure to potentially traumatic content have helped to further enhance the Mechanism's trauma-informed care approach to staff support. In response to the assessment's findings, the Mechanism launched a capacity-building programme to prevent vicarious traumatization.

V. Recommendations

51. 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

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

(a) To ensure that the Mechanism has full access to materials that are 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.

B. Cooperation with States

53. The Mechanism requests Member States:

(a) To continue to provide support to the Mechanism through the regular budget and complementary voluntary contributions to 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 in order 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 inform the Mechanism of specific challenges faced by national justice actors in surfacing and addressing the experiences of a broad range of victims/survivors, and engage with the Mechanism on how it can assist them in achieving more inclusive justice, in line with its victim/survivor-centred approach.

C. Cooperation with civil society

54. The Mechanism requests civil society:

(a) To ensure that the Mechanism has access to all relevant materials to facilitate accountability processes and, to that end, to transfer available information and evidence to the Mechanism and, where required, facilitate its 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

55. 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. Now serving some 15 competent jurisdictions and drawing from a wide array of sources and trusted partnerships with Syrian civil society, Member States and international organizations, the Mechanism strives to apply its limited resources effectively and efficiently by leveraging the central repository and its structural investigation to respond to continually increasing demand from competent jurisdictions, based on a victim/survivor-centred approach towards inclusive justice.

56. Victims/survivors of international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic and their families remain at the heart of the Mechanism's work. In 2022, the Mechanism was able to reinforce and diversify its multifaceted engagement with civil society, in particular with the launch of 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. 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.

57. 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. Moving forward, a particular focus in this regard remains the Mechanism's determination to assist international entities mandated to search for missing persons, where appropriate, and in line with the Secretary-General's report of 2 August 2022 on missing people in the Syrian Arab Republic ([A/76/890](#)).

58. 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.