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*President:* Mr. Francis . . . . . (Trinidad and Tobago)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

many places around the world. While justice is badly needed, justice takes time.

## Agenda item 31

### Prevention of armed conflict

#### (a) Prevention of armed conflict

##### Note by the Secretary-General (A/78/772)

**The President:** Pursuant to resolution 73/182, of 17 December 2018, I now give the floor to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head 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, to present the report (see A/78/772) of the Mechanism.

**Ms. Marchi-Uhel:** It is an honour to brief the General Assembly once again on the occasion of its annual plenary debate on the work 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.

Last month, we commemorated the thirteenth year of death, displacement and the gravest violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria — 13 years of a reality that appears ever-bleaker, as no end to the suffering is in sight. It is a reality that may appear even more hopeless, as other countries are in flames too — in the Middle East, and indeed, in

As I present the Mechanism's tenth report (see A/78/772) to the General Assembly, I want to stress how, in these dark times, a clear, impartial and persistent focus on accountability is in fact having a positive impact and how our work at the Mechanism for Syria nurtures that hope for justice through accountability. Justice takes time, but we see in more and more instances that the time is coming.

To date, the Mechanism has already received 367 requests for assistance from 16 jurisdictions, relating to 271 distinct investigations into core international crimes committed in Syria. Those numbers continue to rise quickly, and since the beginning of 2024, we have seen a further acceleration in the number of requests. The Mechanism has already supported approximately 254 of those requests, relating to 185 distinct investigations. It also continues to leverage work undertaken in response to previous requests and products from the lines of inquiry of its structural investigation by sharing relevant information, evidence and analysis proactively with jurisdictions.

Justice is also becoming more visible. And with it, the visibility of the Mechanism's role in facilitating justice is growing as well. This year, we are able to report on an unprecedented number of concrete contributions by the Mechanism to justice developments relating to Syria. Those are instances in which prosecutors and judicial authorities have authorized the Mechanism to publicly refer to support provided to past or ongoing

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investigations. In France, the Mechanism supported the investigation leading to the trial in Paris, next month, of three senior Syrian intelligence officials, in absentia, for complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes for their responsibility in the disappearance and death of two Franco-Syrian nationals. Also in France, arrest warrants were issued, on 18 October 2023, against four Syrian high-ranking generals for complicity in deliberate attacks against the civilian population and in deliberate injury to life as war crimes for their responsibility in unlawful attacks conducted in Dara'a in June 2017. Moreover, arrest warrants were issued, on 14 November, against the Syrian President, his brother and two generals on charges of complicity in crimes against humanity and in war crimes for their responsibility in chemical-weapons attacks conducted against civilians in Douma and eastern Ghouta in August 2013. I note that the arrest warrant issued against the Head of State is currently under appeal.

In all three cases, the Mechanism has been supporting the related investigations, including by providing information, evidence and analytical products. In Germany, where we already saw the greatest number of trials and convictions in previous years, there have been important additional arrests, indictments and trials for charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Mechanism has been able to refer to its critical support in four such cases during the reporting period. That support included, in particular, the provision of critical witness evidence and evidence that allowed the addition of war crimes charges.

In Sweden, the Mechanism has assisted three cases that resulted in convictions of former Da'esh members for international crimes and two ongoing trials. The trial currently taking place in Stockholm concerns a senior officer in the Syrian armed forces, prosecuted for aiding and abetting war crimes by carrying out extensive, indiscriminate attacks with air and ground forces in and around the cities of Homs and Hama from January to July 2012. Our support to that trial included a legal brief on the commencement of a non-international armed conflict in Syria that proved critical to charging the accused for war crimes. That brief has also been shared with other jurisdictions and is therefore a good example of how the investigative and analytical work within the Mechanism's structural investigation is used to support investigations and prosecutions across multiple jurisdictions. Since the publication of our written report to the Assembly, we have also been given permission to refer to our support for an investigation

in Belgium, where a Syrian national was indicted on 24 January on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes for killings and torture committed by a pro-Government militia in Salamiyah, Hama governorate, in the period 2011–2016.

In all those instances, we see that justice is more than a simple verdict on right and wrong. It is a process, with many stakeholders. It is a transparent process, whereby a new story is told — a story with many voices, many lessons to be learned, many moments that can help stitch together the fractured pieces of broken lives. At the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, we are keen to listen to the stories, amplify the voices and help build the moments when justice comes to life. That is the essence of our victim- and survivor-centred approach, and we are grateful for the General Assembly's recognition of the crucial role played by civil society in Syria and regarding accountability and justice. Only our close and trusted cooperation with many Syrian civil society organizations has enabled us to ensure that we are using our resources efficiently and effectively and that we indeed pursue the most meaningful justice opportunities in the eyes of victims and survivors.

Our thematic strategies on gender, children and youth and broader justice objectives, such as clarifying the fate of missing persons, have been the driving forces of our work with victims and survivors. Since our most recent report, we have made particular advances in the implementation of a child- and youth-sensitive approach. That included organizing the Mechanism's first direct consultation with children affected by events in Syria to explain our mandate and hear their views on priorities regarding justice. On the missing persons issue, we are keen to see the new Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic become operational as soon as possible. That will be a crucial step in filling the painful gap that persists in honouring the right to know of the many families who have missing loved ones in Syria.

One key justice opportunity that we have identified in consultation with civil society, in particular with victim and survivor associations, has been the ongoing proceedings before the International Court of Justice on the *Application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Canada and the Netherlands v. Syrian Arab Republic)*. In that context, the Mechanism is working towards the public release of a report on

detention-related crimes, which has been an area of focus within the structural investigation over the past few years. Like our other lines of inquiry, the work on our detention line of inquiry is closely interlinked with our broader justice objectives and thematic strategies. Through its public release, it is our hope that the report will not only assist the International Court of Justice in its consideration of the Application before it, but that it will also be of use to other accountability stakeholders pursuing justice opportunities on Syria.

The Mechanism's structural investigation has also progressed on its other two currently active strategic lines of inquiry. Just last week, we held an in-person workshop under the Lausanne platform, convened by the Netherlands and Switzerland, in which we had exchanges with specialized civil society organizations on our respective work on unlawful attacks, including chemical-weapons attacks. We discussed our analytical methodology and ways in which we can strengthen our investigative efforts to fill gaps in our central repository of information and evidence. Those contacts further bolster our efforts to advance our currently open case file on the issue, while also facilitating our other efforts to advance accountability for unlawful attack-related crimes. Too few justice opportunities exist to prosecute the use of chemical weapons, and Member States have a special responsibility to support progress in accountability on that key feature of the Syrian conflict.

Our strategic line of inquiry on crimes related to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continues, with a focus on the investigation and analysis of the conscription, enlistment and use of children in hostilities. We expect to soon conclude a report and related analysis on the topic, which we will share with jurisdictions. Our work on ISIL-related crimes benefited from a dedicated workshop with civil society organizations specialized in the documentation of those crimes, with the participation of domestic prosecutors and from consultations with victim and survivor associations, both undertaken last fall. There continues to be an unprecedented and rising demand from competent jurisdictions to assist their investigations into those crimes. With the planned drawdown of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL, we expect the demand from competent jurisdictions for assistance by our Mechanism to grow even further.

Justice takes time, and it requires adequate, sustained resources. In 2019, the Assembly took an important strategic decision, when it voted to fund the Mechanism from the regular budget of the Secretariat (see A/74/PV.52). As highlighted in the report, the Mechanism is operating in an increasingly challenging financial environment. Beyond the current liquidity situation of the broader United Nations, which prevents the Mechanism from filling key vacant posts, the Mechanism's existing regular budget is insufficient to maintain the scope of its work across its structural investigation and respond to the growing demand for its services from competent jurisdictions. Those challenges are aggravated by a reduction in the availability of voluntary contributions, which does not allow the Mechanism to maintain its current staffing capacity.

The achievements of the Mechanism have exceeded the expectations of many of those who voted to establish it in 2016. In order to sustain and secure that impressive growth, the Assembly will need to urgently consider enhancing the financial resourcing of the Mechanism so that it can maintain its staffing capacity and the expertise it possesses.

Today Syria and the region remain embroiled in conflict. It is my hope that, in these times, the light of those seeking justice for Syria can shine even stronger with our joint support. Every case the Mechanism has been able to support is a forceful reminder of the need for accountability and of the possibility of accountability, irrespective of the identity of the victim or the perpetrator.

It has been an honour and a privilege to help build the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and to bring together its unique team of experts in the many areas required to facilitate justice — from lawyers, investigators and analysts to protection, support, digital information management and operations. I am reassured to leave the team in the hands of my successor, Mr. Robert Petit, who is in the Hall today and who has a rich and long-standing experience in the field of international criminal justice.

I would like to thank the members of the Assembly for their faith, confidence and foresight in creating our Mechanism. As the only entity with a dedicated mandate to facilitate the work of jurisdictions pursuing accountability in relation to the Syrian context, it is a unique and groundbreaking institution that has already served, in its short lifetime, as an example for other

situations. But more importantly, it is an institution that has made a real impact.

My deepest thanks go to the many Syrians who have dedicated their lives to fighting for accountability and justice and who have also placed their trust in us. Without them, stories that the world needs to hear would remain untold, inclusive justice would remain elusive, and there would be no light at the end of the tunnel. With them, we can send a strong signal that atrocity crimes do not go unpunished, we can ensure justice for all victims and contribute to the prevention of future violations, and we can bring about reconciliation and sustainable peace.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel for her report and, in particular, for her dedication in executing her very important mandate on behalf of the General Assembly.

**Ms. Pavļuta-Deslandes** (Latvia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the eight Nordic-Baltic countries, namely, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Latvia.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for her insightful presentation of the tenth report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (see A/78/772) and for her relentless efforts to steer the Mechanism towards achieving its goals. We remain active supporters of the Mechanism, as we highly appreciate all the work undertaken by the Mechanism since its establishment.

The brutal armed conflict in Syria has raged now for 13 years — marked by wide-scale atrocities, human rights violations and abuses against people in Syria, an ever-growing death toll, the use of chemical weapons and well over 100,000 people still missing. The conflict has resulted in one of the largest refugee crises in modern history. The Nordic-Baltic region has welcomed Syrians, many of them traumatized, into our countries. Yet the hope for peace remains. We believe that justice and accountability are critical for achieving sustainable peace in Syria. That is a central reason why our support for the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism remains strong.

The Mechanism has demonstrated its vital role in the international community's efforts for justice and

accountability, including towards ending impunity. The initiation of new activities, including the development of new digital analytical platforms and engagement with a broad range of providers during the reporting period, is welcomed. We regret that, despite the efforts of the Mechanism, the Syrian Arab Republic refuses to cooperate with the Mechanism, making it harder for Syrians, regardless of where they are, to get closure.

Countless atrocities have reportedly been committed during the protracted conflict — by all parties. The Nordic-Baltic countries continue to assess that, given its status, capabilities and external supporters, the Syrian Government under Al-Assad, together with its allies, bear the main responsibility for many of the flagrant violations of international law. However, expert reports have demonstrated that there are no clean hands in Syria.

The Security Council has been entrusted with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. That responsibility also entails responding to serious violations of international law. To date, the Security Council has been powerless to respond to the atrocities in Syria, as the Russian Federation has vetoed 17 Council draft resolutions on Syria since 2011. Nevertheless, we continue to call on the Security Council to step up its efforts to ensure accountability, including by referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

The establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism through the General Assembly is an important reminder of the power of the Assembly to step in when the Council is unable or unwilling to act. The General Assembly must be ready to fill the gap left by the use of the veto, in line with the veto initiative.

We commend the Mechanism for the progress made on the implementation of its strategic plan for the period 2023–2025. It has provided significant support to justice actors and continued extensive engagement with civil society, including closer cooperation with victim and survivor associations. The development of a methodological package to guide engagement with Syrian children and youth is a good example of systematic integration. We also welcome the increased sharing of relevant information to help clarify the fate of persons missing in connection with the ongoing repression in Syria.



While the Mechanism have progressed over the years, it cannot achieve its aims alone. It is crucial to enhance international cooperation. We encourage Member States to share all relevant information about crimes committed in Syria in order to ensure the facilitation of investigation and further accountability. Ending impunity and delivering justice for the victims of the most serious crimes is our collective responsibility.

Finally, the Mechanism needs sustainable resources to carry out its important work. The Nordic-Baltic countries continue to support the financing of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism from the regular budget of the United Nations. Many of our countries also support the Mechanism with additional voluntary contributions, and we encourage all States to consider doing likewise.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

**Mrs. Samson** (European Union): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia, as well as Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

We welcome today's important debate on 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, underlining the continued principled commitment by United Nations Member States towards justice for the most serious crimes committed in Syria. We would like to thank the Head of the Mechanism, Ms. Marchi-Uhel, for her leadership and remarkable commitment and all she has done to advance the work of the Mechanism during her mandate. We are pleased to see the progress that the Mechanism has made in the reporting period, its continued efforts to engage and coordinate with all stakeholders and its willingness to assist in national investigations. Yet, despite the efforts, a lot of work remains to be done, which underlines both the need for and the pivotal role of the Mechanism in the pursuit of accountability for international crimes and human rights violations committed in Syria.

The Mechanism's tenth report (see A/78/772) highlights the progress made to hold individuals criminally accountable for the atrocities committed in the Syrian context and to provide justice for some of the most serious crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. Prosecutions have been brought forward, and final judgments have been obtained against perpetrators in several EU countries, and those efforts continue to be pursued in a number of jurisdictions. The ongoing efforts are very important. The EU remains convinced that accountability and justice for victims and survivors remain essential for a stable, peaceful Syria, based on a credible, inclusive and viable political solution in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). We strongly condemn the continuous violations of international human rights law and international crimes committed in Syria by all parties. The EU will remain at the forefront of the fight against impunity in Syria. All those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. The EU will continue to support efforts to gather evidence of those atrocities, regardless of who may have committed them.

In June 2023 the Netherlands and Canada, as part of their important initiative to hold Syria to account for breaching the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, instituted proceedings against Syria before the International Court of Justice. In November 2023 the Court ordered Syria to take provisional measures, and the EU calls on it to comply with the order. The EU also continues to call on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We will continue to support the Mechanism, as well as the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as a member of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, to ensure that the facts surrounding the crimes committed in the course of the conflict in Syria are documented, with a view to future legal action. We strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, as concluded by numerous reports of the OPCW.

The EU reiterates its call on the Syrian regime to comply with the Convention, fully cooperate with the OPCW investigations and complete the dismantling of its chemical weapons programme. It is crucial that the United Nations dedicate the energy and the resources, including sufficient funding, required to pursue and

ensure accountability for those crimes. That is our common responsibility. On 15 November 2023, the General Assembly urged the Secretary-General for further resources to address the Mechanism's increased workload and to ensure the effectiveness of its mandate. We call on all Member States to cooperate with the Mechanism. For our part, the EU is determined that the crimes perpetrated in the past 13 years do not go unpunished, as the Syrian people deserve justice, dignity and peace.

Thirteen years into the conflict in Syria, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate in vast parts of the country, with millions of civilians in need of assistance. Syria's neighbours have been hosting large numbers of refugees for more than a decade. Syrian refugees are still unable to return home because conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary return, in line with the parameters defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and in accordance with international law, have not been fulfilled. It is the primary responsibility of the Syrian regime to remove those obstacles.

At the end of this month, the EU will host the eighth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region in order to draw international attention to the need for a political solution to the conflict and to generate pledges of humanitarian support for Syria and in support of Syrian refugees and their host communities in the region. On the day of dialogue with civil society, the issue of accountability and justice will be one of the important issues on the agenda. During a dedicated panel discussion on ongoing efforts to address the issue of detainees and missing persons in Syria and the possibilities arising from the creation of the new Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, a number of relevant partners will participate on the panel, including the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism. We are looking forward to welcoming the international community to the Conference and call on all Member States' unrelenting generosity and continued support.

**Mrs. Özgür** (Türkiye): I thank you, Sir, for organizing this meeting. We also thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel for her briefing this morning, as well as for her service as the Head 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 since 2017.

Thirteen years have passed since the start of the conflict in Syria. Yet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people have not yet been met. On the contrary, their plight has been further aggravated due to the lack of a political solution to the conflict, terrorism and the deteriorating economic situation in the country, as well as the decrease in humanitarian funding despite ongoing needs at record levels. The recent escalation caused by the developments in Gaza also pose a serious risk of regional conflagration. The current grim picture in Syria reaffirms the urgency of a political solution to the conflict. Since the beginning, Türkiye has spared no effort to support a lasting political solution on the basis of Syria's territorial integrity and political unity, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). Ensuring accountability constitutes an important part of that objective. Accountability is necessary for justice to be served and national reconciliation to be established.

With that understanding, Türkiye has supported and closely cooperated with all United Nations accountability mechanisms in relation to the Syrian conflict. We were among the sponsors of resolution 71/248, which established the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, and we will continue to support its work in documenting the most serious crimes committed in Syria since 2011. We are also pleased to see the ongoing dialogue of the Syrian opposition and its executive organ, the Syrian interim Government, with the accountability mechanisms of the United Nations. We encourage the Mechanism to continue and enhance that dialogue. The Mechanism has a valuable role as a justice facilitator in Syria, as well as through its cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, in relation to chemical weapons attacks, and its work on Da'esh-related crimes. It is important to reveal the ugly face of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, such as the serious crimes committed by the the Kurdistan Workers' Party/ People's Protection Units/Syrian Democratic Forces terrorist organization and its inhumane oppressive practices against the local population in north-east Syria, which have been extensively documented over the years in various United Nations reports.

In conclusion, Türkiye will continue to support the United Nations accountability mechanisms in their meaningful work to hold to account those responsible for the conflict.

**Ms. Chan Valverde** (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica wishes to thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel for presenting the tenth report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (see A/78/772) and to express our sincere gratitude to her and her staff, who have collected not just evidence, but also experiences and stories of hope for accountability.

Costa Rica reaffirms its unwavering commitment to supporting the Mechanism's work, standing shoulder to shoulder to protect the vulnerable, advocate for the oppressed and secure just reparations for all the cases that the Mechanism supports. As an ardent supporter of the Mechanism, Costa Rica values its crucial role, which goes beyond achieving justice for individuals in Syria and extends to giving great impetus to the rule of law worldwide. In that regard, allow me to highlight three points.

First, the Mechanism serves more than a procedural purpose: it also embodies a symbolic role as a custodian of stories. The meticulous collection, compilation, preservation and analysis of evidence encompasses the harrowing accounts by thousands of people, which include stories of systematic violations human rights or the despicable use of chemical weapons. Thanks to our collective dedication, our legal resources and our shared commitment to justice, their testimonies will be key to combating impunity for the most heinous crimes. The establishment of the Internet Resources Unit, for example, is essential to enabling a modern-day prosecutor's office to compile a wealth of complex data for use in a fair trial. That unique operation epitomizes our international dedication to the human rights that are enshrined in articles 7 to 11 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Every innovative strategy bolsters its credibility and reliability, fostering a climate conducive to a fair trial for victims and perpetrators.

Secondly, Costa Rica applauds the Mechanism's commitment to inclusivity in every respect. We underscore its cultural sensitivity in navigating various religious and cultural landscapes and further draw attention to its commitment to multilingualism.

Thirdly, the Mechanism is a paragon of innovation and multilateral cooperation, challenging the stagnation in the Security Council. Acting in the same spirit of cooperation in which the Mechanism was conceived,

States have come together to administer and serve justice, with the Mechanism's assistance. Costa Rica extends its appreciation to those States that have devoted their own legal resources to that greater cause, in line with the fundamental principles of cooperation, solidarity and shared responsibility. Costa Rica pays particular tribute to Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and France. We salute those who have defended and served justice in a number of jurisdictions, in faithful adherence to the Geneva Conventions and the Protocols Additional and in the interest of just reparations. The rule of law promises justice for victims under the yoke of violence.

Nonetheless, we know that much remains to be done. The Mechanism is not able to keep pace with the volume of the requests for assistance; meeting those needs is costly. Costa Rica therefore calls on those States that are able to do so to contribute and meet their financial commitments. We cannot afford to let this revolutionary justice system falter because a few are unwilling to honour their commitments. At what point do we decide that justice costs more than it is worth? That appears to be the conclusion that many have reached. By 30 September, the Mechanism's trust fund will be depleted. Costa Rica is not merely making a fundraising appeal; we are appealing to the collective memory of the commitment we made eight years ago, and we urge a recalibration with justice to confront a different adversary — apathy, which we are capable of defeating in order to achieve justice for the victims and the international community as a whole. Let us never forget that our fates are intertwined.

**Mr. Kulháněk** (Czechia): Czechia fully supports the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and its member States, and I would like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

At the outset, let me thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel — not only for her tenth report (see A/78/772) but, more importantly, for her committed leadership during her mandate as the Head 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. I wish her the best of luck in all her future endeavours.

Czechia strongly supported the establishment of the Mechanism more than seven years ago. We consider it to be a truly meaningful mechanism that can contribute to the delivery of justice in various jurisdictions. In that

regard, we regret to see that the International Criminal Court has not yet been able to deal with the situation in Syria. It would have been the best-placed judicial institution to exercise jurisdiction in such a complex environment. Having mentioned the complexity of the situation on the ground, let me reiterate our support for the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism has proved itself capable of not only performing a quasi-prosecutorial function, but also of contributing to the work of the International Court of Justice, as illustrated by the case concerning the *Application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Canada and the Netherlands v. Syrian Arab Republic)*, initiated against Syria in order to hold it accountable for breaches of its treaty obligations. That cooperation exemplifies how different bodies with distinct mandates can intersect within the United Nations system. At the same time, it illustrates very clearly the need for sustainable and predictable funding from the United Nations regular budget. Since the establishment of the Mechanism and given the importance of its mandate, my country has contributed extrabudgetary funding to complement the resources from the regular budget.

Through the establishment of the Mechanism, the United Nations declared its readiness to contribute to the rule of law and justice in Syria. We are convinced that this readiness is as important today as it was then, and that the imperative to investigate and prosecute violations and abuses of international law, wherever and by whomever they are committed, must be upheld.

**Mr. Rae (Canada):** On behalf of Canada, let me start by thanking Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for her leadership and tireless commitment to accountability for the people of Syria. We appreciate our collaboration throughout her tenure as head 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.

Through its ongoing efforts on the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for the heinous crimes under international law committed in the Syrian

Arab Republic since March 2011, the Mechanism continues to play an indispensable and necessary role. The documentation and collection of evidence on war crimes and human rights violations are critical in our common quest to uphold international law and human rights. The international community must therefore continue its support, including financial support via the necessary budget allocations, in order to facilitate the work of the Mechanism and other mechanisms.

(spoke in French)

It is Canada's great pleasure to highlight Ms. Marchi-Uhel's exceptional leadership. Starting from a simple, vague idea, with the support of her team, she created a Mechanism that gives a glimmer of hope to victims and their families, to whom her commitment is remarkable.

(spoke in English)

The Mechanism's most recent report (see A/78/772) and today's debate demonstrate the continuing need for the international community to ensure that justice and accountability for the victims of atrocity crimes at the hands of the Syrian regime remain at the forefront of our common efforts. In that regard, Canada remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting justice and accountability for the Syrian people, who have suffered immensely for more than a decade.

In that vein, Canada and the Netherlands continue to closely collaborate to seek justice for victims and survivors of human rights violations, in particular torture, under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We are hopeful that our joint initiative will be an important step in combating the impunity that has persisted in Syria for well over a decade and truly appreciate the Mechanism's readiness to provide information and analysis on the joint Canada-Netherlands dispute with Syria under the Convention against Torture.

We are convinced that accountability for human rights violations and justice for victims are critical to fostering sustainable peace and lasting reconciliation in Syria. The Mechanism remains a critical tool to achieve those goals. In this context, Canada applauds the victim-/survivor-centred approach that the Mechanism has developed and integrated into all its work.

The Syrian conflict has also had a gendered impact, as women and girls have been disproportionately affected. Consequently, we commend the Mechanism's



integration of gender-sensitive and child-sensitive methodologies into its work and its dedicated thematic strategies on gender, children and youth.

We all know that the path to justice is fraught with challenges. The political complexities of the Syrian conflict pose significant hurdles to accountability. Despite those challenges, Canada believes in the work of the Mechanism. In that regard, we welcome the appointment of Mr. Robert Petit and wish him every success as he assumes his critical role as Head of the Mechanism. We are in good hands, considering his important experience in the pursuit of international accountability.

Canada will continue to engage with the international community and civil society partners to support accountability efforts and sustainable peace in Syria. But beyond that, I want to make it clear that our commitment to accountability is not just about one country or one dispute. I sometimes hear in the Assembly Hall the phrase “double standards”. There cannot be a double standard; there is one standard. The standard is what we have all signed up for. The standard is the Charter of the United Nations. The standard is the institutions that we have created, the conventions that we have signed, our membership in the International Court of Justice, the membership of most of us in the International Criminal Court and the establishment of the accountability mechanisms that we have created in order at least to allow for the collection of evidence in dealing with the worst assaults against humankind.

Let us be very clear — no country anywhere on this planet is above and beyond the rule of law. No country is exempt from the standards that we have created in common, including my own country. We do not claim any exemption. We do not claim any degree of exceptionalism. We accept the one standard that applies to each and every nation in the world, and that is the standard that no one is above the law. Be ye ever so mighty, the law is always above you. That is what we must remember. It applies to every State represented here in the Hall. It applies to every Government. It applies to everyone responsible for the crimes that are taking place on a daily basis around the world, such as violence against children, the deliberate use of sexual violence as a means of war and any intention to starve or deprive people of the necessities of life. All of these represent crimes. All of these represent assaults on our common sense of justice. The accountability mechanisms are an essential part of the architecture

that we are still building. And believe me, the building is far from over. But let there be no mistake, this law applies to all of us, without exception.

**Mrs. Dime Labille** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for introducing her report (see A/78/772).

France aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and would like to add several remarks in its national capacity.

France supports the initiatives aimed at combating impunity to ensure justice for all victims of the countless human rights violations inflicted on the Syrian people since 2011 and to hold accountable those responsible for atrocities. 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 plays a key role in the collection, preservation and analysis of evidence. France welcomes the progress made during the period covered in the tenth report. The fight against impunity is crucial to building lasting peace in Syria and implementing a political solution based on Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

We commend the immense courage of Syrian civil society stakeholders, whose contributions provide valuable support to the work of the Mechanism. This collaboration is fundamental to achieving the goals of inclusive justice, to make progress in taking into account gender, children and youth perspectives. In that regard, we welcome the implementation of dedicated strategies, as part of a victim-centred approach.

France supports United Nations efforts to ensure justice for all victims of the Syrian crisis. In 2021, we signed an international judicial cooperation agreement with the Mechanism. Thirty-eight French investigations benefit from the Mechanism’s expertise and support. That cooperation has made it possible to organize the first trial in France of senior officials of the Syrian regime for crimes against humanity, which will begin on 21 May. We call on all States to support and cooperate with the Mechanism by providing it access to evidence and to support the efforts of all United Nations entities committed to the situation in Syria.

Human rights violations continue on a widespread basis in this country, as evidenced by reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Independent

Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. France reiterates its firm condemnation of attacks on civilians and calls on all parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian regime and its State and non-State allies, to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

France condemns the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons against its population and will continue to act within the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to ensure that Damascus complies with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. In that regard, we recall that France launched the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which it chairs and whose membership now includes 40 States and the European Union.

*Mr. Pieris (Sri Lanka), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

We reiterate that those responsible for the atrocities perpetrated in Syria since 2011 must be held to account. The Syrian people have been suffering under 13 years of brutal and destructive repression. There can be no lasting peace in Syria without justice and a political solution based on Council resolution 2254 (2015). It is high time for the Damascus regime to agree to take tangible steps in that direction.

Finally, as Ms. Marchi-Uhel will soon complete her term in her position, France commends her for the important work she and her team accomplished throughout her tenure as the Head of the Mechanism. We thank her for her invaluable commitment and for her contribution to justice and the fight against impunity.

**Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein):** Thirteen years ago, the Syrian people called for their freedoms and fundamental rights to be respected. In response, the Syrian regime cracked down and orchestrated one of the most serious criminal enterprises and humanitarian crises since the Second World War, resulting in more than 400,000 deaths, tens of thousands of missing persons and more than 6 million refugees who fled their homes to escape the atrocities.

The Syrian regime has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own people, as both the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons have proven beyond a doubt, and it has engaged in a policy of crimes against humanity. The need to hold the perpetrators of those atrocities to account is as manifest as ever for the countless

victims and survivors of those horrendous crimes, the international community as a whole and the cause of justice and accountability.

When impunity becomes the default response to international crimes, perpetrators are dangerously emboldened to journey further away from the rules that we have collectively established for peaceful existence. That is made clear by the fact that many of the same actors that have fostered impunity for atrocities in Syria now seek to benefit from the impunity in respect of their own violations of international law elsewhere, most obviously in Ukraine. Impunity begets impunity, and that cycle simply cannot be allowed to continue.

In December 2016 (see A/71/PV.66), I had the honour to introduce from this rostrum the text that was adopted as resolution 71/248. By adopting that text, the General Assembly demonstrated its commitment to upholding international law.

I thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head 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, for introducing her report (see A/78/772) today to the General Assembly. Since this is her last such presentation to the Assembly, I would like to thank her very warmly for her years of capable leadership, which has been instrumental in securing the solid place that the Mechanism occupies in the landscape of international accountability mechanisms. We welcome the new Head of the Mechanism, Mr. Robert Petit, and look forward to working with him.

As highlighted in its most recent report, the Mechanism has demonstrated its valuable role in ensuring accountability for the most serious crimes committed in Syria. The Mechanism has further expanded its central repository of evidence, facilitated justice activities, shared more information with competent jurisdictions, fine-tuned its thematic strategies and contributed to high-profile cases of Syrian officials in third countries, including in France, where a court has issued an international arrest warrant for Bashar Al-Assad for complicity in war crimes and crimes against humanity linked to chemical weapon attacks on civilians.

At the time of its creation, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism represented

a leap of faith — a novel model for advancing accountability. That model has proven its worth and has been successfully replicated by the Human Rights Council as an accountability mechanism for the situation in Myanmar. Ultimately, such mechanisms should become a permanent feature of our accountability work available for all situations where the most serious crimes are committed on a large scale and systematically.

The importance of the ongoing work of the Mechanism in Syria was affirmed by the decision to secure its funding from the regular United Nations budget. We welcome the continued support for the Mechanism through sustainable funding from the regular budget going forward, in order to ensure that it does not have a funding shortfall, given all of the justice demands on it as a central institution at this time in the fight against impunity in Syria.

The success of the Mechanism is also an important reminder of the essential role that the Assembly can play in advancing accountability. But it is also important to recall that the Mechanism is only a partial answer to the accountability challenges faced in Syria. We must maintain our commitment to accountability in all situations where the most serious crimes under international law are committed. As Syrian civil society has emphasized time and again, a sustainable peace in Syria, and anywhere where atrocities are committed, must be built on the foundation of justice for past crimes.

**Mrs. Shino** (Japan): I thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head 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 (IIIM), for her valuable briefing, and I express our gratitude to her and her team for their dedicated work.

As the conflict in Syria enters its fourteenth year and the humanitarian crisis continues to worsen, we must remind ourselves that a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process under United Nations auspices is the only path to peace and stability. An important component of that political process is ensuring that justice and accountability are achieved. The work of the Mechanism remains indispensable to that end.

Japan welcomes the considerable progress made towards the Mechanism's objective of facilitating inclusive justice for the victims of the most serious

crimes committed in Syria since March 2011. It is imperative that those responsible for core international crimes committed in Syria be held accountable. In that regard, the expanded volume and quality of the Mechanism's support have led to justice outcomes and new opportunities in several jurisdictions concerning various crimes, perpetrator groups and communities of victims and survivors.

We are pleased that the Mechanism has advanced the implementation of its strategic plan for the period 2023 to 2025. We fully acknowledge that the Mechanism's victim/survivor-centred approach continues to be at the heart of its work. Its intensified cooperation and engagement with civil society actors will deepen its understanding of the perspectives and needs of the affected communities, thereby strengthening accountability efforts. Moreover, the continued focus on thematic issues, such as gender perspectives, facilitates the implementation of more holistic approaches. In addition, clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons remains a crucial issue that needs to be urgently addressed. While the establishment of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic is a significant step forward, the work of the IIIM must have a synergistic effect on that initiative, and in that vein, Japan appreciates that the Mechanism is prepared to cooperate fully.

In conclusion, the Syrian people have endured extraordinary suffering for upwards of a decade. Escalating violence in Syria and the region, socioeconomic deterioration and the repercussions of the devastating earthquakes of 2023 have driven 16.7 million people to need humanitarian assistance. For its part, Japan will continue to support initiatives, including the IIIM, and to contribute, as a member of the Security Council, to advancing a comprehensive and inclusive political process in Syria, in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

**Mr. Aref** (Islamic Republic of Iran): In accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Organization is based upon the sovereign equality of all its Member States. Also, non-intervention and territorial integrity of States are indeed among the fundamental principles of international law set forth in the Charter. Acting in consonance with those fundamental principles, which form the bedrock of international relations and international law, requires full adherence to, and compliance with, such principles throughout the activities of the United Nations, which,

*a fortiori*, requires rejecting mechanisms that violate such principles. The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a responsible State Member of the United Nations, has been unequivocal in its rejection of the so-called “International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism” that has been devised against the Syrian Arab Republic and its people, as that mechanism not only contravenes the fundamental principles of international law, particularly the principles of sovereign equality, non-intervention and territorial integrity, but also runs afoul of the very purposes of the Charter.

That mechanism, which has also imposed unnecessary budgetary implications on the United Nations, is beyond the purview and mandates of the Organization. The General Assembly has not been entrusted with the task of entertaining judicial matters or creating quasi-judicial entities through highly politicized resolutions; neither does it have the competence to impose or purport to exert any oversight mechanism over Member States, especially without their consent, as that clearly negates the very letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

The non-consensual resolution 71/248 and the contentious matters reflected therein well attest to the fundamental flaws inherent in the attempt to devise a mechanism through the General Assembly in the first place. Such a mechanism, which is fraught with legal difficulties, clearly encroaches upon the very prerogatives and domestic jurisdiction of States and, therefore, is also in contravention of Article 2 of the Charter. We are of the view that discussion of legal matters in relation to the mechanism does not render it legally acceptable, as it continues to be in violation of the fundamental principles of international law and the Charter.

On a similar note, I would like to underline that the mere content and title of that resolution, couched in such neutral terms as “international”, “impartial” and “independent”, do not make it international, impartial or independent. This whole process and mechanism have been supported and advanced by, and serve the highly partial and unjust political objectives of, certain Western countries that, on a daily basis, violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. They have inflicted severe conditions of life upon the Syrian population through unilateral coercive measures and exploited the wealth and natural resources of the Syrian people. Those countries also instigate violence and terrorism inside the Syrian Arab

Republic. Consequently, and given the circumstances of the adoption of the resolution and the ongoing activities under that resolution, it is axiomatic that that mechanism, which lacks any credibility, cannot be considered impartial or independent.

Such a mechanism is yet another instance of the selective and unjust approaches, characterized by double standards, taken by a few, evidencing the persistent abuse of international organizations by certain Western countries. That is demonstrated more clearly today, as we witness the Western sponsors of the resolution establishing that mechanism — not just passively, but actively, and by all means at their disposal — preventing the establishment of any mechanism or the adoption of any measure that could address, prevent or at least alleviate the egregious and irreparable harm resulting from the continuous perpetration of atrocious crimes, including genocide, against the Palestinian people in Gaza.

In conclusion, we would like to reaffirm our rejection of the mechanism and reiterate that the findings of that mechanism cannot be considered a legitimate source of evidence for judicial proceedings, including within international courts and tribunals. We believe that such an initiative jeopardizes the credibility and integrity of the United Nations system. It erodes the foundations of the rule of law at the international level, while also failing to bring peace and stability to the Syrian Arab Republic and its people.

**Ms. Stoeva** (Bulgaria): Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union, and I would like to further emphasize a few points in my national capacity.

Let me first acknowledge the presence today of Ms. Marchi-Uhel, Head 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, and to thank her for the presentation of the tenth report (see A/78/772) on the implementation of the mandate of the Mechanism and for her professionalism and dedication during her tenure.

Bulgaria welcomes the report and its recommendations on the cooperation of the Mechanism with the United Nations, with States and with civil society. We commend the Mechanism’s unwavering commitment to preserving evidence, analysing data



and providing invaluable support to national war crimes units. We underscore the Mechanism's commitment to inclusive justice and its victim/survivor-centred approach and appreciate the Mechanism's engagement with civil society actors. We also welcome the development and implementation of thematic strategies on gender, children and broader justice objectives and the commitment of the Mechanism to support, in accordance with its mandate, the operationalization of the newly established Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

While we note with satisfaction the progress that the Mechanism has made on the implementation of its strategic plan for the period 2023 to 2025, we remain concerned about the uncertainty of the extrabudgetary resources that are increasingly needed to complement the regular budget resources introduced in 2020.

Today's debate is not only an opportunity to discuss the current progress and challenges in the implementation of the mandate of the Mechanism, but also an opportunity to remind ourselves that the Mechanism for Syria is an innovative and responsible undertaking for several reasons.

First, its inception shifted the focus on accountability from the Security Council to the General Assembly. Frustration with the Security Council's paralysis in the face of widespread alleged atrocities encouraged the General Assembly to take a more central role in supporting international criminal justice initiatives.

Secondly, the IIIM has positioned itself as a bridge between various sectors and serves as a central repository for the material collected — rather than focusing only on collecting, consolidating, preserving and analysing evidence — in order to serve the purposes of a future international criminal tribunal in delivering justice. Indeed, the Mechanism's first significant achievement is its central repository function, and any investment in technology to increase the searchability of that repository will result in indispensable support for national jurisdictions that have initiated investigations and trials in accordance with the principles of universal jurisdiction.

The main challenge in the Mechanism's work is not the paucity of available material but rather how to effectively handle the overwhelming volume of material produced on the Syrian situation. That means that the Mechanism must devise new approaches to traditional archiving practices that integrate technology and legal

evidence, and we welcome the information provided in that regard in the report. We also note that the challenges associated with the access, fragmentation, coordination, volume and secrecy of the collected material must be addressed in an innovative and all-encompassing manner.

In conclusion, while there are a number of States that will continue to oppose the Mechanism's mandate and existence, Bulgaria belongs to the majority of Member States that remain committed to accountability for the crimes committed in Syria and elsewhere in the world. The Mechanism not only advances justice and accountability for Syrians but also inspires justice actors in other situations of ongoing conflict. For that reason, Bulgaria calls in all States committed to sustainable peace through impartial and comprehensive justice to continue their direct and indirect support for the Mechanism and increase the capacities of their prosecutorial and judicial authorities to investigate and prosecute crimes committed inside and outside their territories.

**Mr. Kim Song** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea takes this opportunity to clarify its position with regard to 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 (IIIM).

We reaffirm our consistent position against the establishment and activity of the IIIM, as it is a clear violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs, which are basic principles of the international relations. We take note that the adoption of resolution 71/248 on the establishment of the IIIM is non-transparent and non-consensual. It is well known that legal technical assistance by the United Nations to any Member State should be provided in accordance with the request of the concerned State. However, the relevant General Assembly resolution on the establishment of that Mechanism was enforced to adopt without prior consultations with or any consent from the concerned State.

Furthermore, based on the principles and relevant Articles of the Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly does not have any mandate to establish any investigative or judicial organ, as that

mandate was absolutely vested in the Security Council. The establishment of the IIIM is nothing but a typical example of the politicization, double standards and selectivity of human rights. From the early days of its establishment, the IIIM, while advocating independence and impartiality, has been engaged only in interfering in the internal affairs of Syria and overthrowing its social system, while carrying out its activity based on the fabricated information and false testimonies offered by hostile forces.

Nothing can justify the acts of allowing that illegal Mechanism to carry out its activity under the United Nations umbrella and sponsoring and funding its activity from the United Nations regular budget. The United Nations should not be subjected to political pressures by some Western countries under any circumstances and must preserve its impartiality, objectivity and credibility as a facilitator of the process of seeking a political solution to the Syrian issue.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea extends its unwavering support to the Government and the people of the Syrian Arab Republic in their struggle to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity, while ensuring the human rights of its own people and combating all corrupt attempts of outside forces to interfere.

In conclusion, my delegation hopes that the Syrian issue will be addressed in a peaceful way by political means and without any interference, in conformity with the demand and interests of the Syrian people.

**Ms. Pringle** (New Zealand): I would like to start by thanking the Head 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 (IIIM), Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, for submitting its tenth report (see A/78/772).

New Zealand appreciates the opportunity to discuss the important work of the Mechanism at this plenary meeting of the General Assembly. New Zealand reiterates its strong support for the Mechanism and the essential work it continues to do in pursuit of justice and accountability for international crimes committed in Syria. Its efforts are critical for preventing impunity in Syria and providing justice for victims and survivors. Justice and accountability for international crimes are fundamental to sustainable peace. New Zealand is pleased to observe the report's finding that

further important progress is being made towards the fulfilment of the Mechanism's mandate.

New Zealand commends the assistance that the Mechanism has provided to competent jurisdictions. We see the increased demand for assistance from competent jurisdictions as a testament to the value of the work the Mechanism is doing. New Zealand commends its victim- and survivor-centred approach and the further development and implementation of its thematic strategies on gender, children and young people and broader justice objectives.

New Zealand also commends its expanded and intensified cooperation with civil society actors as important enablers of the victim- and survivor-centred approach. In a period marked by significant conflicts and crises around the world, it is important that the need for justice and accountability in Syria not be forgotten. We will continue to follow the work of the Mechanism closely and it can continue to count on New Zealand's support.

Finally, New Zealand would like to thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel for her work during her tenure as Head of the IIIM and we would also like to wish her successor, Mr. Robert Petit, all the best when he takes over the role.

**Ms. Brandt** (Kingdom of the Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

Allow me to highlight four points.

First, with regard to the important work 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 (IIIM), the international community has called on Syria to comply with its international legal obligations for more than 13 years. Regrettably, Syria does not take any responsibility and continues to violate international law with impunity. For all those Syrians affected by atrocities and their families, accountability is long overdue but not out of sight. The Kingdom of the Netherlands commends the key role the IIIM has played and is playing in establishing accountability for the people of Syria, alongside the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons important work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Investigation and Identification

Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, among other entities. The IIIM has proven to be a unique entity that helps to ensure that the most serious crimes committed to date in Syria are not forgotten and do not go unpunished.

Secondly, accountability efforts at the national level reinforce multilateral efforts, such as the work of the IIIM, and vice-versa. Both national and international accountability initiatives, including domestic investigation and prosecution, assist the international community in trying to fill the impunity gap. Sustainable peace in Syria will be possible only if the perpetrators are held to account and victims obtain justice. Therefore, as also noted by previous speakers, Canada and the Kingdom of the Netherlands have invoked the responsibility of Syria for breaches of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment with a view to eventually instituting proceedings against Syria before the International Court of Justice. We welcome the International Court of Justice's order in response to our request for provisional measures, which requires Syria to prevent acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in order to ensure that no one under its control commits such practices, as well as to preserve evidence related to such acts. Those provisional measures are an important step towards establishing much-needed accountability and justice for the people of Syria. We join others in calling on Syria to comply with the International Court of Justice's order. It is our conviction that true justice and accountability can be achieved only by having a victim- and survivor-centred approach, including by applying gender-, child- and youth-sensitive perspectives, as integrated by the IIIM.

Thirdly, the significance of collaboration with Syrian civil society organizations representing survivors and victims cannot be overstated. They are essential in the pursuit of justice and accountability. Since its establishment, the IIIM has recognized the importance of engaging and cooperating with Syrian civil society organizations, as they are in a unique position to document crimes and make sure Syrian voices are heard. That has also benefited the work and relevance of the IIIM. The IIIM's commitment to pursuing inclusive justice is not only commendable but — as we have said before — it can and should serve as an example for other United Nations-mandated bodies.

Fourthly and finally, the Kingdom of the Netherlands has been a proud supporter of the IIIM since its inception. Its work is indispensable for effective accountability efforts at the national, regional and international levels. We will continue to call on all States to cooperate with and support the IIIM. It is also a shared responsibility to ensure that the IIIM is equipped with sufficient resources, including a sustained and increased allocation of resources through the regular budget, as indicated in the tenth report of the IIM (see A/78/772). Our cooperation and support are essential to ultimately end impunity and hold perpetrators accountable — not only because the victims and their families in Syria demand and deserve justice but also because it provides hope to people in other conflict areas.

Let me conclude by joining others in extending our heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for her tireless efforts, immense dedication and invaluable service. We really cannot thank her enough. We wish her successor, Mr. Robert Petit, all the best in his new role.

**Mr. Niu Xiaoqiang (China)** (*spoke in Chinese*): The Syrian issue has dragged on for 13 years. Illegal invasion, foreign occupation, terrorism and unilateral coercive measures have caused enormous harm to the Syrian people. The international community should draw lessons from that in promoting a political settlement to the Syrian issue.

I will address three points.

First, the future of Syria must be decided by the Syrian people themselves. China supports the mediation efforts of the United Nations, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), to continue to promote a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. We welcome the enhanced communication and cooperation between the League of Arab States and other countries in the region with the Syrian Government and their constructive role in resolving the Syrian issue.

Secondly, Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be effectively safeguarded. Since the outbreak of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel has launched frequent air strikes against a number of locations in Syria through the occupied Golan, in grave violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which is a matter of deep concern to China. Against the background of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, all parties must exercise restraint

in order to avoid exacerbating tensions and triggering chain reactions between hotspot issues and the spread of conflict.

Thirdly, unilateral sanctions and the plundering of resources have long impeded Syria's economic recovery and social development and the improvement of livelihoods, while also gravely violating the Syrian people's most basic human rights, such as the rights to subsistence, development and health. Such acts must stop immediately. The so-called humanitarian exemptions from unilateral sanctions against Syria cannot hide the systemic damage caused by those long-standing unilateral sanctions, let alone compensate for them. The relevant countries should immediately put an end to those unlawful acts and foreign forces should immediately withdraw their illegal military presence from Syria.

China consistently opposes any violation of international humanitarian law or international human rights law and maintains that all Syrian parties should abide by international law, including international humanitarian law. The issue of impunity should be addressed with full respect for the judicial sovereignty of the country concerned, leveraging its leading role and supporting the overall political settlement. Actions taken within the United Nations framework should help maintain the unity of Member States and help the Syrian parties to enhance mutual trust and build consensus. Discussions on accountability should not be politicized by resorting to the imposition of sanctions and pressure on the Government of the country concerned.

China's position on the establishment 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 remains unchanged. The establishment of the Mechanism was fraught with controversy, having proceeded in the absence of full consultation with the country concerned or the support of its Government. United Nations Member States are also deeply divided with regard to the work and reports of the Mechanism. China does not support the inclusion of the work of the Mechanism in the regular budget of the United Nations.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland thanks the Head 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 for submitting its latest report (see A/78/772) and commends the Mechanism for the substantial results and progress achieved over the past year.

There can be no lasting peace in Syria without justice for the victims — we must keep hammering home that message in the face of the violence of a conflict that continues to drag on with dramatic consequences for the population. All Syrians have suffered the horrors of a war that is characterized by a shocking disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights. Countless civilians have been killed, tortured, forcibly disappeared and exiled. Against that grim backdrop, the transitional justice work carried out by the Independent Mechanism is valuable. It offers the light of hope to all the victims in Syria and outlines the beginnings of the reconciliation that the country so desperately needs. It is in that spirit that Switzerland has supported the Mechanism since its inception and will continue to do so.

Allow me to highlight several points.

First, the Mechanism's contribution to accountability efforts in Syria is essential, as demonstrated by the unprecedented levels of requests for assistance from the competent jurisdictions. Those hundreds of procedures have led to tangible results, with the opening of investigations and trials, notably in Germany, Sweden and France. Switzerland welcomes the work of an impartial justice system that focuses on the expectations of victims.

Secondly, the Independent Mechanism can count on a significant contribution from civil society in its mission. In Syria, civil society plays a crucial role in documenting the crimes committed. In that context, Switzerland and the Kingdom of the Netherlands are committed to facilitating collaboration between the Mechanism and Syrian civil society organizations through the Lausanne process.

Thirdly, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the fact that such success is possible only if the Mechanism receives sustainable funding. Given the significant increase in its assistance activities and investigative work, the Mechanism is facing an increasingly precarious financial situation. In view of those needs, my country has made a voluntary contribution for 2023 and 2024 and urges Member States to make a similar commitment. The credibility of



our collective commitment to upholding international humanitarian law and international human rights law to seek justice for the most serious crimes committed in Syria is at stake.

In conclusion, I would like to convey a special message to the Head of the Mechanism, Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel. As the first to hold that position, Ms. Marchi-Uhel has left her mark on the fight against impunity in Syria, while greatly contributing to the success of the Mechanism and what it has become today. Switzerland — and I myself personally — would like to thank her warmly for her sincere and total commitment to our common cause. We wish all the best in her future endeavours. I also welcome her successor and wish him every success in carrying out his challenge-filled mission. He can count on our support.

**Mr. Pretterhofer** (Austria): Austria aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

We welcome today's debate on 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 (IIIM) and we thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel and her team for the Mechanism's tenth report (see A/78/772).

It is our firm belief that our international order must be based on international law and the rule of law, which are indispensable preconditions for lasting peace and security. A fundamental pillar of the rule of law is accountability for the most serious crimes under international law. Without accountability, there can be no sustainable peace and reconciliation process. That is why the work of the IIIM is so important. It was created with a mandate to collect and analyse evidence of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law violations. That mandate is being fulfilled with diligence. In our view, substantial progress has been made during the reporting period, ranging from collecting information and processing evidence to providing assistance to competent jurisdictions. We understand that the number of requests for assistance to the IIIM has grown in recent years. In our view, that is an expression of appreciation for the important work it has conducted. Austria has a cooperation agreement with the IIIM for legal assistance through our judicial authorities. In that regard, we thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel and her team for their valuable collaboration.

The work of the IIIM has evolved over the years and reached a considerable level of sophistication. The mere processing of evidence is one thing. But the preparation of analytical products tailored to ongoing domestic investigations requires a different set of skills and resources. It is evident that such analytical work contributes significantly to ongoing justice processes, including in a proceeding before the International Court of Justice on the *Application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Canada and the Netherlands v. Syrian Arab Republic)*. Accountability for the most serious crimes under international law constitutes a priority of Austrian foreign policy. We therefore fully support the IIIM and similar mechanism and instruments, such as commissions of inquiry, in Syria and other instances. To support the IIIM, Austria provided financial support in 2017 and 2019 before full funding from the regular budget was achieved. Its inclusion in the regular 2021-2022 budget was an important step. Considering the important work of the Mechanism, full funding should come from the regular budget. It is our understanding that the current programme budget is insufficient to maintain the scope and nature of its work. In addition, in the light of growing demands from competent jurisdictions, the Mechanism should be equipped with the necessary resources. As in previous years, Austria will once again make a voluntary contribution to the IIIM in 2024.

The General Assembly created the IIIM because the organ primarily responsible for upholding international peace and security — the Security Council — failed to ensure the rule of law. That does not deter us from repeating our call on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, which was created to prosecute high-level perpetrators of the most serious crimes. National reconciliation cannot be achieved without accountability. There is no sustainable peace without justice. Those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity must be held accountable. The people of Syria deserve it.

**Mr. Geisler** (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

We sincerely thank the Head 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 (IIIM), Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, for her

continuous efforts and dedication to achieve justice and accountability for the most serious crimes committed in Syria. We are most grateful to Ms. Marchi-Uhel and her team for advancing the work of the IIIM and for the tenth report underlining the progress made (see A/78/772).

In March, we commemorated the thirteenth anniversary of the uprising, when the Syrian people took to the streets in peaceful protest to demand their freedom and respect for human rights. With half of the population displaced, unprecedented levels of humanitarian needs and reports of grave human rights violations, there can be no normalcy without a comprehensive political solution in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). Accountability for such heinous crimes and deterrence from the commission of any more such atrocities in Syria and beyond remain ever-important. We are convinced that effective accountability is a precondition for sustainable peace. In relation to the magnitude of the most serious crimes committed in Syria, the number of prosecuted cases remains low. We therefore welcome the steady increase of prosecutions, wherever the IIIM is in a position to support them. That confirms its success and effectiveness.

One such example in which the IIIM demonstrated a tangible impact was the arrest of a Syrian national accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including torture and enslavement, by the German Federal Prosecutor's Office in August 2023. The IIIM supported the investigation by providing information and critical evidence, which helped adding war crimes to the charge. The investigative activities also led to findings of crimes committed in Damascus in 2013 and 2014, resulting in the indictment of two other Syrian nationals. We are highly appreciative of and extremely thankful for the close cooperation between the IIIM and the German Federal Prosecutor General and are committed to continue working together on pending cases. Germany reiterates its firm political and financial support for the IIIM. We urge all Member States to do the same and fully cooperate with the Mechanism. There is still substantial work left to be completed with regard to accountability and justice in Syria. We hope that Syrians themselves will be allowed to pursue accountability and justice in their country effectively and without fear in the future. Until that is possible, it is incumbent on all of us here to ensure that the crimes committed in Syria do not go unpunished.

**Ms. Pichardo Urbina** (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): The General Assembly continues to be

subjected to the politicization, double standards and selectivity promoted by Western countries against sovereign and independent countries. By creating the so-called 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, without consulting or cooperating with the Syrian Arab Republic, the General Assembly acted beyond the powers conferred on it by the Charter of the United Nations, in violation of the law and the principles of sovereignty and sovereign equality of all States Members and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has demonstrated full capacity through its legal and judicial institutions, without external interference or political and financial pressures for adequate accountability. The so-called Mechanism continues to receive funding from the United Nations budget, even during a liquidity crisis, proving that those resources are being used to advance the Western agenda of aggression, isolation and hostilities towards our sovereign peoples.

Nicaragua reaffirms its total solidarity with the people and the Government of the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic and rejects the so-called International Mechanism. In that regard, we wish to place on record that we reject the issuance of the report (see A/78/772) and the creation of the Mechanism in question. Nicaragua believes that the solution to the Syrian conflict must be achieved through dialogue and negotiation in order to reach a political agreement that reflects the will of the Syrian people and Syrian Government, with the support of the international community, without foreign intervention. At the time of its creation, Nicaragua voted against the establishment of that controversial and politicized Mechanism (see A/71/PV.66), given that as a peace-loving people who are respectful of international law and human rights, we do not recognize or accept initiatives that violate the sovereignty of our peoples, including the selectivity and politicization of human rights. We call for the promotion of greater cooperation and collaboration with the people and the Government of Syria, eliminating the illegal, criminal and inhumane unilateral coercive measures, which represent a crime against humanity that affects the lives of the Syrian people, thereby hindering the work of the United Nations and its agencies in Syria.

To address the situation in Syria, there must be a constructive and objective humanitarian approach

under Syrian leadership, without external interference, allowing for the reconstruction of what has been destroyed by terrorism, interventionism and foreign aggression, as well as the voluntary and dignified return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes. We reiterate our call for intensified efforts at the national, regional and international levels in support of development, reconstruction and a peaceful existence in Syria, based on the wishes of the Syrian people.

**Mr. Poveda Brito** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): In line with our historic tradition, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reaffirms our unwavering commitment to combating impunity and ensuring for accountability for serious crimes, including crimes against humanity, which, given their brutality and magnitude, violate human dignity and the fundamental values of coexistence in our societies.

With regard to the issue before us today, it is timely to recall that Venezuela voted against resolution 71/248 (see A/71/PV.66), which led to the irregular and controversial establishment of a mechanism that contradicts and is in flagrant violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the most basic norms of international relations. The establishment of that structure usurps the mandate of the Security Council, which is the only organ authorized to establish investigative mechanisms or tribunals with mandatory legal authority over individuals or States. Moreover, Syria remains on the Security Council agenda.

The creation 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 — which claims to discharge the duties of a judicial or investigative body, ignores the primary responsibility that sovereign States have to investigate and try those responsible for any crime that may have been committed within their national borders and was broadly rejected by the State concerned — sets a negative precedent for the work of the General Assembly. The context of creating that structure with powers that correspond only to a judicial organ necessarily leads to the conclusion that the hypothetical evidence that it may have gathered during its so-called mandate is invalid and lacks legal substance for potential criminal trials on Syria, whose institutions have full capacity to deliver justice. That structure,

which calls itself an investigative body, has the primary goal of continuing to feed the political agenda of a small group of Governments that attempt to apply pressure on the Syrian Government, in flagrant violation of the principles of sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs of States and the self-determination of peoples. That is why we reject any attempt to legitimize or finance that political destabilization operation with resources from the regular budget of the Organization, which are supposedly facing liquidity issues. All of that should lead us to use resources more efficiently.

That clear-cut example of selectivity and double standards undermines the credibility and impartiality of the United Nations, turning it into an instrument of political and commercial expediency for its sponsors. On the contrary, we should create a mechanism to investigate the atrocity crimes being committed by the extremist Government of Israel against the Palestinian population, including genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression, and for which we are only seeing impunity and cynicism. That structure is not impartial or independent, is essentially governed by the financial interests of those that benefit from its financing and does not benefit the Syrian people in any way. We also question its methodology, which uses third-hand and fourth-hand sources to justify its findings. The best way to support the Syrian people in overcoming the consequences of foreign interventionism is to completely and unconditionally lift the unilateral coercive measures that affect Syria's development and human rights and stand in the way of its prosperity. Moreover, it is essential that we continue supporting the international peace and security initiatives that are endorsed by the legitimate Government of Syria and abandon the warmongering initiatives and funding initiatives for terrorist groups that are instigated from abroad.

In conclusion, Venezuela confirms its commitment to, and its solidarity and brotherly relations with, the people and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as our desire for them to continue working on genuine initiatives to achieve peace, stability and justice in Syria and to advance political processes that are led by the Syrians themselves, without interference of any kind, while faithfully respecting the spirit and the letter of the Charter of the United Nations.

**Mr. Cardon De Lichtbuer** (Belgium): Belgium aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

We welcome today's debate on the tenth report (see A/78/772) 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. My country is pleased to note the unprecedented level of demands for assistance by the Mechanism during the reporting period, which highlights the Mechanism's progress in its continued efforts to hold perpetrators accountable for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

More than 13 years of armed conflict have left the country in a dire humanitarian situation. For more than a decade, the most serious crimes of international concern have continuously been perpetrated. The human cost of the conflict has been enormous, with millions of people forcibly displaced from their communities or living as refugees all over the world. A political solution in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) is urgently needed.

The fight against impunity is a key priority for my country. Ensuring accountability is essential in the Syrian context and is also invaluable in many other conflicts in the region and worldwide.

We would like to reiterate our strong support for the Mechanism, which is a critical entity in our common effort to achieve accountability in Syria. Over the past few years, many national jurisdictions, including Belgium's, have benefited from assistance from and cooperation with the Mechanism in their investigations and prosecutions. The Mechanism has contributed in a very tangible way to accomplishing justice for victims and survivors as final judgments and criminal sentences have been obtained against individuals responsible for the atrocities they committed in the Syrian context. By engaging and strengthening its partnerships with civil society, as well as implementing strategies on gender, children and young people, the Mechanism has reinforced its core objective, namely facilitating comprehensive and inclusive justice with a victim and survivor-centred approach. Belgium is convinced that impartial justice and effective accountability are indispensable for achieving sustainable peace. We therefore call on all countries to join us in cooperating with the Mechanism and providing it with the necessary support.

I would like to end by thanking Ms. Marchi-Uhel for her remarkable commitment over the past seven

years and the tremendous work she accomplished together with her team during her mandate. We wish the newly appointed head, Mr. Petit, the best of luck in taking over the leadership of Mechanism.

**Mr. Maes** (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Luxembourg fully aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

Luxembourg welcomes the organization of today's debate, which enables us to reaffirm our support for 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 and assist in bringing to justice those responsible for them. Luxembourg is proud to have supported the Mechanism since its establishment in 2016. Luxembourg thanks the head of the Mechanism, Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, for submitting its report (see A/78/772), in particular for her determined work over the past seven years. The success of the Mechanism is also the result of her outstanding commitment and that of her entire team. I thank Catherine very much and wish her successor, Mr. Robert Petit, all the best.

For 13 years, Syria has sunk a little deeper every day into the horror of an indiscriminate violence that kills in a climate of impunity. That impunity is one of the reasons why the Syrian regime and other parties to the conflict in Syria continue to commit crimes that have made civilians the primary victims. The General Assembly's establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria in 2016 allowed for a decisive step to be taken in identifying those responsible for those crimes, including through the collection, preservation and analysis of evidence and the sharing of data and expertise. The unprecedented number of requests for assistance from the competent courts shows that the Mechanism continues to demonstrate its effectiveness as an actor in the domain of justice. We welcome the efforts undertaken by the national courts in the European Union. The establishment of the Mechanism also illustrated the important role that the General Assembly can play when the Security Council is paralysed by the veto. We deeply deplored the Security Council's inability to adopt a draft resolution (S/2014/348) referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court on 22 May 2014 due to the negative vote of two permanent members of the Security Council (see S/PV.7180).



We welcome the progress highlighted in the Mechanism's tenth report, in particular the increasing availability of its services in support of the investigation and prosecution of international crimes committed in Syria. We commend the Mechanism for developing and diversifying its collaboration with civil society actors and strengthening its rights-based approach to victims and survivors. The Mechanism has adopted strategies on gender, children and young people, which strengthen its work towards inclusive justice.

The decision to establish the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic in resolution 77/301, of 29 June 2023, is another example of the important role of the Assembly. The Independent Institution, which has a humanitarian objective and is responsible for shedding light on the fate of all missing persons in Syria, also follows a victim- and survivor-centred approach. Although its mandate is different from that of the Mechanism, it is complementary. We welcome the Mechanism's readiness to work with the new Independent Institution.

Luxembourg will continue to support the strengthening of the funding of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria from the United Nations regular budget. The Mechanism must have the budget required to maintain the scope and nature of its work and to cope with the increasing demands for services from the competent courts.

To end the conflict and atrocities in Syria, it is essential to work towards a political solution. Fighting impunity is not incompatible with the quest for that political solution. On the contrary, we are deeply convinced that justice is an indispensable ingredient for bringing peace to Syria, as it is in other conflicts around the world.

Finally, we must also continue to respond to the considerable humanitarian needs in Syria. Luxembourg will continue to do its part in that regard as well. In the face of the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Syria, we will not stop calling for justice for Syrians.

**Mr. Košuth** (Slovakia): My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

At the outset, allow me to thank the outgoing head 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, Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, for submitting the tenth report (see A/78/772) on the implementation of the Mechanism's mandate, but mostly for her leadership, dedication and valuable contribution to accountability for the most serious crimes committed in Syria. I also acknowledge the presence of the newly appointed head of the Mechanism, Mr. Robert Petit, at today's meeting and wish him all the best in the discharge of his functions.

I will present only a few reflections that are important for my delegation vis-à-vis the tenth report.

First, with regard to the mandate of the Mechanism to facilitate justice, we note the unprecedented increase in requests for assistance and the respective contribution of the Mechanism to justice over the reporting period, which clearly manifests the added value and crucial role of the Mechanism. My delegation greatly appreciates the efforts of individual States to use the evidence gathered by the Mechanism to bring perpetrators to justice. As far as the use of such evidence is concerned, all potential jurisdictional grounds, including that of universal jurisdiction, should be taken account by national authorities. At the same time, we continue to believe that the situation should be referred to the International Criminal Court by the Security Council for a comprehensive prosecution. Concerning the case file involving a series of chemical and conventional attacks that occurred in 2017, Slovakia welcomes the focus of the Mechanism's investigative resources on building evidentially stronger allegations by closing evidence gaps.

Secondly, as demonstrated by the report, inclusive justice remains the key objective of the Mechanism's work. In that context, we fully endorse the victim- and survivor-centred approach and appreciate the progress made in that regard. We also acknowledge the importance of clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in Syria and we note with satisfaction the preparedness of the Mechanism to cooperate with the new Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Indeed, a close, effective and efficient cooperation without duplication between the two will be of the utmost importance.

Thirdly, my delegation echoes the Mechanism's concern that the continued level of hostilities in the Syrian Arab Republic is not matched by the same level of collective determination on the part of the international community in order to bring an end to

the conflict and the related violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses. After more than 12 years of conflict, the Syrian people deserve justice, dignity and peace.

In conclusion, we are convinced that a comprehensive solution to ensure a fulsome accountability in Syria must be found as a fundamental prerequisite for the success of conflict resolution and reconciliation. The Mechanism will enjoy the continuous support of Slovakia in those efforts, including for adequate funding from the regular budget.

**Mr. Svercsok** (Hungary): At the outset, Hungary aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union on behalf of its 27 member States.

Let me start by expressing our sincere appreciation to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for the tenth report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (see A/78/772), as well as for her steadfast commitment to promoting accountability in the context of the Syrian conflict.

That protracted conflict has endured for more than 13 years without any resolution in sight. It is evident that there is no military solution to the conflict and Hungary reaffirms its dedication to the United Nations-led political process, echoing the steadfast efforts of Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, including his “step for step” approach. In addition to the broader political objectives, it is imperative to address the immediate needs of victims and survivors. Ensuring accountability is paramount for delivering justice to victims, who cannot be made to wait until the eventual conclusion of the conflict through political negotiations.

The conflict’s repercussions, including significant migratory and refugee flows, have also made it an international concern. Alongside survivors, individuals who have been implicated in war crimes, crimes against humanity or other heinous crimes under international law have infiltrated and resettled in various countries while often falsifying their identities, thereby complicating accountability efforts. Consequently, international cooperation is pivotal for ensuring justice for victims and survivors. The increasing number of assistance requests submitted to the Mechanism underscores the global interest in forging partnerships to uphold accountability.

On that note, we would like to announce that the Budapest high courts recently adjudicated a case establishing that an individual known as the “hangman of Da’esh” committed a widespread and systematic assault against the civilian population in Syria, amounting to crimes against humanity. Such atrocities must not go unpunished. However, as that experience showed, delivering justice faces a number of obstacles in national proceedings, including linguistic barriers and the acquisition of substantial evidence from a conflict-affected region. In that regard, we welcome the recommendations outlined in the tenth report on how States could cooperate with the Mechanism and relevant stakeholders. Moreover, we particularly welcome the Mechanism’s proactive information-sharing, which allows for the provision of pertinent data and materials to competent jurisdictions on its own initiative.

Finally, it is crucial to underscore that providing support to victims and the civilian population necessitates diverse forms of assistance. Hungary supports a number of humanitarian and early-recovery programmes in the Middle East, including in Syria through the Hungary Helps Programme, which aims to help communities in need, including Christian communities. Following the 2023 earthquake in Syria and Türkiye, Hungary provided more than €30 million of financial support to help deal with the consequences of that natural disaster. Hungary takes pride in contributing to alleviating the humanitarian conditions in Syria and the region.

In conclusion, we reiterate our steadfast commitment to the Mechanism and look forward to continuing our constructive dialogue in the future, and we wish the incoming head of the Mechanism, Robert Petit, success in his endeavours.

**Mr. Abesadze** (Georgia): Georgia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

At the outset, I would like to thank the head 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, Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, and her team for their continued efforts in carrying out its important mandate and to express appreciation for the submission of its tenth report (see A/78/772).

Georgia welcomes the progress achieved by the Mechanism during the reporting period and reaffirms its steadfast support for the crucial mission of the Mechanism in assisting the investigation and prosecution of individuals responsible for the gravest crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic over the past 13 years. In that regard, we once again reaffirm our unwavering support for the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria and acknowledge the importance of the continued cooperation between those mechanisms in ensuring complementarity.

Georgia remains deeply alarmed by the ongoing atrocities and violations of international humanitarian law in Syria. We also share the concerns expressed about the increasingly deteriorating humanitarian situation that the Syrian people continue to face, as is clearly depicted in various reports of the United Nations. The Syrian regime must cease attacks against civilians and civilian facilities, allow safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian assistance to all in need and cooperate fully with the Mechanism and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria. The findings outlined in the report once again illustrate the urgent need for ensuring accountability in the pursuit of justice for the victims and survivors of those heinous crimes. The Mechanism's efforts to collect, preserve and analyse evidence play a crucial role in facilitating fair and independent criminal proceedings against perpetrators.

We commend the Mechanism for its dedication and commitment to uncovering the truth and holding to account those responsible for the criminal actions brought to light. The progress made in supporting various jurisdictions and providing assistance for ongoing investigations are commendable and reflect the Mechanism's vital role in the pursuit of justice. However, Georgia emphasizes the importance of ensuring that it receives adequate resources and support in order to continue its essential work effectively. The challenges outlined in the report, including the financial constraints and the volatile situation in Syria, underscore the need for sustained international cooperation and commitment to addressing impunity for those crimes.

In conclusion, Georgia stands firm in its belief that justice must prevail and accountability must be upheld for violations of international law, regardless of where they occur.

**Mr. Ćurić Hrvatić (Croatia):** Croatia aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, and I would like to add some remarks in our national capacity.

We thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head 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, for her presentation of the report of the Mechanism (see A/78/772) to the General Assembly, and we commend her dedication in pursuing justice for victims and survivors. Croatia would once again like to state its unequivocal support to the Mechanism, as we do every year during this debate. We continue to call for the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, and for the Syrian authorities to cooperate with the Mechanism and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. Owing to its national experience as a victim of aggression in the 1990s, Croatia is painfully aware of the importance that accountability and the search for the missing have for a country's ability to achieve reconciliation and find a path to sustainable peace. While we are still searching for 1,800 of our missing citizens, we continue to support the efforts of the international community to ensure accountability and help find those missing everywhere, including in Syria.

Year after year, we gather here to support the basic requirement for a path to peace — making the basic amends owed to victims and survivors, that is, through accountability. Accountability means more than just the immediate need for justice. It lays the groundwork for sustainable peace and reconciliation. Without accountability, the wounds of war fester, deepening divides and diminishing the prospects for achieving stability. By holding perpetrators to account, we pave the way for a future where justice prevails, grievances are addressed and trust is restored. Croatia appreciates and applauds the progress that the Mechanism reports that it has made in its work towards its objective of facilitating inclusive justice. While the situation in the country remains difficult, we have every faith that the Mechanism can do its job and will succeed in holding accountable those responsible for core international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. We especially welcome the Mechanism's expanded and intensified cooperation with Syrian civil society

organizations, which is essential to achieving a victim- and-survivor-centred approach.

The Syrian conflict is in its thirteenth year and is still considered one of the largest displacement crises in the world, affecting millions. Accountability is of paramount importance to the prevention of future violations, but by itself it cannot bring about peace. The political process and determination on all sides to bring an end to the conflict remain essential. Peace and accountability are mutually reinforcing and complementary.

In conclusion, as we deal with multiple crises around the world, let us not forget the people of Syria, who after all these years are still in need of peace and justice.

**Ms. Hutchison** (Australia): I thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel, Head 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, for her briefing. As this is her final briefing in that role, Australia would like to take this opportunity to express its deep appreciation for her valuable contribution during her time as the Head of the Mechanism. We welcome Mr. Robert Petit into the role and look forward to supporting his efforts.

Australia shares the grave concerns expressed by the Mechanism, the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the serious and constant challenges facing the Syrian people. We strongly condemn the human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law that have been perpetrated throughout the Syrian conflict, now in its fourteenth year. Today millions are still being subjected to grave injustices and suffering. We condemn the reprehensible attacks on civilian infrastructure, including the targeting of schools, markets, hospitals and mosques, which have continued unabated for the duration of the conflict. Reports of arbitrary arrests and detention, and of forced disappearances, sexual and gender-based violence and torture across Syria, demonstrate a flagrant disregard for the human rights of the Syrian people. The perpetrators of those horrific abuses must be held to account. In that regard, Australia acknowledges the important work of the Mechanism and welcomes its annual report (see A/78/772). The examples provided in the most recent report demonstrate that the Mechanism is making a

valuable contribution to the quest for accountability for some of the most abhorrent crimes committed during a protracted conflict. Convictions in courts around the world are a testament to the Mechanism's expertise and dedication, and we encourage it to continue to carefully prioritize and target its activities so as to maximize its impact within the resources available.

Australia welcomes the update on the Mechanism's development and implementation of its thematic strategies, particularly on gender. Integrating sexual and gender analysis into its important work will ensure inclusive justice for victims and survivors, particularly of gender-based violence. We also welcome the Mechanism's commitment to sharing its best practices with other accountability actors in other conflict situations as well as in the Syrian context. Australia is proud to have been a sponsor of resolution 77/301, which established the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. We welcome cooperation between the Mechanism and the new Institution, based on their complementary mandates. We hope that any cooperation will help to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons in Syria and provide adequate support to victims, survivors and their families.

More must be done to ensure that the people who perpetrate such human rights abuses are unable to continue acting with impunity. That is why Australia is steadfast in its support for the Mechanism's important work. We call on all Member States to join us in supporting the Mechanism and continuing the efforts to pursue accountability for international crimes committed in Syria.

**Mr. Kirk** (Ireland): Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

I thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel for her informative briefing and would like to once again express our sincere appreciation to her this month as she concludes her leadership in establishing 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 as an instrument that has effectively and efficiently helped combat impunity in Syria and provide victims with an opportunity for justice. Ireland continues to commend the Mechanism for its essential work in collecting evidence of international crimes committed in Syria. As the Security Council remains



unable to advance accountability there, the work of the Mechanism is essential in supporting investigations and prosecutions in national jurisdictions, and we want to repeat our previous call for the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

The tenth report of the Mechanism (see A/78/772) notes that the frequency of requests for assistance submitted to the Mechanism has accelerated in the past year, creating an unprecedented level of demand. Ireland commends the way in which the Mechanism has evolved to respond to the increasing demand and the important contribution that it is making to the pursuit of accountability by providing assistance. Regrettably, for 13 years the conflict in Syria has imposed appalling hardship and suffering on its people and continues to have a particularly adverse impact on women and children. We welcome the Mechanism's commitment to a victim-and-survivor-centred approach. Inclusive justice is essential, including through direct engagement with children affected by the conflict and the integration of victim perspectives.

Ireland remains committed to ensuring accountability for international crimes committed in Syria and believes that it is the responsibility of the international community to prioritize accountability and justice for the victims and survivors of such crimes. We continue to believe that accountability and justice are essential to reaching a genuine solution to the conflict in Syria in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). Ignorance of the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in the context of the Syrian conflict is a tragedy. Ireland notes that in spite of the unprecedented number of requests for assistance submitted to it, the Mechanism is prepared to support the new Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. That cooperation will help the Institution meet the needs of victims, survivors and the families of the missing. That cooperation, and cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations, States and members of Syrian civil society, will continue to facilitate justice for the Syrian people.

Ireland continues to support the funding of the Mechanism through the regular budget of the United Nations. We also strongly support its request for increased funding to address its significantly increased workload. It is essential that it be enabled to continue to discharge its important mandate effectively.

**Mr. González Behmaras (Cuba)** (*spoke in Spanish*):

At the time of the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 71/248, my delegation expressed its serious concern about the mandate 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. Looking at the tenth report of the Mechanism today (see A/78/772), we would like to point out that the Mechanism has no legal basis and goes beyond the purview and functions granted to the Assembly in Articles 10, 12 and 22 of the Charter of the United Nations. Calling it a subsidiary organ of the Assembly extends to the Mechanism and its staff immunities and privileges that are not appropriate. The Mechanism's terms of reference are not sufficiently clearly defined to ensure that its use is not politicized. There has been no way for Member States to be able to give their views or make decisions about it. The deliberate undermining of the primary responsibility of the Syrian Arab Republic and its legal system to investigate and prosecute any crimes that may have been committed within its borders is a transgression of the norms and principles of international law and sets a dangerous precedent in the work of the Organization.

The Mechanism is given functions similar to those of a prosecutor's office, with the aim of establishing a connection between the evidence and those who might be guilty in order to share information with national, regional or international courts that in its view may have jurisdiction. That constitutes legal arbitrariness. It is not even the classic judicial function. A judicial organ cannot be both judge and jury. The inconsistencies in the current report have also been apparent in previous reports. The Mechanism has no precedent in the history of the United Nations. It is part of attempts to single out Syria and use the General Assembly as a platform for attack and politicization. The Assembly is holding two meetings dealing with the same subject in the space of two days, something that my delegation cannot accept.

With regard to financing, repeated votes on the issue in both the Fifth Committee and the Assembly have shown that there is no consensus support for the Mechanism. Such mechanisms should not be funded from the regular budget, particularly if they do not have the participation of the State concerned. In the context of the serious liquidity crisis that we are seeing throughout the Organization, which is fundamentally the result of the failure of the United States to pay its

bills, that has led to a selective and discriminatory approach to situations on which there is no consensus.

Cuba will not support any mechanism that does not recognize or respect the principles of the Charter, and that is the case with the Mechanism established pursuant to resolution 71/248. Its aim is to unjustly single out the Syrian Arab Republic, and it calls into question the credibility of the Organization and the objectivity and impartiality of its mechanisms. We therefore once again state our opposition to the Mechanism and reiterate that we cannot prevent conflicts or guarantee international peace and security if we do not abide by the essential principle of respect for the Charter and international law. We also reaffirm our unequivocal support for the quest for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria, and we have full confidence in the ability of the Syrian people and authorities to achieve that goal.

**Ms. Alsnef (Qatar)** (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank the President of the Assembly for holding this annual meeting pursuant to the Assembly's resolutions on the situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, and for reaffirming the importance that the Assembly attaches to the work 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. I want to express our appreciation to Ms. Marchi-Uhel and her team for their efforts and for preparing the annual report before the Assembly today (see A/78/772), as well as for Ms. Marchi-Uhel's outstanding efforts as the first Head of the Mechanism. We would also like to take this opportunity to welcome her successor, Mr. Robert Petit, wishing him success in fulfilling his mandate and stressing Qatar's full cooperation and support.

Humanitarian and legal aspects are always very important for the State of Qatar, and particularly regarding the Syrian situation, as reflected in Qatar's tangible humanitarian contributions and its support to the Mechanism. Our interest is based on our commitment to the role of justice in achieving reconciliation, stability and sustainable peace, and in ending impunity for core international crimes and violations of international law, regardless of their perpetrators. The Mechanism is considered the most prominent international instrument in that regard, with a specific and clear mandate to fulfil a legal and moral responsibility towards the victims of international crimes. Its work is bound

by the principles of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The Mechanism has already achieved proven success as a model and effective entity for supporting justice. We welcome the progress noted in the Mechanism's tenth report (see A/78/772) regarding the implementation of its first strategic plan for the 2023–2025 period, and we acknowledge its reaffirmation of its commitment to the principles of neutrality, independence and inclusive justice. We commend its victim-and-survivor-centred approach and its communication with victims, survivors and civil society generally through bilateral cooperation and regular consultations, as well as continued coordination, awareness-raising and the mobilization of support.

We welcome the decision to continue funding the Mechanism from the regular budget, which ensures predictability and promotes the Mechanism's credibility and independence. We see that there is a need to allocate further financial resources to ensure that it can fulfil its mandate effectively, and it will be important to cover those funding needs based on the Mechanism's strategic plans, given that the volume of its work has clearly increased since 2020. With \$2.3 million in contributions, Qatar is one of the Mechanism's main donors.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that the best way to achieve sustainable peace and stability in the Syrian Arab Republic is through a political settlement based on international consensus and the resolutions of international legitimacy, including the Geneva communiqué (A/66/865, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolution 2254 (2015), in a way that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and protects the country's sovereignty, independence and unity.

**Ms. Sullivan (United States of America)**: At the outset, the United States would like to thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for her steadfast leadership 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. We applaud her hard work and advocacy on behalf of Syrian families, victims and survivors, as well as the Mechanism's contributions to successful convictions for war crimes. We wish her all the best in her next endeavours, as we welcome the appointment of Mr. Robert Petit as her successor and

look forward to working with him. We also thank the brave Syrians who have come forward at great personal risk to share information about the crimes committed in Syria by the Al-Assad regime, Da'esh and other actors.

A sustainable end to the conflict in Syria will require accountability for the atrocities committed, some of which have risen to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Syria cannot achieve reconciliation while criminals enjoy impunity. Those circumstances led the Netherlands and Canada to institute proceedings at the International Court of Justice against Syria for alleged breaches of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. A lasting political solution in Syria will be possible only if those responsible for the ongoing human rights violations are held to account and if the victims obtain justice. We welcomed the Court's provisional measures requiring Syria to prevent acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, ensure that no one under its control commits such practices and preserve evidence related to such acts. Those measures are a first step towards much-needed accountability and justice for the people of Syria. The work of documenting atrocities, collecting evidence and pursuing justice is resource-intensive and requires sustained financial support. The United States calls on Member States to maintain full funding for the Mechanism's work through the regular budget of the United Nations. We also encourage Members to make voluntary contributions to allow the Mechanism to fulfil the full range of its mandate and serve the growing number of requests for assistance. The United States has already provided more than \$1 million via a grant agreement this year.

The Mechanism now serves some 16 competent jurisdictions, expanding its reach and impact in supporting efforts to hold perpetrators accountable. It is also deepening and intensifying its trusted partnerships with Syrian civil society, Member States and international organizations, fostering collaboration and solidarity in the pursuit of justice. The Mechanism's work is indispensable to our pursuit of justice for the victims of atrocities in Syria. By collecting and preserving evidence, it is strengthening the foundation on which accountability rests. Its impartial and independent mandate ensures that justice is pursued without bias or political interference. The horrors witnessed in Syria, beginning with the Al-Assad regime's brutal suppression of peaceful protests in 2011 and continuing with its use of chemical weapons and

strikes on civilians, demand a robust response from the international community.

We must commit to providing the necessary funding, political will and collective action to pursue justice for the victims and survivors of atrocities in Syria. Only then can we honour the memory of those who have suffered and build a future where impunity has no place in our world.

**Mr. Kyslytsya** (Ukraine) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head 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, for her presentation of the tenth report of the Mechanism (see A/78/772).

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union, and I would like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

The report confirms that the Mechanism plays an important role in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes committed in Syria since March 2011. We endorse all of the report's recommendations seeking to build on the Mechanism's cooperation with the United Nations, Member States and civil society. The international community must also consider the way forward for ensuring accountability. In that regard, Ukraine echoes the calls to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We also commend the important work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and welcome the establishment of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The international community should spare no effort to halt or at least alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. Ensuring that those who have perpetrated serious crimes, violations and abuses are held accountable and providing justice for the victims are crucial steps towards the achievement of reconciliation and lasting peace in Syria and should be part of a comprehensive political solution in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

We are here to respect and defend the Charter of the United Nations and international law, unless we want to live in a jungle where might is right. We cannot allow any of the perpetrators of the most serious crimes under international law to go unpunished. Everything in the

world is interconnected. We know that Russians have been involved in mass killings of civilians in Syria, yet justice has still not been served for the victims of those crimes. Impunity breeds more violence. The accuracy of that statement is evident in the example of Russia's war on Ukraine, which has been marked by the aggressor's commission of the most flagrant war crimes and crimes against humanity. That is why we call on all Member States to redouble their efforts to establish a special tribunal for the prosecution of the crime of aggression against Ukraine. Justice must prevail.

**Mr. Sylvester** (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom commends the important work 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 in holding to account those responsible for the most serious crimes under international human rights law and for human rights violations and abuses during the Syrian conflict. We thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for her leadership of the Mechanism over the past seven years. During her tenure it has become an established mechanism, making essential contributions to legal proceedings through its collection, preservation and analysis of evidence. We look forward to engaging with her successor, Mr. Robert Petit.

We commend the Mechanism for continuing to facilitate and support justice efforts across multiple We are pleased to note the Mechanism's continued commitment to inclusive justice, including in relation to gender, children and young people. Its expertise and inclusive focus have expedited and enhanced the prospects of numerous legal proceedings. In 2023 the Mechanism's efforts helped to expedite the issuing of arrest warrants for high-ranking Syrian military officers for their complicity in deliberate attacks on the civilian population of Dara'a. It made valuable contributions to judicial cases in Germany and Sweden, leading to the conviction of two individuals complicit in war crimes. The Mechanism also contributed evidence to arrest warrants for four high-ranking Al-Assad regime officials for their complicity in the 2013 chemical-weapon attacks in Douma and eastern Ghouta.

We welcome the significant contribution of Syrian civil society organizations to accountability efforts,

including by highlighting atrocities committed by the Al-Assad regime and Da'esh. The Mechanism has made valuable progress in intensifying its cooperation with civil society actors and providing a space where the voices of the communities and survivors affected can be heard. We must not allow impunity for chemical-weapon attacks, systematic torture or forced disappearances by State and non-State actors in Syria, and the work of the Mechanism is essential to that fight against impunity.

**Mr. Mohamed** (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Every year the General Assembly discusses the agenda item "Prevention of armed conflict", demanding that we take a more objective and effective look at the root causes of conflicts rather than simply discussing their humanitarian repercussions and impact. In that context, foreign intervention, which is one of the main underlying reasons for the continuation and fuelling of conflicts, should not be overlooked, and the Assembly should give it greater attention and focus when discussing this agenda item.

Our key guarantee of stable relations and advancing the prevention of conflict is respect for the Charter of the United Nations and its principles, which our international relations are founded on. The selective establishment of legal mechanisms without the consent of the relevant State or discussion with it, and the use of financing for such mechanisms from the United Nations regular budget, depleting the Organization's resources at a time when it is suffering from reduced funding, is therefore undermining the sovereignty of its Member States.

While achieving justice and fighting impunity are essential, they require a just and lasting peace through nationally owned solutions without foreign interference. That is what can ensure the territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their internal affairs, rather than the establishment of mechanisms and bodies that impose unilateral views and sanctions. Experience has shown that such measures are ineffective and, in many cases, help complicate situations and prolong suffering.

**The Acting President:** We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers this afternoon following the Assembly's consideration of the agenda items announced in *The Journal of the United Nations*.

*The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.*