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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 seventh 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 seventh 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 has established itself as a key actor in efforts towards justice for serious international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. The Mechanism, although negatively affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the United Nations liquidity situation and subsequent hiring freeze, has nevertheless advanced on all prongs of its mandate by refining existing remote working methods and adopting new ones and by allocating limited resources strategically.

The Mechanism's central repository of information and evidence continues to expand. Faster and more automated processing capabilities have increased the searchability of the data in support of the ongoing work of competent jurisdictions and of longer-term justice efforts. Evidentiary modules designed to facilitate proof of contextual elements of core international crimes, including analysis to support charges of war crimes, have been shared with jurisdictions upon request and on the Mechanism's own initiative. Simultaneously, the Mechanism has continued to broaden its engagement with Syrian civil society actors to better understand the needs of the communities that it aims to serve. This has included focused consultations on the Mechanism's gender strategy.

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 seventh report to the General Assembly. The report covers the Mechanism's activities from 1 August 2020 to 31 January 2021.

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 these crimes.

3. Four years after its creation, the Mechanism fulfils the role of both a central repository of information and evidence in relation to serious international crimes, and an agile justice facilitator equipped to support current and future investigations and prosecutions to this end. In line with this flexible approach, the Mechanism continues to carefully allocate its staffing and resources to maximize its capability to provide timely assistance to competent jurisdictions, while advancing its structural investigation to support longer-term justice efforts. The Mechanism is designing its analytical work to be easily adapted and used for the broadest possible range of crime categories and alleged perpetrators affiliated with these crimes. In accordance with its founding principles of impartiality and independence, the Mechanism addresses crimes supported by evidence, regardless of the affiliation of individual perpetrators. It aims to fill gaps in its evidence collection through targeted investigations, with a view to addressing the scope and complexity of the Syrian situation over the past 10 years to the best of its abilities.

4. The ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the liquidity situation of the United Nations as a whole constituted additional challenges during the reporting cycle. After the outbreak of the pandemic in the beginning of 2020, the Mechanism executed a smooth transition to remote work, thanks to its existing technologies and frameworks, as well as training conducted previously. These secure remote working methods were further refined during the reporting period. However, given that in-person meetings and the collection of information and evidence, missions, the processing of complex data and other activities have been delayed, the Mechanism's progress across the full range of its functions has decelerated. In addition, the Mechanism has been affected by the United Nations liquidity situation. While the full budget of the Mechanism had been approved by the General Assembly in December 2019, a spending ceiling of 62 per cent and subsequent hiring freeze was imposed as a result of the liquidity situation facing the Organization. As a result, the Mechanism has not been able to proceed to fill all positions approved by the Assembly to achieve full recruitment.

5. Notwithstanding these challenging conditions, the Mechanism advanced the implementation of its mandate successfully. The central repository of information and evidence continues to grow, thanks to ongoing collaboration with information and evidence providers and remote collections. The amount of time taken to process material collected by the Mechanism has decreased and digital storage facilities were expanded to 1.7 petabytes. Evidentiary modules to assist competent jurisdictions in the chapeau requirements of serious international crimes have been advanced, and a first completed module has been shared with competent jurisdictions, upon request, and at the Mechanism's initiative. At the end of the reporting cycle, the Mechanism had concluded 59 cooperation frameworks with a diverse range of actors and entities.

Furthermore, the Mechanism had received 92 requests for assistance from 11 competent jurisdictions currently investigating and prosecuting offences in the Syrian context.

6. The Mechanism continues to advance its office-wide strategies on gender, crimes against children, a victim/survivor-centred approach and support for broader justice objectives. Collectively, these strategies underpin the Mechanism's commitment to learning from other justice actors by taking concrete steps to integrate best practices into its substantive work and daily operations.

7. Pursuant to paragraph 37 of General Assembly resolution [75/193](#), the Mechanism will henceforth submit one annual report, instead of two, to the Assembly on the implementation of its mandate, ahead of the annual presentation of the report by the Head of the Mechanism in April at a plenary meeting of the Assembly, under the agenda item entitled "Prevention of armed conflict". The upcoming annual debate is scheduled for 21 April 2021.

8. The Mechanism continues to keep abreast of the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and of the needs of Syrian communities residing abroad. In this context, the Mechanism reiterates the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations representatives for the Syrian people. In accordance with the resolution on the founding of the Mechanism, in which the need for any political process aimed at resolving the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure credible and comprehensive accountability to bring about reconciliation and sustainable peace was stressed, the Mechanism continues to encourage all States to advance accountability for serious international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic now and in the future.

II. A central repository of information and evidence

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

9. The Mechanism further increased the size and utility of its central repository of information and evidence relating to serious crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 by focusing on remote collections and remote cooperation. In the calendar year 2020, the Mechanism conducted 130 collections. However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an impact on the Mechanism's overall ability to expand and strengthen its central repository because restrictions on international travel and other confinement measures resulted in the postponement of in-person collection missions during the reporting period. In-person meetings with relevant interlocutors at the seat of the Mechanism in Geneva have also been curtailed. To accommodate the circumstances posed by COVID-19, the Mechanism has maintained the approach to collection and investigation, outlined in its sixth report, by focusing on activities and source development capable of being conducted remotely and by undertaking preparations and related outreach for when travel restrictions are lifted.

10. During the reporting period, the Mechanism refined its focus on targeted collection efforts. These are aimed at securing the most relevant materials and information capable of advancing ongoing analytical projects relating to its structural investigation and its responses to requests for assistance from competent national jurisdictions currently investigating and prosecuting serious crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. Targeted collection efforts have also been concluded with a view to advancing the Mechanism's commitment to holistic and inclusive justice, in particular regarding different categories of victims/survivors. This includes ensuring

that progress is made in securing information and evidence of historically overlooked and insufficiently documented crimes, such as sexual and gender-based crimes and crimes against children, and by identifying and filling gaps within the Mechanism's collection in relation to these crimes.

11. The Mechanism continues to engage with a broad range of information and evidence providers, including States, international organizations, United Nations partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other individuals. In this context, the Mechanism continues its ongoing and constructive cooperation with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, in relation to the transfer of materials by the Commission and by receiving the Commission's assistance in contacting and liaising with sources and potential witnesses, subject to the consent of each individual and in accordance with applicable confidentiality measures, to ensure the protection of the source and/or potential witness. Whenever possible, the Mechanism also shares with the Commission its analysis generated on the basis of the Commission's data. The Mechanism deepened its cooperation with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and, in this context, received additional materials from OPCW during the reporting period.

12. In accordance with the applicable Secretary-General's bulletin ([ST/SGB/2019/4](#)), as previously reported, in August 2019 the Mechanism sought access to materials of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. However, a decision has yet to be made on the Mechanism's request for access to these materials. As previously reported, to obtain access to some of the materials relied upon by the Joint Investigative Mechanism, the Mechanism has been working directly with individual States that provided information to the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Efforts to obtain access to relevant materials in this way have been affected by COVID-19. The Mechanism takes note of the recent decision taken by the General Assembly in paragraph 8 of its resolution [75/193](#), in which it "calls upon the Secretary-General to ensure that the relevant [Joint Investigative Mechanism] materials are processed expeditiously to be shared with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism without any further delays and no later than the end of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly".

13. The Mechanism is using the period of restricted travel triggered by COVID-19 to conduct a review of its internal procedural framework for investigation and collection, drawing on lessons learned from its experiences during the first few years. This review is thorough and resource-intensive. Its outcome will enhance the Mechanism's ability to engage in targeted high-value investigative work.

14. The Mechanism has continued its efforts to initiate cooperation with the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic, in line with its commitment to impartial and inclusive justice. The Mechanism has not yet received any response to its requests from those authorities. The Mechanism will also continue to reach out to all States, including those that publicly oppose its mandate, regarding evidentiary materials that they may hold according to publicly available information.

B. Processing evidence

15. During the reporting period, the Mechanism advanced the preservation and processing of information and evidence in its possession to make it available for ongoing analytical work and to respond to requests for assistance from competent jurisdictions. The overall evidence holdings increased to 79 terabytes, with more than 2 million records processed. At the same time, the Mechanism's progress in this area of work decelerated because of substantial challenges faced as a consequence of the

COVID-19 pandemic and the hiring freeze resulting from the United Nations liquidity situation. Combined, those factors compelled the Mechanism to postpone the launch of its Internet resources unit, which specializes in obtaining information and evidence from the Internet. The financial restrictions imposed by the United Nations also had an impact on the Mechanism's ability to procure necessary software and hardware, and its subsequent ability to begin certain kinds of complex evidence processing. Moreover, the Mechanism was required to develop alternative ways of working with and processing evidence remotely owing to the pandemic.

16. As part of this strategic adaptation to the COVID-19 situation, the Mechanism dedicated resources and time to improving the efficiency of digital evidence processing, using both automation and agile proceedings. As a result, notwithstanding multiple lockdowns during the reporting period, the Mechanism reduced by 90 per cent the average time elapsed between the registration of a piece of digital evidence and its accessibility by analysts through the central repository. This major efficiency improvement will continue to pay dividends in the future.

17. In addition, the Mechanism significantly increased its capacity for digital evidence storage during the reporting period. The central repository can, at present, preserve and provide easy access to very large collections of digital files, with storage capacity now expandable to 1.7 petabytes.

18. The Mechanism has also reached out to other communities on technological and methodological challenges relating to its central repository and the processing of digital evidence. For example, in October 2020, the Mechanism convened a gathering of civil society organizations, major technology companies, United Nations agencies and other international organizations, hosting a workshop to address specific challenges that arise in the context of complex digital data, including video. It resulted in the launch of a set of technological approaches, which should assist the Mechanism in improving the searchability of its digital video and digital imagery collections. Moreover, the Mechanism launched a Geneva-based e-discovery platform, leveraging resources and collaboration opportunities to share technology, technical approaches and non-substantive digital evidence methodologies with other United Nations actors based in Geneva and elsewhere. Collaboration in this context has resulted in shared efficiencies between entities and is planned in order to continue to improve the evidence repository's processing effectiveness in the coming period.

19. Over the next reporting period, the Mechanism hopes to expand the capability of its central repository by launching the previously postponed specialized Internet resources unit and by deploying further analytical database toolsets.

III. Facilitating justice

A. Analysing evidence and building case files

20. The Mechanism continued to advance the analysis of information and evidence within its growing central repository, working on multiple strategic lines of inquiry over the reporting period. The United Nations hiring freeze has had an impact on capacity across all the Mechanism's active lines of inquiry, necessitating the engagement of analytical staff across multiple projects and pausing or moderating the pace of some projects in order to advance others. The flexible approaches adopted to move staff across different projects have ensured the overall continuity of the Mechanism's analytical work in support of the development of its structural investigation and in its ongoing assistance in response to requests from competent jurisdictions.

21. Within one line of inquiry, the Mechanism finalized an evidentiary module regarding a contextual requirement necessary for the prosecution of war crimes charges. This module has been shared with multiple competent jurisdictions during the reporting period. Within a separate line of inquiry, a similar project on a contextual requirement necessary to prove crimes against humanity charges has been advanced, but capacity issues have affected the pace at which this project can progress. With regard to detention-related allegations, key analytical products on crime patterns and structures have been updated to take account of material newly added to the central repository. This led to development of new products on crime patterns and associated organizational structures. The Mechanism has also continued its analysis of materials relating to allegations of specific unlawful attack incidents and the organizational structures connected to those incidents.

22. As outlined in its previous report, the Mechanism remains committed to developing a range of analytical products to meet both short- and longer-term justice needs covering the broad range of alleged crimes and perpetrators in the context of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mechanism is mindful of the need for its analytical work to advance its structural investigation and lay the foundation for its work to build case files. To this end, the Mechanism develops products relevant to the structural investigation dealing with cross-cutting contextual, structural and other issues that are designed to fit flexibly into multiple case files. In parallel, through cross-sectional collaboration, the Mechanism has been leveraging existing technologies to develop and enhance the various platforms utilized for its analytical work and internal knowledge-sharing.

23. In advancing its lines of inquiry, the Mechanism remains committed to a holistic and inclusive approach to justice, in particular regarding different categories of victims/survivors. Specific attention is paid to ensuring that analytical work products incorporate historically overlooked and insufficiently documented crimes, such as sexual and gender-based crimes and crimes against children. The aim is to integrate this focus from the commencement of every analytical project, in order to assist in accurately identifying the full range of offences to which victims and survivors were exposed. In this context, the planning and implementation of analytical projects systematically integrates elements from the Mechanism's cross-cutting strategies on gender, crimes against children and a victim/survivor-centred approach, through a range of tools and processes, in coordination with the Mechanism's internal office-wide working groups on these themes.

24. As previously reported, the Mechanism has two open case files. However, owing to operational and resource constraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the United Nations liquidity crisis and subsequent hiring freeze, the Mechanism has not been able to allocate dedicated resources to these case files during the reporting period. One of the files, designed to support longer-term accountability efforts, has been paused almost entirely. The Mechanism continuously assesses the progress of its collection and analytical work with a view to identifying adequate bases to open additional case files, resources permitting. The Mechanism will open such case files whenever the necessary conditions are met and subject to the availability of sufficient resources.

B. Frameworks for sharing and cooperation

25. The Mechanism has continued to engage with a broad range of relevant entities and actors to establish cooperation frameworks aimed at fostering its collection activity and overall work. By the end of the reporting cycle, 59 such cooperation frameworks were in place with State entities, international organizations and civil society actors, with discussions ongoing with respect to 19 additional frameworks.

New domestic legislation allowing for cooperation with the Mechanism was also passed in two States in the second half of 2020.

26. Flexibility has remained the guiding principle for the Mechanism in the management of cooperation frameworks, adjusting format, scope and content to the diverse needs and circumstances of its interlocutors. With the implementation of previously concluded frameworks and the increase in collection and sharing activities based on these existing arrangements, the Mechanism has entered a new phase of cooperation. In close collaboration with information and evidence providers, existing frameworks are revisited to ensure that they still respond to the needs of all participants and are amended as necessary to fit new circumstances or to address issues arising. These can include adjustments in the classification of the material to be shared or considerations relating to the security of sources. With this approach, the Mechanism has adapted to changing situations and maximized the value of a number of past agreements in furtherance of the implementation of its mandate.

27. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unexpected challenges regarding the conclusion of new cooperation frameworks. Because of the sensitivity of the matters at issue and the legitimate security concerns of many sources, not being able to conduct in-person meetings and converse directly has had an impact on the pace of the Mechanism's new engagements and cooperation discussions. In rapidly implementing the full range of required new and secure communication methods and developing more agile working methods, the Mechanism has nevertheless made progress in this area. Maintaining active contacts, preserving trust relationships and building new collaborations in the current global context requires dedicated efforts, which the Mechanism is committed to sustaining.

28. The Mechanism also continues to welcome engagement by other United Nations entities, as well as the Secretariat, and appreciates its cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. The Mechanism values the contribution of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to its work, including in relation to collection-related activities as previously mentioned, and informal collaboration with other United Nations accountability mechanisms regarding shared administrative and technical concerns while fully respecting the independence and mandate of each entity.

C. Sharing information and evidence with national jurisdictions

29. The Mechanism is mandated to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings in national, regional or international courts or tribunals that have or may in the future have jurisdiction over the crimes under consideration. In line with its terms of reference, the Mechanism shares information only with jurisdictions that respect international human rights law and standards, including the right to a fair trial, and that would not apply the death penalty for the offences under consideration. During the reporting period, the Mechanism continued to assist competent national authorities investigating and prosecuting serious international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

30. By 31 January 2021, the Mechanism had received 93 requests for assistance from 11 competent jurisdictions. A total of 36 requests for assistance have been processed and closed, while work is ongoing for another 36. To date, the Mechanism has assisted 36 distinct investigations conducted at the domestic level by providing supporting evidence, relevant information and analytical products, establishing contacts between judicial authorities and witnesses, and serving as a bridge between

civil society organizations and national judicial authorities. Some of these investigations concern cases in which a suspect is in detention or that have led to trial proceedings. Owing to the number and breadth of requests recently received and resource limitations, the Mechanism had not begun work on 21 requests for assistance at the time of reporting.

31. During the reporting period, the Mechanism focused on broadening the array of assistance offered to national war crimes units, moving beyond the sharing of pieces of information and evidence preserved in the central repository in response to the discrete factual questions posed in numerous requests for assistance. Efforts were first directed at deepening the Mechanism's understanding of the needs of domestic jurisdictions to inform the Mechanism's strategy and priorities and at developing analytical products that would assist in building core international crimes cases across relevant competent jurisdictions. The Mechanism has successfully begun to proactively share analytical reports and evidentiary modules designed to feed into a broad range of national structural investigations and discrete ongoing prosecutions. It continues to develop a variety of additional analytical and evidentiary products intended to facilitate ongoing and future prosecutions of serious international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

32. The significant restrictions on missions and in-person meetings caused by the current COVID-19 pandemic have impaired the Mechanism's ability to fulfil its objective of fully expanding these forms of assistance. However, the Mechanism has laid the foundations necessary to offer additional support in the near future once restrictions are lifted. It has invested dedicated efforts in refining its internal procedures to facilitate future cooperation and sharing with national judicial authorities and is engaging in a review of its internal procedural framework for investigation and collection-related work. It has also further integrated its approach across its units responsible for: (a) investigation and collection; (b) preservation; (c) analysis and case-building; and (d) sharing. Through these efforts and other measures geared towards developing the sharing aspect of its mandate, the Mechanism has prepared the ground for furthering its role as justice facilitator for the year 2021 and beyond.

IV. Mechanism-wide developments

A. Update on thematic strategies

33. During the reporting period, the Mechanism took concrete steps towards finalizing its overarching gender strategy, with a view to making portions of this strategy accessible to a wider audience. The gender strategy is intended to integrate gender perspectives throughout the Mechanism's substantive work and across all mandated activities, providing the conceptual frameworks, methodologies and practical tools necessary to do so. To ensure that staff members have the skills and competencies necessary to integrate effectively gender perspectives into their daily work, the Mechanism also conducts periodically bespoke, foundational gender training for all new staff members. The most recent training session was held in November 2020. Preparations are also under way to conduct bespoke advanced gender training for staff involved in the Mechanism's accountability-related work in 2021.

34. The Mechanism has begun the process of seeking input from different stakeholder groups on its gender strategy. In October 2020, the working group on gender and victim/survivor-centred approaches conducted an online consultation on the strategy with female representatives of Syrian civil society organizations working on gender issues. The Mechanism gained invaluable insights from that consultation,

which have deepened its understanding of barriers to bringing to light sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian context and the challenges faced by NGOs working on these issues. Identifying these barriers and designing tools and approaches to overcome them is a critical part of the Mechanism's ongoing efforts to implement its gender strategy. The Mechanism considers this type of consultation an important tool for enabling Syrian women to influence and engage with accountability efforts in a meaningful way. Additional consultations are expected to take place throughout the next reporting cycle.

35. The Mechanism benefited greatly from the expertise of external gender specialists during the reporting period. The specialists have helped to refine aspects of the gender strategy and to develop practical guidance for interviewing victims of sexual violence in the Syrian context. The guidance is undergoing final internal review with a view to its operationalization and is a concrete example of the tools that the Mechanism is developing to integrate gender perspectives into its substantive work.

36. The Mechanism's victim/survivor-centred approach is intended to better understand the experiences, concerns and priorities of victims/survivors of international crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic. Its aim is to increase the inclusivity of the Mechanism's activities by paying specific attention to categories of crimes and to victims/survivors often overlooked or underrepresented in justice and accountability efforts, including women, children and minorities. During the reporting period, the Mechanism consulted extensively with United Nations entities and Syrian civil society organizations to identify and establish contact with individuals and groups that are currently not adequately represented in justice and accountability efforts in the Syrian context. The Mechanism is committed to investing the time and resources required to build trust with these actors, enabling them to engage with the Mechanism in a safe and informed manner.

37. The Mechanism's efforts to address crimes committed against children in the Syrian Arab Republic are undertaken within the framework of a dedicated strategy that is complementary to the strategy on gender. Both strategies share certain conceptual frameworks and working methods, as well as analytical tools and approaches, while fully recognizing that accountability issues relating to gender and children have distinct dimensions and characteristics. During the reporting period, the Mechanism consulted closely with relevant stakeholders to build internal knowledge and skills to collect and analyse more effectively information and evidence relating to crimes against children. The Mechanism is preparing to supplement its expertise to address this category of crimes in 2021 and is committed to sharing its insights, approaches and tools, where possible, to better address these often-neglected categories of crimes that affect children in particular.

38. The Mechanism reiterates its commitment to broader justice objectives, focusing in the first instance on assisting in the search for missing persons in the Syrian context, including learning from other situations in order to meet the needs of victims/survivors. The Mechanism has commenced using information and evidence in its central repository to assist those active in the search for missing persons. Some limitations and restrictions apply to this type of work. The Mechanism cannot communicate with affected communities and families directly on missing persons issues owing to capacity, mandate and confidentiality constraints. To advance its commitment, the Mechanism has introduced an initial and simplified tagging process for missing persons as part of ongoing searches of data in its central repository. While the Mechanism is already cooperating with some international organizations active in this field, it plans to conduct further outreach during the next reporting cycle with a view to increasing the direct transfer of information or insights from the evidence and/or analytical work to actors mandated to search for the missing.

B. Operational support

39. The operational support section of the Mechanism is intended to provide cross-sectional support in the core areas of security, language services, and witness and victim protection and support. During the reporting period, the section focused on building the team and developing procedures. However, the United Nations hiring freeze meant that most recruitment efforts for the section had to be delayed or postponed to 2021.

40. The operational support section of the Mechanism continued to successfully integrate security considerations into all aspects of the Mechanism's operations, working closely with all staff, in particular the investigations team and the information security officers. In addition, communications channels were solidified with the security section of the United Nations Office at Geneva, other United Nations entities and relevant interlocutors. Significant progress was made on the preparation or revision of standard operating procedures relating to operations both at the Mechanism's premises and in the field.

41. In the area of language support, the Mechanism increased its capacity and is further developing flexible processes for the internal provision of language support, as well as contracting external language support to cover all the Mechanism's operational needs, including both translation and interpretation.

C. Funding

42. In response to the call from the General Assembly in paragraph 35 of its resolution 72/191, the Secretary-General decided to include the Mechanism in the proposed programme budget for 2020 (A/74/6 (Sect. 8) and A/74/6 (Sect. 8)/Corr.1). The Assembly decided to approve the request for regular budget funding for 2020 in paragraph 46 of its resolution 74/262. Although the entire request was approved by the Assembly, a spending ceiling of 62 per cent was imposed as a result of the liquidity situation facing the United Nations.

43. The Secretary-General included the Mechanism in the proposed programme budget for 2021 (A/75/6 (Sect. 8)). In the final week of 2020, the General Assembly voted to approve the entire request (resolution 75/252, para. 49).

D. Team

44. The Mechanism has continued to accord significant priority to recruitment. At the end of the reporting period, 50 of the 60 approved regular budget posts had been filled. In April 2020, the Secretary-General imposed a freeze on hiring for regular budget vacancies. Ongoing recruitment for remaining vacant posts will be finalized and staff onboarded once current hiring restrictions are lifted.

45. The Mechanism's working group on organizational wellness submitted an internal report to support ongoing efforts to promote the safety and mental and physical well-being of team members. The majority of the recommendations contained in the report have been endorsed and implementation is well under way. This includes the creation of a staff committee tasked with developing a standard operating procedure to address possible secondary traumatization caused by repeated exposure to graphic materials while performing professional duties. The committee will conduct its work in close consultation with external specialists. During the reporting period, United Nations entities and external experts also provided training to all Mechanism staff members on preventing and managing secondary trauma.

V. Recommendations

46. The Mechanism will seek cooperation to fulfil its mandate and maximize its impact, as set out below.

A. Cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations

47. 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;
- (b) To ensure that relevant United Nations agencies coordinate and cooperate fully with the Mechanism, respecting the mandate of each entity;
- (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 of international crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic;
- (e) To engage with the Mechanism on refining and implementing its gender strategy, its strategy on crimes against children and its victim/survivor-centred approach, in particular with regard to integrating gender perspectives throughout the Mechanism's work and accounting for and responding to the needs and concerns of victims/survivors, including children;
- (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 are established in conformity with the Mechanism's mandate and can benefit from its work and expertise.

B. Cooperation with States

48. The Mechanism requests Member States:

- (a) To continue to support the Mechanism's budgetary needs and continued inclusion in the regular budget of the United Nations, in accordance with past decisions taken by the General Assembly;
- (b) To ensure broad cooperation and engagement with the Mechanism and to implement any required agreements and frameworks 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 that efficient and effective procedures are in place to facilitate access to their territories by the Mechanism as required for its work;

(f) For States hosting Syrian refugee communities, to provide information and facilitate introductions for the Mechanism with 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 services in connection with the Mechanism's work.

C. Cooperation with civil society

49. 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 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 refining and implementing its gender strategy, its strategy on crimes against children and its victim/survivor-centred approach, in particular with regard to integrating gender perspectives throughout the Mechanism's work and accounting for and responding to the needs and concerns of victims and survivors, including children;

(d) To assist the Mechanism in reaching out to civil society, especially victim/survivor groups, and to foster an overall understanding of the Mechanism's mandate and work.

VI. Conclusion

50. During the reporting cycle, the Mechanism continued to make progress on the implementation of its mandate, notwithstanding additional challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the United Nations liquidity situation. Early investment in modern technologies and remote work capacities and capabilities enabled the Mechanism to continue to advance its mandate, even as most in-person activities were postponed.

51. Continuous improvement in the searchability of the Mechanism's central repository continues to support the development of the Mechanism's analytical work, such as strategic lines of inquiry, evidentiary modules and case files. The steady increase in requests for assistance from competent jurisdictions and ongoing dialogue and collaboration with them also illustrate the Mechanism's increasing importance as a justice facilitator in the short and longer term.

52. The Mechanism continues to regularly engage with Syrian civil society representatives to better understand the needs and sensitivities of the communities that it aims to serve. These consultations and findings are subsequently incorporated into the Mechanism's work, including its office-wide thematic strategies on gender, victims/survivors, children and the missing. This approach enables the Mechanism to integrate efforts aimed at inclusive justice into its processes and to assist a broader range of justice objectives, whenever feasible.

53. The Mechanism is grateful for the support extended to it by States, the United Nations system, international organizations, civil society actors and individuals. It will continue to be guided by the principles and purpose of its mandate and continue the quest for comprehensive justice for the Syrian people and for all affected by serious crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic.