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Letter dated 22 May 2023 from the Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith, in accordance with paragraph 3 of Security Council resolution [2651 \(2022\)](#), the tenth report on the activities of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

I would be grateful if the present letter and the report were brought to the attention of the members of the Security Council and issued as a document of the Council.

(Signed) Christian **Ritscher**
Special Adviser and Head of the Investigative Team



Tenth report of the Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

Summary

The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is reporting for the tenth time to the Security Council, marking new key outcomes towards the fulfilment of its mandate in respect of accountability for core international crimes committed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh).

Following previously reported investigative achievements, the Team successfully launched new lines of inquiry on the development and use of biological and chemical weapons, the destruction of cultural and religious heritage and the crimes committed against various communities of Iraq. The Team has started to be engaged in building criminal case files with its Iraqi counterparts – investigative judges, prosecutors and forensic and law enforcement experts – against Da'esh/ISIL perpetrators who escaped from Iraq and are residing in third States.

The Team, confident in the future adoption of a domestic legal framework to prosecute Da'esh/ISIL members for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, is aiming to work with the Iraqi judiciary on key evidence and leads that could support charges related to core international crimes.

The Team will continue to share its expertise and knowledge with relevant jurisdictions, within and beyond Iraq, to hold Da'esh/ISIL members accountable for such crimes.

The major evidence-digitization project led by the Team is continuously being implemented and UNITAD is assisting its counterparts in the digitization of records at several courts in Baghdad, Tikrit, Anbar, Ninawa, Kirkuk, Tazah Khurmatu and Erbil. This support includes the provision of training on the management of key evidence, as well as on the physical archiving of records.

The Team is highly dedicated to uninterruptedly providing its expertise, information, and equipment to Iraqi counterparts, in particular in the framework of its digitization project.

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	4
II. Status of investigations	4
A. Progress in investigative priorities	4
B. Specialized thematic units: mainstreaming expertise on key aspects of investigations. . .	9
C. Composition and facilities of the Investigative Team	10
III. Investigative activities: collection and storage of evidentiary material	11
A. Documentary, testimonial and digital evidence collection	11
B. Excavation of mass graves and the return of remains	13
C. Storage, analysis and management of evidence	14
IV. Delivering accountability in collaboration with national actors	15
A. Engagement and cooperation with the Government of Iraq, including with the Kurdistan Regional Government	15
B. Strengthening the capacity of Iraqi authorities	16
C. Working in partnership with all elements of Iraqi society	17
V. Cooperation in support of the activities of the Investigative Team	18
A. Engaging with Member States and providing support to ongoing national proceedings. .	18
B. Ensuring coherence with United Nations system entities	18
VI. Promoting accountability globally	19
VII. Funding and resources	19
VIII. Looking forward.	20
IX. Conclusion	20

I. Introduction

1. The tenth report on the activities of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) is hereby submitted to the Security Council.
2. During the reporting period, the Investigative Team sustained its efficient path of investigations, pursuant to its mandate to support domestic efforts to hold Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) accountable for acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The work of the Team has been conducted in accordance with Security Council resolution [2379 \(2017\)](#) and the terms of reference for the activities of the Team in Iraq ([S/2018/118](#), annex), as approved by the Security Council on 13 February 2018.
3. In addition, in line with paragraph 3 of resolution [2379 \(2017\)](#), the Special Adviser and Head of the Investigative Team has remained in close and attentive contact with national authorities, religious actors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and each survivor group in order to promote, both in Iraq and globally, accountability for crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL.

II. Status of investigations

A. Progress in investigative priorities

4. The Team continued to advance its investigations into international crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq. Drawing on six dedicated field investigation units and two thematic investigation units based in Baghdad, Dahuk and Erbil, the Team continues to maintain its capacity to undertake investigations into crimes committed against all communities in Iraq.
5. During the reporting period, UNITAD produced preliminary case assessment reports on crimes committed against the Sunni population in Anbar, crimes against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community and on the destruction of cultural heritage. Existing case assessment reports have been enhanced with additional evidence and legal analysis. This led, inter alia, to a significant update of the 2021 report on crimes committed against the Yazidi community in Sinjar with new facts, additional evidence and analysis; the enhancement of the initial case assessment report on crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL against the Christian community in Iraq, focused on crimes committed in the towns of Hamdaniyah and Bartalah; and the report on the development and use of chemical and biological weapons by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq. The Team has focused increasingly on cross-team investigations, as reflected in its report on the destruction of cultural heritage, which currently focuses on 29 sites and encompasses all communities of Iraq. UNITAD is enhancing its investigations into crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL during its occupation of Mosul and anticipates that further lines of inquiry will lead to the completion of assessments on Da'esh/ISIL leadership and hierarchical structure in that city and in Tall Afar. The Team expects to arrive at initial findings on the targeting of Iraqi police and security forces by Da'esh/ISIL during its occupation of Mosul and it also intends to expand its investigations into cultural heritage crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL.
6. The fruitful cooperation that has been developed with the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq, and specifically with the Chief Justice and Head of the Supreme Judicial Council, has remained critical in supporting the activities of the Team. Investigative judges and investigators from courts across Iraq played a crucial role in this regard. Their contribution has continued to be an indispensable part of the investigative progress and achievements during the reporting period.

7. In addition, the Team continued to work holistically with civil society to identify gaps in existing knowledge, to align investigative priorities and to try to avoid the duplication of effort and resources, in particular in relation to corroborating the statements of witnesses and survivors. The Team expresses its gratitude to the civil society actors that shared information and witness statements in relation to the crimes under investigation.

Development and use of chemical and biological weapons by Da'esh/ISIL

8. During the reporting period, the investigation into the development and use by Da'esh/ISIL of chemical and biological weapons in Iraq led to the collection and preservation of significant additional evidence. Specifically, the Team has acquired a large amount of forensic and documentary evidence, which further supports and advances its case assessment report.

9. Key lines of inquiry during this period focused on investigating main sites of chemical weapon production; gaining further insight into delivery systems manufactured and used by Da'esh/ISIL; and expanding the investigation to additional chemical weapons attacks perpetrated by Da'esh/ISIL across Iraq. The Team worked with technical experts, including experts from the Mine Action Service, who provided specialized insight and technical statements about chemical weapons production sites identified during the liberation of areas occupied by Da'esh/ISIL, as well as the delivery systems employed by this group. The Team is also focusing on collecting and preserving evidence linked to 12 attacks, working closely with Iraqi judicial authorities who provided court records and case files to UNITAD.

10. With respect to the attack of 8 March 2016 on Tazah Khurmatu, the Team has focused on collecting evidence on Da'esh/ISIL units that were operating in the area at relevant periods. This has led to the collection and preservation of new battlefield evidence and files, including on Da'esh/ISIL's operations in Kirkuk and the potential involvement of specific persons of interest.

11. Moving forward, UNITAD will engage with expert entities to expand on information-sharing arrangements and obtain dedicated analysis and reports. The Team will also advance its legal analysis of linkages between persons of interest and the legal findings and its analysis of specific forms of criminal liability for potential core international crimes.

Crimes committed against the Christian community

12. Substantial progress has been made in the collection and analysis of evidence, which has strengthened the case assessment report with preliminary findings on crimes committed against the Christian community in Iraq. The Team significantly progressed in its analysis of Da'esh/ISIL documents as well as through in-person interviews and screenings with witnesses, including victims, experts and religious leaders. UNITAD also identified and interviewed several Christian men and women who had undergone forcible religious conversion and inhumane treatment while detained in Hamdaniyah and Bartalah, focusing on women who had been subjected to sexual violence while kept in Da'esh/ISIL detention.

13. Another major focus of the Team's efforts has been the identification and collection of linkage evidence, so that high and mid-level commanders, who were present in the Christian-populated towns in Ninawa Plains and who are responsible for crimes committed against the Christian community, may be held accountable. Progress was made in the development of individual case files for Da'esh/ISIL members in relation to crimes committed in Hamdaniyah, including a high-level Da'esh/ISIL member associated with the Diwan of Spoils. The identities of these Da'esh/ISIL members are corroborated by testimonial evidence, Da'esh/ISIL internal

documents and case files provided by the Iraqi judiciary. The Team has also progressed in analysing Da'esh/ISIL's propaganda concerning the Christian community through the identification and review of Da'esh/ISIL publications, including fatwas and propaganda magazines.

14. Through field-based investigative work, UNITAD has identified several key locations. In December 2022, one of several field missions to Hamdaniyah led to the identification of several key locations, including a health clinic where Christians had been gathered by Da'esh/ISIL and forcibly transferred out of Hamdaniyah; two houses where the remaining Christian men and women had been detained; and the building where Da'esh/ISIL had established its local headquarters. In addition, the Team strengthened its findings on the destruction of Christian cultural heritage in Mosul and the Ninawa plains, including churches, monasteries, cemeteries, manuscripts, Christian symbols and artwork. The Team also made headway into the identification of Da'esh/ISIL members responsible for the destruction of Christian cultural heritage.

Crimes committed against the Yazidi community

15. The Team has continued to collect evidence in respect of the attack committed by Da'esh/ISIL against the Yazidi community in the Sinjar district and has updated the case brief in relation to that crime. In addition to identifying new potential witnesses, UNITAD focused its efforts on expanding its list of alleged perpetrators, which currently consists of 2,286 individuals, including 188 foreign fighters. In-depth case files have been developed in relation to 31 persons of interest. In developing its understanding of the Da'esh/ISIL perpetrator network behind the Sinjar attack and the subsequent killings, enslavement and other crimes committed against the Yazidi population of Sinjar, the Team has started to support case-building on individual perpetrators, in collaboration with Iraqi authorities, including Kurdish authorities, as well as competent national jurisdictions of several third States.

16. The Team also furthered its investigation into crimes committed against the Yazidi community in Tall Afar, developed a witness list and engaged with local Iraqi authorities and counterparts.

17. Furthermore, the Team continued its investigations into the crimes committed against the Yazidi population in Qani, Hamadan and Zelili. In this regard, UNITAD provided support to Iraqi authorities before, during and after the excavations of mass graves in these three locations, facilitating the collection of additional forensic evidence and providing further investigative leads. The Team has developed a witness list and is collecting testimonial evidence to shed light on the events, including with respect to victims, survivors and potential perpetrators. A case assessment reflecting the evidence related to these crimes, as well as the Da'esh/ISIL individual perpetrators involved, is in preparation.

18. UNITAD also advanced its investigation into the destruction of Yazidi cultural heritage by Da'esh/ISIL. In this regard, the Team identified 106 Yazidi heritage sites that were destroyed by Da'esh/ISIL, conducted witness interviews and developed analytical findings in relation to destroyed heritage sites.

Crimes committed against Kaka'i, Shabak and Shia Turkmen communities

19. Complementary to the specialized cross-sectional investigations into gender-based crimes, the Team has focused on advancing the investigation into crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL against the Kaka'i, Shabak and Shia Turkmen communities in Iraq, including specific attacks against cultural heritage sites and campaigns of killing and enforced disappearance specifically targeting these community members.

20. UNITAD focused on collecting evidence of allegations involving missing Shia Turkmen from Tall Afar and Shabak from villages near Mosul and gathering testimonial, documentary and digital evidence on the destruction of cultural heritage. The deepening of the evidence base concerning crimes committed against these communities was achieved by conducting several field missions across Ninawa and Kirkuk Governorates and by strengthening cooperation with judicial authorities, civil society organizations, community leaders and religious figures.

21. The Team will now focus on gathering additional evidence and conducting interviews with key witnesses, such as survivors and eyewitnesses to specific gender-based crimes. Furthermore, the Team will review and analyse battlefield evidence to identify senior persons of interest operating in the area at the time.

Crimes committed against the Sunni community

22. UNITAD has continued to expand its investigation into crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL against the Sunni community in Anbar. Specifically, additional evidence was gathered in relation to two main incidents: the execution of 16 members of the Albu Nimr tribe in a sinkhole in the Tharthar desert and the execution of around 46 members of the tribe at the Bakr roundabout in Hit, both in October 2014. In addition, the Team expanded its focus into a third incident: the capture and killing of 15 members of the Jam'iyah police station in Hit at the beginning of October 2014. UNITAD has identified other incidents, including extrajudicial executions; torture; cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment; and extensive destruction of public and private property and of cultural heritage, which will be explored as the investigation continues.

23. The Team has developed a preliminary case assessment report outlining its initial findings in relation to these crimes and the three incidents mentioned above. The report, based on the evidence collected so far, includes witness testimony, satellite imagery, Da'esh/ISIL documents and open-source information. The findings also allow the identification of key Da'esh/ISIL members in positions of command at the relevant time and the development of individual files pertaining to these persons of interest.

Crimes committed in and around Tikrit

24. The Team has continued investigating the crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL against the civilian population of Tikrit and Alam from June 2014 to March 2015.

25. Further corroborative evidence was collected on arbitrary arrests and detentions, beatings, public executions, the destruction of religious and cultural monuments as well as destruction, looting and seizure of property by Da'esh/ISIL during its occupation of Tikrit and Alam. More details on Da'esh/ISIL media and propaganda activities have emerged based on testimonial evidence. The Team has also identified persons of interest operating in the area during the relevant time.

26. UNITAD continued to collaborate with Iraqi judicial authorities and to collect corroborative evidence regarding the perpetrators of the mass killing at Tikrit Air Academy in June 2014.

27. The Team also engaged with administrative and judicial authorities as well as with community representatives and families of survivors in Tikrit to explore new investigative leads.

28. During the next reporting periods, the Team will continue to update and consolidate the case assessment report on the crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL and its perpetrators in Tikrit and Alam, aiming for completion by the end of the year.

Crimes committed in and around Mosul

29. The Team expanded its line of inquiry into the targeting of Iraqi police and security forces by Da'esh/ISIL during its occupation of Mosul. The investigations are currently focusing on crimes committed in southern Mosul. The Team has widened its evidence base through in-person interviews and screenings with witnesses, including victims of crimes committed in Hammam al-Alil. The evidence collected thus far indicates several potential crimes including torture, enforced disappearance and mass killing of hundreds of police officers or persons associated with the police force.

30. Following a field mission to Hammam al-Alil in March 2023, the Team identified several key locations, including a house where Da'esh/ISIL detained and tortured police officers and persons associated with police and security. Evidence collected during the mission provided information on the possible existence of mass grave sites, believed to contain the remains of hundreds of victims.

31. The Team also continued its investigation into the mass execution by Da'esh/ISIL of approximately 1,000 Shia detainees from Badush prison on 10 and 11 June 2014. UNITAD interviewed additional witnesses, including survivors of the attack on Badush prison, who were identified through statements obtained from Iraqi judicial authorities, as well as through the Team's investigation.

32. In addition, and after the excavation of the main execution site in 2021 and 2022, which held the remains of almost 600 Shia prisoners killed by Da'esh/ISIL, the Team has sustained its efforts to locate additional mass graves. Ongoing investigative efforts have led to the identification of a victim believed to be the only survivor of a mass execution carried out south of Mosul. UNITAD is currently focusing on locating the respective mass grave site, where approximately 85 Shia prisoners were allegedly shot and buried.

33. Based on testimonial accounts, the Team identified additional Da'esh/ISIL perpetrators involved in the execution of Shia prisoners from Badush prison.

34. To support the Iraqi authorities in identifying remains and returning them to their families, UNITAD has compiled a list of individuals identified as likely to have been executed by Da'esh/ISIL and has shared it with the Iraqi Mass Graves Directorate to supplement their holdings of victims' names.

Cross-team investigations on the destruction of cultural heritage

35. The Team has expanded its investigation into the destruction by Da'esh/ISIL of cultural heritage by producing a preliminary overview of the destruction of religious and cultural heritage sites from all Iraqi communities. It currently focuses on 29 sites located in the Ninawa and Mosul areas, with a view to identifying persons of interest and potential perpetrators.

36. Field-based investigations have resulted in the collection and preservation of testimonial evidence, including from site caretakers, and documentary evidence. UNITAD has also collected Da'esh/ISIL videos pertaining to specific attacks and has analysed several propaganda documents. Through its investigative efforts, the Team has identified Da'esh/ISIL units, such as Hisbah, the diwan of underground resources (Diwan al-Rikaz) and the diwan of proselytization and mosques (Diwan al-Da'wah wal-Masajid), which might have been involved in the destruction of cultural heritage, and is in the process of analysing the role and responsibilities of each entity and identifying their key members. UNITAD is also examining destruction methods, including the use of explosives, "industrial" deterioration and ransacking, that resulted in the destruction of cultural property in Mosul and in the Nimrud museums.

37. Identification of and access to eyewitnesses remain a crucial challenge for the Team in advancing the investigative work. Because UNITAD has shifted its emphasis towards the identification of the individual perpetrators responsible for the destruction of cultural heritage, it will carry out detailed analytical work, including, for example, satellite imagery assessment, and will interact with various stakeholders working on cultural heritage in order to identify those potentially responsible.

38. To further its investigation, the Team has interacted with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization and with non-United Nations entities, as well as with Iraqi authorities involved in collecting, preserving and restoring Iraq cultural heritage. The Team is in the process of developing a wider investigation plan to address the international crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL against all ethnic communities in the geographical area of Ninawa Governorate.

39. Finally, UNITAD is also undertaking an in-depth analysis of Da'esh/ISIL structural organization and leadership in Mosul during the time of occupation (June 2014–December 2017), which includes the identification of the most important Da'esh/ISIL leaders, their subordinates, the roles of said leaders and subordinates and how those individuals are connected to each other. The Team will work on a preliminary case assessment thereof in the next reporting period.

B. Specialized thematic units: mainstreaming expertise on key aspects of investigations

40. In parallel with the core investigative work, the Team has continued to build its capacity in specialized cross-sectional areas, in accordance with international standards.

Sexual and gender-based crimes and crimes against children

41. The Gender Crimes and Children Unit has continued to investigate gender-based violence and crimes against children committed by Da'esh/ISIL against a wide range of communities, including Yazidis, Shia Turkmen, Christians, Kaka'i, Shabak and Sunnis. Having amply documented the capture and sexual enslavement of Yazidi women and girls and the use of Yazidi boys as child soldiers, UNITAD progressively invested more resources in gathering evidence on individual Da'esh/ISIL fighters who are being investigated or prosecuted for participating in these crimes. In this regard, the Team has conducted witness interviews and analysed evidence included in the requests for assistance stemming from third States.

42. In the previous six months, additional leads were identified in the investigation of sexual and gender-based crimes committed against Shia Turkmen girls, which also potentially concerns women who were captured by Da'esh/ISIL in Sinjar after fleeing Tall Afar and were subsequently forced to marry Da'esh/ISIL fighters. This investigation also encompasses Shia Turkmen boys who were separated from their families and forced to become child soldiers. Evidence recently collected also shows that, on occasion, Shia Turkmen children, from newborns to children aged 7, were adopted by Da'esh/ISIL families, an allegation that UNITAD is continuing to investigate. Based on the evidence available so far, the Team has completed an analytical report on preliminary findings on sexual and gender-based crimes committed against members of the Shia Turkmen community, which also identifies alleged perpetrators.

43. In addition, UNITAD has launched promising investigative lines on gender crimes and crimes against children from the Shabak and Kaka'i communities. While the sensitive nature of the crimes, the culture of the communities and the

underreporting of these crimes all pose significant challenges, potential witnesses have been identified through contacts with local civil society organizations.

44. Additional evidence was also gathered on crimes against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community. This evidence has been fed into an analytical report that covers crime patterns involving the execution of gay men and boys. Investigations were focused on Mosul, where most of the executions took place, but also documented killings in Tall Afar, Bartalah and Sinjar. In addition to testimonial evidence from eyewitnesses to the executions, documentary evidence was analysed, such as Da'esh/ISIL papers laying out the group's ideology on homosexuality and judgments from Da'esh/ISIL courts sentencing them to execution. The overall analysis allows the identification of Da'esh/ISIL departments (for example, the department of justice and grievances) involved in the executions, as well as the identification of individual perpetrators, including Da'esh/ISIL judges who issued the sentences or those who carried out the executions.

Financing of Da'esh/ISIL crimes

45. During the reporting period, the Team has continued to focus its investigation on the financial and command structure of Da'esh/ISIL and how it supported the war effort and the commission of international crimes.

46. To that end, the Team has furthered its analysis of some Da'esh/ISIL departments, namely the treasury department (Diwan Bayt al-Mal), the zakat department (Diwan al-Zakat wal-Sadaqat) and the department of soldiers (Diwan al-Jund), to outline in greater detail their interrelations and how they all served and assisted the achievement of the Da'esh/ISIL strategy, ultimately leading to the commission of international crimes. The Team has also been conducting extensive research and analysis on the Da'esh/ISIL delegated committee.

47. With respect to the treasury and zakat departments, the analysis of UNITAD has shown how these two entities cooperated with one another and were strictly subordinated to the delegated committee. The Team's findings on Diwan al-Jund were expanded to cover correspondence between this department and various Da'esh/ISIL entities and are being focused on the role of Da'esh/ISIL "governors" ("walis") in the conduct of hostilities. Regarding the Da'esh/ISIL delegated committee, the Team has analysed its evolution from two delegated committees in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq after Da'esh/ISIL took control of the territory in 2014 to one unified delegated committee around 2017, as well as the possible ideological fracture among various factions and how that might have affected its operations. The Team has been continuing this analytical work with the aim of producing reports that may assist national authorities in their understanding of the functioning and operations of Da'esh/ISIL.

48. Furthermore, the Team opened a new line of inquiry focusing on the pillage by Da'esh/ISIL of oil and its attacks on oil infrastructure between 2014 and 2017. The Team began conducting extensive searches to identify witnesses, potential evidence and reports relevant to this line of inquiry, as well as persons of interest. The provision of access to crucial evidence in the custody of Iraqi authorities will be critical to the Team's analytical work.

C. Composition and facilities of the Investigative Team

49. UNITAD now has a total of 216 personnel, including 157 staff members. Ensuring gender and geographical balance has remained a priority, with women presently accounting for 50 per cent of substantive and support staff, including gender

balance in senior management positions in the Team. All regional groups of the United Nations continue to be represented.

50. The number of national experts appointed to the Team has increased. It is anticipated that an additional 3 national experts will be appointed shortly, taking the total number of Iraqi national experts serving with the Team to 31.

Provision of expert personnel by Member States

51. Member States have renewed their support to UNITAD through the provision of seconded expert personnel in accordance with paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 2379 (2017). Currently, 11 experts have been placed at the Team's disposal by the respective national authorities of Egypt, Germany, Jordan, the Russian Federation and Sweden. These experts have also contributed to the geographical diversity of the Team's staffing composition.

III. Investigative activities: collection and storage of evidentiary material

52. UNITAD continued to expand and enrich its evidence holdings during the reporting period, strengthening the evidential basis for future Da'esh/ISIL accountability proceedings. Notable achievements include the identification and collection of the largest known online repository of digital materials stored by Da'esh/ISIL in the cloud, amounting to 2.6 terabytes of data. Similarly, evidence was gleaned from an additional 64 hard drives and around a dozen new mass grave excavations. Over 8 million pages of Da'esh/ISIL documents from the holdings of the Iraqi authorities have been digitized by the Team. The development of new capabilities, such as the automatic detection of stamps of Da'esh/ISIL units and near-duplicate video detection, enables the Team to incisively refine existing evidence while its holdings continue to grow.

A. Documentary, testimonial and digital evidence collection

53. The Team has continued to enrich its holdings of documentary, testimonial and digital evidence to support ongoing investigations and prosecutions. During the reporting period, capabilities in digital forensics have been further enhanced. In particular, advanced recovery processes can now be performed on damaged devices to maximize the exploitation of battlefield evidence. Through effective collaboration with the Ninawa Counter-Terrorism Court in Mosul, the Team has successfully diagnosed and, where possible, acquired data from an additional 64 hard drives directly linked to Da'esh/ISIL activities. This significant recovery of digital forensic material enables a comprehensive understanding of Da'esh/ISIL operations.

54. In addition, an internal cross-training programme has been implemented to optimize the identification, collection, preservation and exploitation of digital forensics according to international standards. Approximately 30 members of the Team benefitted from this training, which emphasizes the proper identification and collection of evidence using field-oriented processes in line with forensic best practices. This will contribute to reducing the "time-to-evidence" ratio and will further streamline the collection of digital evidence.

55. Similarly, UNITAD has made considerable progress in exploiting digital evidence derived from the Internet through open-source investigations. During the reporting period, the Team identified and collected the largest known online repository of digital materials stored by Da'esh/ISIL in the cloud. The total size of

this archive stands at 2.6 terabytes of data. It includes the full collection of Da'esh/ISIL propaganda materials released by the group since 2013, as well as administrative and policy documents, training materials and biographies of Da'esh/ISIL ideologues and leaders. Moreover, the contents of the archive revealed the source files of mobile phone applications developed by the group to coordinate their operations on the ground. These will be used by the Team to accurately reconstruct events across its investigations into crimes committed against a broad range of Iraqi communities. The initial review and analysis of more than 100,000 pieces of original Da'esh/ISIL content led to the identification of several key source materials for further inquiry, including instructions for the production and use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in Iraq and beyond.

56. In addition, in exploiting Da'esh/ISIL propaganda materials, dark web content and satellite imagery, investigators collected key propaganda videos and photographic reports depicting more than 20 cases of destruction of cultural heritage by Da'esh. A comprehensive open-source investigation was also conducted into the slave trade of Yazidi women and girls by Da'esh/ISIL members and foreign terrorist fighters, using social media and messaging applications. This added significantly to the identification of victims and perpetrators of crimes committed against the Yazidi community, including sexual and gender-based crimes.

57. Finally, training and capacity-building initiatives for external stakeholders continue to reinforce national investigative capacity and further cement the Team's partnership with the Iraqi authorities. For example, a series of trainings on open-source investigations were delivered to Iraqi investigative courts and security services during the reporting period. This was further strengthened through the organization of trainings on open-source investigative techniques across United Nations operations, including a training provided by the Team to the Human Rights Office of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq in April 2023. All trainings were based on the use of open-source, non-proprietary tools, thereby maximizing the scope for use of this expertise and the sustainability of results.

58. In parallel, the efforts of UNITAD to digitize physical evidence has exceeded the forecast contained in its previous report to the Security Council. To date, the Team has digitized in excess of 8 million pages, over 1 million more than the target set in November 2022. Absolute numbers, however, tell only part of the story. The true measure of this effort is the ease with which members of the Iraqi judiciary can now make use of their own holdings, as attested by senior Iraqi judges who have indicated that their response times in relation to case files and requests for information have significantly decreased. This increased accessibility and usability of documentary evidence speaks to the goals of UNITAD to support the Government of Iraq while growing the evidence base available for Da'esh/ISIL member prosecutions.

59. The wholesale digitization of case files contributes to expedited proceedings, more efficient investigations and overall modernization of the judicial process. To attain these objectives, UNITAD works hand in glove with its counterparts in federal Iraq and in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Over the course of the reporting period, members of the Team's digitization unit undertook more than 90 missions to repositories of evidence – primarily courts and security service – in Anbar, Baghdad, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates. They identified, screened and assessed evidence holdings, trained staff, procured and deployed equipment and launched and monitored digitization operations. The estimated volume of documentary evidence at these locations and elsewhere that still needs to be digitized and preserved is high: more than 20 million physical pages, thousands of electronic devices and countless terabytes of information.

60. Some of these large sets of documentary evidence are complex multimedia collections, which include Da'esh/ISIL paper documents, books, VHS tapes, computer hard drives and mobile phones. Each of these media types requires its own distinct technology to extract the information contained within it, convert it to usable digital format and preserve it for later use. Another collection that the Team has already fully digitized consisted of testimonial evidence documented by interviewers and preserved on paper. To manage these collections, the Team continued to use multidisciplinary teams of analysts, archival specialists and forensic investigators to effectively process and preserve evidence of Da'esh/ISIL crimes.

61. UNITAD places great importance on identifying and tracing the provenance of evidence, including its movement from crime scenes and battlefields, as well as among the Iraqi courts and other government entities. This enables the Team to continue ensuring an uninterrupted chain of custody of evidence within its possession, in accordance with its mandate, and to secure the long-term evidentiary viability of materials in its holdings. To this end, the Team is continuously investigating and analysing digitized and digital evidence to screen their contents for relevance and, ultimately, to better prepare them for electronic discovery in national judicial proceedings.

B. Excavation of mass graves and the return of remains

62. During the reporting period, the Team continued to support the excavation of mass grave crime scenes in Iraq, with field-based forensic excavation work conducted in multiple locations around the city of Hit, Anbar Governorate, as well as in the town of Sinjar, Ninawa Governorate. The Team also conducted a preliminary recording of a potential mass grave near the town of Hit, believed to be connected to the execution and disposal of the remains of individuals from minority groups in the area.

63. In addition, UNITAD has acted on new information received on the location of potential mass grave sites for forensic assessment at multiple locations near the city of Mosul.

64. Strong engagement and partnership with the Mass Graves Directorate of the Martyrs Foundation and the Medico-Legal Directorate of the Ministry of Health remain central to the Team's investigative work, in addition to field-based support from the Kurdistan Regional Government. The common forensic strategy, agreed upon between the Team and the Government of Iraq in 2021, was implemented with several key milestones accomplished during the reporting period.

65. In this regard, excavations at three mass grave locations in the vicinity of Hit were completed in January 2023. Witness testimonies indicate that these locations are connected to the executions of members of the Sunni community during the Da'esh/ISIL occupation of the mentioned area. More than seven bodies, additional commingled human remains and associated evidence were recovered from a mass grave site at Zuwayyah while more than eight bodies, additional commingled human remains, and associated evidence were recovered from a mass grave in the vicinity of Jam'iyah.

66. Three mass graves, believed to be the location where 22 men were executed in August 2014, were excavated near the small farming village of Hamadan. Seven bodies and multiple commingled human remains and associated evidence were recovered from a large mound of overburden, while the remains of another individual were recovered from a different mound north of that location. Two bodies, commingled human remains and associated evidence were recovered from two locations in Zaliliyah, west of the town of Sinjar, while an additional three bodies and associated evidence were recovered from a location near the village of Merkan in the

foothills of the Sinjar Mountains. These excavations were accomplished through the joint efforts of a team of field experts from the Mass Graves Directorate, the Medico-Legal Directorate and the Kurdistan Regional Government. This brings the number of grave sites holding Yazidi victims of Da'esh/ISIL crimes, investigated in close collaboration with the national authorities, to 40.

67. UNITAD created comprehensive three-dimensional maps throughout the duration of the excavations, which, when combined with the detailed digital recording of human remains and evidence in situ led by the Mass Graves Directorate, will enable the accurate digital reconstruction of the crime scene. Advanced desk-based temporal change detection evaluation of open-source dated satellite imagery, combined with data mining of the Team's evidence holdings and real-time analysis of the forensic landscape at the time of excavation, elucidated the human and environmental impact on the site. This approach is essential to understanding the nature of these legacy crime scenes and relevant lines of inquiry to be pursued.

68. Coinciding with National Mass Graves Day in Iraq, UNITAD took part on 16 May 2023 in commemorating 78 victims of Da'esh/ISIL crimes committed in Badush prison, whose remains were recovered from mass grave sites and identified for dignified burial. UNITAD provided on-site support to its Iraqi national counterparts at the Mass Graves Directorate and the Medico-Legal Directorate for the exhumation of these victims.

C. Storage, analysis and management of evidence

69. Building on the significant improvement in processing automation achieved in the second half of 2022, and with over 4.7 million files in its document-review database, the Team has focused on improving efficiency in its review and analysis processes and more cost-effective storage of evidence.

70. The Team is currently moving all audiovisual files from the document review system storage to the Zeteo application's Azure storage, which will save over 90 per cent of monthly audiovisual data storage costs.

71. The ability to automatically detect Da'esh/ISIL stamps and seals on documents has also been added to the Team's data-processing functionality, and UNITAD is currently finalizing the testing and refinement of its stamp-detection models. This will allow automatic tagging of stamped documents by Da'esh/ISIL organization units, enabling investigators to more efficiently search and filter documents.

72. Furthermore, UNITAD has completed the development of its video near-duplicate detection, which allows investigators to review video content more efficiently by grouping videos that have similar content but that are not exact duplicates.

73. Finally, the Team completed an initial review of legal issues in its lines of investigation to develop a number of refined high-level substantive categories. This has enabled the more streamlined organization of documents across all lines of investigations. The next phase in this project will involve the use by a dedicated review group of professionals of machine learning to apply those categories to all documents in the Team's collection. This will generate hash digest lists and search queries to categorize newly collected records as they are processed, ensuring greater efficiency in the growth and enrichment of the evidence holdings.

IV. Delivering accountability in collaboration with national actors

74. The effective fulfilment of the UNITAD mandate continues to be founded on close partnerships with national actors across Iraq. During the reporting period, the Team further strengthened its relationship with domestic authorities, religious leaders, NGOs and other entities.

A. Engagement and cooperation with the Government of Iraq, including with the Kurdistan Regional Government

75. Throughout the reporting period, the Team continued to engage with high level officials of the Iraqi Government, judiciary and Parliament, including representatives from the Kurdish region. The Special Adviser met with the National Security Adviser, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Higher Education and the Kurdistan Regional Government International Advocacy Coordinator. The Special Adviser also engaged with the Speaker of Parliament and the Chair of the Legal Committee of the Council of Representatives.

76. The Special Adviser also met with the Chief Justice and Head of the Supreme Judicial Council and maintained continuous engagement with the Supreme Judicial Council and competent investigative judges to ensure the progress of the investigative and operational work of the Team. In particular, the Special Adviser continued to engage with the heads of the Ninawa Court of Appeals, Rusafah Court, and Karkh Investigative Court and remains thankful for their support to the Team's investigations.

77. The Team maintained contact with the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs for bilateral relations in his capacity as the new Chair of the National Coordinating Committee, which continues to facilitate the work of UNITAD in line with the Team's terms of reference. The Special Adviser was particularly encouraged by the Chair's continued support and the mutual commitment to build upon the already strong cooperation between UNITAD and the Government of Iraq.

78. During the reporting period, the Special Adviser engaged with the office of the Prime Minister through meetings with his Senior Advisers on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, who visited the UNITAD office in Baghdad on two separate occasions for in-depth discussions relating to the Team's work and ongoing investigations.

79. UNITAD continued to expand and deepen pre-existing arrangements with competent Iraqi judges that allowed for the sharing of findings on Da'esh/ISIL financing. The Team remains in regular discussion with the Supreme Judicial Council, the legal adviser of the Prime Minister and the Iraqi Council of State on how it can best support an Iraq-led process in navigating pathways for a legal framework in order to hold Da'esh/ISIL perpetrators accountable for international crimes before competent courts.

80. In that regard, UNITAD has consistently reiterated its readiness to provide its expertise, in full compliance with its mandate and terms of reference, to support national initiatives aimed at adopting legislation on core international crimes that would serve as a legal basis for the prosecution of Da'esh/ISIL members in Iraq. In March 2023, UNITAD participated in a joint meeting between members of the Iraqi judiciary and legal experts from the office of the Prime Minister, the National Permanent Committee for International Humanitarian Law and the Iraqi Council of State to discuss pathways towards international crimes charges for Da'esh/ISIL perpetrators in Iraq. The participants established a joint working group that will meet

regularly and considered inviting parliamentarians and other experts. A second meeting of the working group was held in May 2023.

81. During the reporting period, the Special Adviser also met with senior officials of the Mass Graves Directorate and the Medico-Legal Directorate, with whom the Team works closely to support the process of mass grave excavations and the identification of victims and to allow for families to bury the victims' remains.

82. The Team appreciated the continuous support from representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government. UNITAD continued to engage with the Head of the High Judicial Council of the Kurdistan region and the Deputy Prosecutor General. Important contributions were made to the investigative work of the Team, particularly by the Ministry of the Interior, the Office of Rescued Yazidi Affairs and the Commission for Investigation and Evidence Collection. The Team remains regularly engaged with the Coordinator for International Advocacy and his Office.

B. Strengthening the capacity of Iraqi authorities

83. UNITAD continued to support the digitization of records at various courts in Baghdad (namely Rusafah and Karkh), Tikrit, Anbar, Ninawa, Kirkuk, Tazah Khurmatu and Erbil. This included providing training on evidence management and the logical and physical organization of records to facilitate easy access and exploitation. In addition, the Team has been working to strengthen the capacity of national entities to acquire, analyse and preserve digital evidence from devices seized on the battlefield as well as the clear web and the dark web.

84. During the reporting period, UNITAD delivered tailored training and set up four forensic laboratories at major courts, including Karkh, Rusafah and Tikrit, as well as the Counter-Terrorism Service in Baghdad.

85. In April 2023, as part of enhancing the capacities of Iraqi experts, UNITAD, jointly with its judicial counterparts at the criminal court and federal appeal court levels, conducted a comprehensive training on digital forensics for the Ministry of the Interior electronic crimes unit in Kirkuk. UNITAD, in partnership with Ninawa Counter-Terrorism Court, also trained Iraqi forensic experts on the extraction of crucial data from the Court's compilation of damaged battlefield evidence related to Da'esh/ISIL crimes. Similarly, the Team provided specialized digital forensics equipment to augment the special forensic investigation laboratory of the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service. In addition, in March 2023, the Team provided a range of essential forensic equipment to the Medico-Legal Directorate, including laboratory consumables and personal protective equipment for daily use during work in anthropology and forensic DNA laboratories.

86. Furthermore, for the purpose of joint case-building, the Team has developed lists of persons of interest who participated in crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq and who are currently at large outside Iraq.

87. Following the appointment of the new Minister of the Interior, and building on the pilot witness protection training course organized jointly in June 2022 by UNITAD and the European Union Advisory Mission in Iraq, these entities have agreed to create a curriculum to train selected witness protection officers, to be appointed by the Ministry of the Interior. UNITAD will provide technical assistance in that regard to draft a threat and risk assessment model.

C. Working in partnership with all elements of Iraqi society

88. In order to ensure that its investigative work is informed by the knowledge and experience of all affected communities in Iraq, the Team has continued to prioritize its engagement with religious actors, survivor groups, NGOs and community leaders.

89. During the reporting period, the Special Adviser visited Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani at the holy city of Najaf and was honoured to discuss with him the Team's investigative work and the pursuit of justice in Iraq and elsewhere. His messages of peace and his call for accountability on behalf of all victims of international crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq remain at the heart of the work of UNITAD.

90. UNITAD also met with Ahmed Hasan al-Taha, Chair of the Iraqi Jurisprudence Council, and visited the Shrine and Mosque of Imam Abu Hanifa in Baghdad. The Council's continued support for UNITAD investigations was reiterated.

91. In February 2023, the Special Adviser visited Tazah Khurmatu in Kirkuk, which coincided with the anniversary of the 2016 Da'esh/ISIL attack in which chemical weapons were used against its population. The Special Adviser had the opportunity to meet with a group of victims and other survivors and also met with several local officials and community leaders, as well as with the investigative judge leading the case.

92. In addition, in May 2023, the Special Adviser visited the holy shrines of Imam Hussain and Imam Abbas in Karbala', meeting the shrines' religious custodians, Sayyed Al-Safi and Sheikh Al-Karbalai. During that visit, the Special Adviser also paid a visit to the Wafi Foundation for Documentation and Studies and the head of the Iraqi Centre for the Documentation of Extremist Crimes. Both centres expressed their readiness to cooperate with the Team.

93. During the reporting period, the Special Adviser engaged in in-depth discussion of the work of the Team with Iraqi academics and university professors. In May 2023, he delivered a lecture about the mandate and achievements of UNITAD during a seminar at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Baghdad, at which 30 academics from all over Iraq participated. He also visited Al-Alamain Institute for Graduate Studies in Najaf.

94. In parallel, the UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum continued to serve as an important platform for knowledge-sharing and the exchange of best practices with Iraqi and international NGOs in areas relevant to the investigative work of the Team. In February 2023, the fifth thematic round table of the UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum, entitled "Towards holding Da'esh/ISIL perpetrators accountable for international crimes: investigating gender-based crimes" was convened, bringing together 50 participants from civil society organizations and UNITAD team members for a half-day event, to reflect on the work that has been done so far in investigating gender-based crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL and to exchange thoughts and best practices to strengthen the cooperation of UNITAD with the NGO community in this area. NGO representatives discussed various challenges that they faced while working with survivors of gender-based crimes, including the fear of stigmatization and the need to improve existing legislation in order to increase faith in the justice process among affected communities. UNITAD is grateful for donors that financially support its work in that area through the Gender Crimes and Children Unit, a Team unit that currently is fully reliant on extrabudgetary funding.

V. Cooperation in support of the activities of the Investigative Team

A. Engaging with Member States and providing support to ongoing national proceedings

95. Pursuant to its mandate and terms of reference, the Team has continued to engage with Member States to foster accountability for international crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL and to support a growing number of national jurisdictions.

96. In parallel, the Team has continued to strengthen its ability to provide support for ongoing national proceedings in Member States. A total of 17 third States – and 39 competent authorities within these countries – have requested assistance from the Team with respect to ongoing investigations and prosecutions. The ability of the Team to collect testimonial evidence from witnesses in direct response to requests for assistance, combined with its capacity to identify corroborating internal Da'esh/ISIL documentation from digital battlefield evidence has been of significant assistance in supporting investigations by national jurisdictions. During the reporting period, the Team has provided support for several investigations that have led or are expected to lead to judicial proceedings.

97. Concretely, UNITAD has continued to conduct interviews of witnesses upon the request of third States in the context of ongoing investigations against Da'esh/ISIL members residing in foreign jurisdictions who were predominantly involved in crimes against the Yazidi community. Furthermore, the Team is analysing evidence that was collected in response to specific requests made by several Member States and that is linked to joint investigations of Da'esh/ISIL networks involved in sexual slavery with a view to developing a case brief on the identified Da'esh/ISIL members. UNITAD has also continued to work collaboratively with its Iraqi judiciary counterparts on flagging to Member States persons of interest allegedly associated with Da'esh/ISIL who have committed crimes in Iraq but have since fled abroad.

98. The Team continued to provide expert testimonies and reports, such as on Da'esh/ISIL attacks against the Yazidi community in Sinjar and the analysis on forced marriage within Da'esh, to be used in national proceedings. UNITAD experts gave testimony in trials in the United States and Sweden in early 2023 and will soon testify in criminal proceedings against alleged Da'esh/ISIL members in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Portugal. The support provided by the Team to national investigations and prosecutions, including locating and interviewing relevant witnesses, disclosing Da'esh/ISIL documentation and providing expert testimonies, led to trials in Sweden and Portugal and was instrumental in obtaining a guilty verdict in a recent Da'esh/ISIL case in the United States.

B. Ensuring coherence with United Nations system entities

99. Since its previous report, the Team has maintained a high degree of commitment as one member of the United Nations family, especially through its active participation in the Global Counter-Terrorism Compact. In March 2023, UNITAD took part in the high-level event of the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Institute for Economics and Peace entitled “State of terrorism 2023: insights and trends towards more robust responses in preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism”. Moreover, in January 2023, the Team contributed to the ninth meeting of the Coordination Committee of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact pertaining to “The changing counter-terrorism landscape and evidence-based/data-centric responses to the threat”.

100. In March 2023, the Special Adviser met with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as with several Special Rapporteurs with mandates of common interest pertaining to accountability for international crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL members.

101. In May 2023, UNITAD also participated in the expert group meeting entitled "Towards meaningful accountability for sexual and gender-based violence in terrorist contexts", co-organized by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. This allowed the Team to share expertise on the criminal justice avenues for sexual and gender-based violence in terrorism cases and in the context of violations of human rights.

VI. Promoting accountability globally

102. In line with his mandate pursuant to paragraph 3 of Security Council resolution [2379 \(2017\)](#), the Special Adviser has continued his efforts to promote, throughout the world, accountability for crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL and to work with survivors to ensure that their interests in achieving accountability for Da'esh/ISIL are fully recognized.

103. In April 2023, the Special Adviser participated in the thirty-third meeting of the Genocide Network of the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation in The Hague, Kingdom of the Netherlands, shedding light on the latest achievements of the Team and liaising with judicial authorities from Member States in order to provide direct support to their proceedings against Da'esh/ISIL members.

104. UNITAD participated in a workshop on international humanitarian law and counter-terrorism for national investigators and prosecutors in The Hague, Kingdom of the Netherlands, in April 2023, co-organized by the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation and the International Committee of the Red Cross. This expert-level discussion forum was aimed at clarifying the relevance of international humanitarian law to the application of national criminal law by domestic judicial authorities.

105. In June 2023, UNITAD participated in an event co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations, Justice Rapid Response, Yazda and the Clooney Foundation for Justice, engaging with survivors of genocide.

VII. Funding and resources

106. The Team has been able to make progress in pursuing its core functions through regular budget funding. However, extrabudgetary contributions of funds, equipment and services from Member States, as well as from regional and intergovernmental organizations, have been essential to ensure the implementation of its mandate, in accordance with paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution [2379 \(2017\)](#).

107. Voluntary contributions in the form of extrabudgetary contributions have been provided to advance the Team's investigative and thematic priorities and enable the operational implementation of specialized programme areas, including the destruction of cultural heritage by Da'esh/ISIL, witness protection, potential overseas ante-mortem data collection initiatives, the development and use by Da'esh/ISIL of chemical and biological weapons, the digitization and archiving of Da'esh/ISIL evidence, mass grave excavation, investigations into sexual and gender-based crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL and capacity-building initiatives for the Government of Iraq, including in the Kurdistan Region.

108. During the reporting period, the Team was grateful to receive extrabudgetary support from Denmark, France, Germany, India, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the United States of America and the European Union. New contributions were also secured from Sweden.

109. Resource mobilization remains a key challenge for UNITAD as it is pivotal to sustain the tempo and depth of its investigative work. Going forward, the Team will continue its dialogue with Member States regarding identified gaps and unfunded areas requiring support, to constantly ensure progress towards Da'esh/ISIL accountability. Specifically, this could be dedicated to enhancing new investigative lines that are tightly linked to the repatriation of Da'esh/ISIL affiliates from camps in neighbouring countries, including Hawl camp, the excavation of mass graves and advancing requirements for DNA identification.

VIII. Looking forward

110. UNITAD, based on the progress made so far and the remaining challenges, will focus its work on the key priorities below in the coming six months:

(a) Continuous collection and exploitation of information and leads related to Da'esh/ISIL core international crimes committed in Iraq and having affected all communities of its society, with the aim of supporting Iraqi and third States' core international crimes-based investigations and prosecutions with information and evidence;

(b) Supporting the Iraqi national drafting process on international criminal law to establish a domestic legal framework with a view to supporting future domestic criminal proceedings of Da'esh/ISIL members, including potential returnees, on charges of international crimes, in accordance with the mandate of UNITAD;

(c) Expansion of capacity enhancement support towards the Iraqi judiciary in criminal proceedings and case-building.

111. The Team will continue to implement these priorities in close cooperation with the Government of Iraq.

IX. Conclusion

112. The Team is confident to continuously progress with the implementation of its mandate. During the reporting period, the work of UNITAD has been marked by significant achievements not only in terms of the continuous collection of evidence but also in terms of the enhancement of the capacity of the Iraqi judiciary pertaining to international criminal law and the handing over of equipment and material.

113. In the coming six months, the Team will continue its work with the Government of Iraq to capitalize on the new opportunities for holding perpetrators accountable while focusing on persons of interest. UNITAD stands ready to support potential future trials based on a domestic international crimes law, in accordance with its mandate and with United Nations best practices and policies.

114. UNITAD remains highly committed to achieving accountability for core international crimes committed by Da'esh/ISIL, relying on the continued support of the international community, including Iraq, to ensure that the legitimate call for justice for survivors and victims is fulfilled.