



General Assembly

Distr.: General
13 August 2020

Original: English

Seventy-fifth session

Item 33 of the provisional agenda*

Prevention of armed conflict

International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the sixth 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.

* [A/75/150](#).



Report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011

Summary

The present report is the sixth prepared by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 for submission to the General Assembly pursuant to Assembly resolution [71/248](#) and paragraph 50 of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the resolution establishing the Mechanism ([A/71/755](#)).

The Mechanism has continued to make steady progress in implementing its mandate, notwithstanding the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and the liquidity situation of the United Nations, which has resulted in a hiring freeze and the reduced allocation of non-post resources. The Mechanism has reprioritized its substantive and operational activities in line with the constraints imposed by external circumstances and has refined its technical capabilities to support extended periods of remote work.

Flexibility and responsiveness have characterized the Mechanism's internal operations and engagement with external interlocutors, allowing it to develop and implement new technologies, create tailored analytical products, conclude diverse cooperation frameworks and respond to an increasing number of requests for assistance from competent jurisdictions. A commitment to understanding and responding to the needs and concerns of its many stakeholders, including victims and survivors of international crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic, underpins every effort the Mechanism makes to advance its mandate. The Mechanism's approach to justice is both inclusive and holistic, ensuring that it pays appropriate attention to historically underrepresented categories of crimes and victims/survivors, and that it can support the pursuit of different pathways to accountability.

I. Introduction

1. The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 hereby submits its sixth report to the General Assembly. The report covers the Mechanism's activities from 1 February 2020 to 31 July 2020.

2. The General Assembly created the Mechanism in December 2016 with a mandate to collect, consolidate, preserve and analyse evidence of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses, and to prepare files in order to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings, in accordance with international law standards, in national, regional or international courts or tribunals that have, or may in the future have, jurisdiction over these crimes.

3. Three-and-a-half years after its creation, the Mechanism is well positioned to facilitate the accountability efforts of competent jurisdictions in the short-term and to support longer-term justice within the limits of available resources. This includes developing the Mechanism's structural investigation and building case files that can reinforce work presently under way in national systems, as well as preparing for additional jurisdictional possibilities that may arise in the future. The Mechanism has created a central repository of information and evidence that holds more than 2 million records. It continuously builds and strengthens this repository, including by adding new materials, enhancing its structure and organization and identifying duplicate records to keep its storage requirements at a manageable size. The Mechanism has responded to a steadily increasing number of requests for assistance by sharing information and evidence, analytical products, and expertise. By the end of the reporting period, the Mechanism had received 66 requests for assistance from 11 jurisdictions, concluded 56 frameworks for cooperation and interacted directly or indirectly with more than 220 sources of information and evidence.

4. The Mechanism's approach to building its central repository and supporting accountability efforts is characterized by flexibility and responsiveness, as well as a strong commitment to inclusive and holistic justice. The Mechanism has made solid progress on developing and implementing dedicated and interconnected strategies on gender, crimes against children, and a victim- and survivor-centred approach, which collectively help to translate this commitment into meaningful action, drawing on lessons learned from other justice actors. The present report illustrates how the Mechanism's flexible and responsive approach furthers the implementation of its mandate, as well as how it is working to ensure inclusive and holistic justice outcomes for the Syrian people through different accountability pathways. Consistent with this approach, the Head of the Mechanism has taken the position that its mandate encompasses the provision of support to judicial proceedings that are not of a criminal law character that concern liability for crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic which fall within the scope of the mandate.

5. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has presented the Mechanism with challenges, but also allowed it to further develop and implement its remote-working capabilities. From the commencement of its work, the Mechanism considered carefully the benefits of establishing a flexible working culture and ensured that its office was well equipped to support teleworking. Many staff members availed themselves of teleworking arrangements, with the strict implementation of security protocols, which permitted many aspects of the Mechanism's mandate to be fulfilled by teams working remotely. Consequently, when the COVID-19 situation emerged, the Mechanism was able to adjust quickly, smoothly and effectively to working remotely. To minimize disruptions caused by travel restrictions and other confinement

measures, the Mechanism focused on investigation and collection activities that could be conducted remotely. It also made a number of adjustments to facilitate the processing of evidence in these new circumstances and refined its technical capabilities to better support remote work. Despite these measures, COVID-19 has had an impact on some aspects of the Mechanism's work. Its operations have been further affected by the liquidity challenges facing the United Nations and the consequent hiring freeze and reduced allocation of non-post resources.

6. On 13 March, owing to the COVID-19 situation, the President of the General Assembly communicated his decision to postpone the plenary meeting on the prevention of armed conflict, which would have included an address by the Head of the Mechanism to the General Assembly. Throughout the reporting period, the Mechanism has made extensive use of technology to continue engaging closely with States, United Nations entities, international organizations and international and Syrian civil society organizations through online meetings and events.

7. While the Mechanism does not comment publicly on crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic owing to the confidential nature of its work, its leadership shares the concern expressed by the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations representatives for the welfare of the Syrian people amid dire humanitarian conditions, and reiterates the importance of justice for victims and survivors of international crimes.

II. A central repository of information and evidence

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

8. The Mechanism's ability to expand its central repository by collecting information and evidence relating to serious international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic has been affected by COVID-19. Restrictions on international travel and other confinement measures have resulted in the postponement of those field missions and in-person meetings which are essential for developing and maintaining sources and conducting certain types of collection activities.

9. To accommodate these novel circumstances and ensure continued progress on implementing its mandate, the Mechanism has temporarily adjusted its approach to investigation and collection. It is focusing on those activities that can be conducted remotely and has succeeded in completing remote collections of information and evidence and developed new partnerships with potential sources. The Mechanism is confident that once restrictions related to COVID-19 are lifted, it can implement strategies to quickly further its investigation and collection work, subject to limitations arising from the ongoing United Nations liquidity situation and associated hiring freeze and reduced non-post resource allocation.

10. As discussed in its fifth report to the General Assembly ([A/74/699](#)), the Mechanism is working to deepen its cooperation with existing sources, prioritizing high-value interactions and collections. This approach has allowed the Mechanism to gather information and evidence that is directly relevant to its case files and analytical projects, as well as to its responses to requests for assistance from competent national jurisdictions.

11. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19 and the liquidity situation, the number of sources that the Mechanism interacts with directly or indirectly for the purposes of gathering information and evidence has grown to more than 220 individuals and entities. By engaging with States, international organizations,

international and Syrian civil society organizations and journalists and other individuals, the Mechanism has gained access to information and evidence relating to perpetrators with various affiliations and to diverse groups of victims and survivors. The Mechanism's overarching collection plan is reviewed regularly to ensure that its collection activities cover a wide range of crime, perpetrator, witness and victim/survivor categories in line with the Mechanism's inclusive approach to justice. This approach pays close attention to specific vulnerabilities arising from conflict dynamics and structural factors, including those affecting women, children and minorities.

12. The Mechanism documents the provenance of the information and evidence it collects to ensure a historical record of collected material that is as accurate and complete as possible. It also considers carefully the needs and concerns of information- and evidence-providers, particularly with regard to security. The Mechanism aims to support justice efforts in the Syrian context in a holistic manner by ensuring that collected material can serve a broad array of accountability opportunities. Its documentation of the provenance of information and evidence can include affidavits and provenance statements.

13. The Mechanism's efforts to build a comprehensive central repository of information and evidence are greatly assisted by its ongoing cooperation with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. The Commission has provided the Mechanism with most of the information collected by the Commission since its inception and has assisted the Mechanism by contacting and liaising with a large number of the Commission's sources and potential witnesses, subject to the consent of each individual and in accordance with strict confidentiality measures to ensure the protection of the source. The Mechanism continues to periodically receive material collected by the Commission during the course of its new mandates.

14. The Mechanism has received materials from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) gathered by its fact-finding mission on the Syrian Arab Republic and continues to engage with OPCW regarding the transfer of additional materials. In accordance with the applicable Secretary-General's bulletin ([ST/SGB/2019/4](#)), the Mechanism has, as previously reported, sought access to materials of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism from the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. However, a decision has yet to be made on the Mechanism's request. The Mechanism is also working directly with individual States that provided information to the Joint Investigative Mechanism in this context.

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

B. Processing evidence

16. During the reporting period, the Mechanism continued to build on previous efforts to scale up its evidence preservation, storage and processing capabilities through continuous improvements in automation and quality control. The agility and responsiveness of the Mechanism's operations is demonstrated by its capacity to adapt the task of evidence processing to the constraints imposed by COVID-19. It has developed new workflows, procedures and technologies to support remote evidence

acquisition and secure, user-friendly, end-to-end encrypted file transfer systems between sources, the Mechanism and jurisdictions the Mechanism assists.

17. The Mechanism executed two major software upgrades that enhanced audio and video review capabilities, as well as an underlying foundation for recognizing and managing entities, such as locations and incidents, appearing in these materials across the entire analytical cycle. In addition, the Mechanism is working on a system to track the development of analytical work products related to its strategic lines of inquiry. Internal innovation and collaboration were further encouraged during remote work through an internal code-sharing system that allowed for the continuous, near real-time delivery of new algorithms and automation to the entire technical team.

18. New and innovative algorithms to enhance information retrieval and review capabilities during the reporting period included glyph recognition, object recognition of multimedia evidence, technology developed in-house to evaluate and improve Arabic optical character recognition quality and continued work on technology to improve the identification of duplicate videos.

19. The shift to remote operations created opportunities for significant improvement in the processing of open-source evidence through the completion of a large open-source collection activity. Through constant, office-wide collaboration, inefficiencies and irregularities were identified, and solutions – whether procedural or technical – were quickly implemented, leading to an overall methodology that encompasses risk management, collection prioritization, acquisition strategy and tool selection to allow for possible future court room presentation formats.

20. During the reporting period, considerable effort was made to focus on and improve the handling of individual statements, including from victims and witnesses. This included integrating that unique evidence category into the overall source protection and data protection strategy across all integrated systems, as well as implementing formatting standards to allow for automatically recognizing entities at the collection stage.

III. Facilitating justice

A. Analysing evidence and building case files

21. The Mechanism's analytical work related to information and evidence acquired prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 continued with minimal disruption during the reporting period. Two new lines of inquiry have been opened and work has advanced on two existing lines of inquiry. However, the recruitment freeze has delayed the filling of several positions, necessitating the temporary suspension of work on one case file.

22. Within one existing line of inquiry, the Mechanism has been developing an evidentiary module regarding a contextual requirement necessary for the prosecution of war crimes charges in order to assist a range of competent jurisdictions. During the reporting cycle, the Mechanism carried out a targeted investigation in support of its work on this module. The module, which will include a brief legal analysis and lists of underlying evidence, is currently being finalized for transfer. Within another line of inquiry, the Mechanism initiated a similar project on the contextual requirement necessary to prove charges of crimes against humanity. The Mechanism also expanded its work on organizational structures and crime patterns. While continuing to prepare analytical products on these issues in the context of detention-related allegations, the Mechanism has also opened a third new line of inquiry in relation to allegations of unlawful attack and has begun examining related structures and crime patterns.

23. In selecting its lines of inquiry and areas of focus, the Mechanism is guided by the need to reflect an inclusive and holistic approach to justice in its work. In this regard, the Mechanism's selection is made with the aim of ensuring that the impact of its work relates to different categories of perpetrators and victims/survivors. As noted in its previous reports to the General Assembly, the Mechanism is making efforts to ensure that adequate attention is paid to historically overlooked and insufficiently documented crimes, such as sexual and gender-based crimes and crimes against children. In advancing its analytical work, the Mechanism has taken steps to ensure that its organizational strategies on these issues inform its review of the evidence in its collection, its approach to identifying and addressing gaps and the range of issues addressed in its analytical products.

24. Finally, in progressing analytical work across its lines of inquiry, the Mechanism's objective is to ensure that it anticipates and meets short- and long-term justice needs. To achieve this objective, the Mechanism is developing a diverse range of user-friendly analytical products and tools that are responsive to the needs of investigators and prosecutors at different stages of criminal justice processes. Its products encompass intelligence-oriented reports, legal research, litigation-oriented briefs and visual products such as organization charts and timelines. The Mechanism has also developed tools that track a variety of information relevant to criminal justice actors, including information relevant to understanding crime patterns and structures to which actors alleged to have been involved in their perpetration belong. The Mechanism's analytical products and tools are designed to both complement the evidentiary material underlying them and hold independent value. While intelligence-oriented products and tools aim at presenting large amounts of factual data in multiple user-friendly and accessible formats, the Mechanism's litigation-oriented products tackle challenging legal issues that prosecutors are either confronting or are expected to confront. In developing its litigation-oriented products, the Mechanism's focus is on integrating legal strategies that draw upon lessons learned by international justice actors in the past.

25. The Mechanism has two open case files (one of which has been suspended owing to current operational constraints) and continuously assesses the progress of its collection and analytical work with a view to identifying an adequate basis to open additional case files, resources permitting. The Mechanism will open such files whenever the necessary conditions are met.

B. Frameworks for sharing and cooperation

26. The Mechanism has continued to establish formal and informal cooperation frameworks for the purposes of collecting information and evidence from different entities and actors. By the end of the reporting cycle, 56 cooperation frameworks were in place with States, international organizations and civil society actors, with an additional 22 frameworks in process. During this period, several existing agreements were also revised to reflect growing cooperation with certain partners.

27. The Mechanism's flexible approach has been instrumental in facilitating the conclusion of cooperation frameworks. It has tailored its frameworks to suit the diverse requirements of different international organizations and civil society actors, resulting in a wide range of frameworks that include verbal agreements, exchanges of letters, memorandums of understanding, protocols and bilingual frameworks. The Mechanism has also provided assistance to support the adoption of new national legislative frameworks. The diversity of organizations and civil society actors the Mechanism now cooperates with enhances its capacity to seize opportunities for justice concerning crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

28. In accordance with its commitment to inclusive justice and ensuring that certain categories of crimes, perpetrators and victims/survivors are not overlooked, the Mechanism has sought to identify and engage with entities in possession of information and evidence concerning underdocumented incidents or categories of crimes and underrepresented groups of victims/survivors, including women, children and minorities. These efforts have resulted in the conclusion of several new cooperation frameworks with Syrian civil society actors and organizations.

29. To enable the conclusion of additional cooperation frameworks, the Mechanism continues to raise awareness about its mandate and role within the United Nations system and reach out to relevant national authorities. Increasing and diversifying the number of information providers with whom it cooperates, and accessing relevant information and evidence collected by States and United Nations entities over time, is essential to advancing the Mechanism's mandate. Building trust with organizations and State entities that are not accustomed to collaborating with the United Nations or are unfamiliar with accountability bodies requires dedicated effort, which the Mechanism is committed to sustaining.

30. The Mechanism welcomes engagement by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, as well as the Secretariat, and appreciates its cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office of Legal Affairs. The Mechanism continues to consult with the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar regarding shared administrative and technical concerns while fully respecting the independence and mandate of each entity.

C. Sharing information and evidence with national jurisdictions

31. The Mechanism is mandated to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings in national, regional or international courts or tribunals that have, or may in the future have, jurisdiction over the crimes under consideration. In line with its terms of reference, the Mechanism only shares information with jurisdictions that respect international human rights law and standards, including the right to a fair trial, and would not apply the death penalty for the offences under consideration. The Mechanism does not support investigations and prosecutions that focus solely on terrorism-affiliated charges and requires that they encompass core international crimes. During the reporting period, the Mechanism continued to assist national war crimes units investigating and prosecuting core international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

32. By the end of the reporting period, the Mechanism had received a total of 66 requests for assistance from the judicial authorities of 11 States. A total of 22 requests for assistance have been processed and closed, while work continues on 33 requests. The Mechanism has started sharing information and evidence as well as analytical products in response to 23 of the 33 requests. The Mechanism has not yet begun work on 11 requests for assistance, owing to resource limitations.

33. The Mechanism has seen a steep increase in the number of requests for assistance received during the reporting period. This is a testament to the constructive dialogue between the Mechanism and national war crimes units. The Mechanism continues to prioritize regular bilateral engagement with national war crimes units, which is essential for gaining a better understanding of the challenges faced by judicial authorities and optimizing the provision of tailored assistance. The Mechanism is working to enhance its response capacities in the light of the growing number of requests it receives and the increasing diversity of these requests in terms of scope and subject matter.

34. When responding to requests for assistance, the Mechanism's multidisciplinary team of analysts, lawyers, evidence officers and investigators face many challenges. While the growing size of the Mechanism's repository has increased the likelihood of identifying relevant materials, it correspondingly increases the volume of material requiring review, leading to longer response times. Technical challenges have also been identified in relation to searches of handwritten Arabic documents collected by the Mechanism. To overcome these challenges, the Mechanism is working to design targeted searches and enhance the searchability of documents to maximize the efficiency of searches and shorten response times.

35. The diversity of subjects covered by the requests for assistance received by the Mechanism has helped to identify evidentiary gaps in the central repository. To ensure that its work is responsive to the needs of requesting authorities and can facilitate an array of opportunities for justice, the Mechanism is making an increasing number of targeted requests for information and evidence to its network of information providers. In close consultation with requesting judicial authorities, the Mechanism strives to collect additional evidence that is directly relevant to ongoing national investigations and identify new witnesses willing to support ongoing and future accountability efforts.

IV. Spotlight: harnessing the potential of technology to advance accountability in the Syrian crisis

36. During the reporting period, the Mechanism continued to demonstrate agility and innovation in its techniques for the preservation and analysis of evidence. It has begun to explore novel technological solutions for faster and more robust and accurate analytical processes.

37. The need to create and add new technologies to the existing catalogue of tools utilized by the Mechanism stems from challenges concerning new collections of video and documentary material. Challenges related to the intake and analysis of this material, particularly documentary evidence, arise from its high volume, variety and complexity, as well as its varying levels of organization and quality. The combination of these factors means that part of this evidence was previously inaccessible for analytical purposes. The main goal of all technological projects at the Mechanism is to convert inaccessible data in various formats – documents, photographs, video and audio – into accessible, searchable and operative data, and to improve the speed and quality of analytical processes.

38. One notable example of the innovative technology employed by the Mechanism is the execution of a novel approach to the technology assisted review of evidentiary material, which aims at achieving a more automated, and consequently much faster and more accurate, analysis of individual documents contained in massive collection repositories. This represents one of the first uses of technology assisted review within international criminal law. Specifically, the Mechanism has focused on the design of glyph recognition processes, where recognition of visual symbols, patterns and regularities in a large set of data is possible through algorithmic tests, facilitating the automatic classification of documents into categories.

39. The Mechanism's technology assisted review project is currently being tested on one exceptionally challenging and voluminous collection of evidentiary material of high importance, which consists of low-quality, scanned hard copies of typed and handwritten Arabic documents and requires significant reorganization. Executing an in-depth quality review, classification and analysis of this collection would require a considerable investment of time and resources. This novel and tailor-made technological approach can significantly reduce that investment.

40. The technology assisted review project involves two main functionalities: automated clustering of documents into thematic groups based on similar physical characteristics, and automated object detection of high-value, predefined objects that assist in the identification and attribution of relevant material, such as stamps and signatures. The adoption of these two automated functions, in combination with classic analytical approaches, such as queries and entity recognition, allow for a faster and more precise and reliable review and analysis of evidentiary material.

41. Once successfully implemented with regard to the selected collection, the technology assisted review could be applied to other document collections in the Mechanism's central repository. This technology has the potential to enable a more thorough review of larger collections, facilitating the identification of valuable evidence more quickly and easily and identifying common patterns across various collections.

V. Mechanism-wide developments

A. Update on strategies related to gender, a victim- and survivor-centred approach and crimes against children

42. The Mechanism intensified efforts to refine and implement its overarching gender strategy during the reporting period. To ensure an interdisciplinary and coordinated approach to these efforts, the Mechanism created an internal, office-wide working group on gender and a victim- and survivor-centred approach. Ongoing activities to support the implementation of the gender strategy include developing – in consultation with external experts where necessary – standard operating procedures, protocols and tools for integrating gender perspectives throughout the Mechanism's substantive work. The working group is also developing an advanced gender training programme that will help teams to implement specific gender strategies related to core professional tasks.

43. Since the beginning of its operations, the Mechanism has created the conditions for addressing sexual and gender-based violence, and gender issues more broadly, as a core part of its work. It has done so in myriad ways, for instance by focusing on gender competence as a core requirement in recruitment processes; integrating accountability for gender perspectives as part of staff workplans; and developing gender strategies as part of its collection planning, case-file building and structural investigation. The multilayered gender strategy provides a coherent conceptual and practical framework for advancing these efforts, recognizing that gender perspectives must be integrated at every institutional level and across all mandated activities to be effective.

44. The pilot project on sexual and gender-based crimes, which was carried out in cooperation with non-governmental organizations focused on the Syrian context, has been completed. It yielded valuable insights on how structural gender inequalities render women, men, girls and boys vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violations, while cultural and social norms exacerbate the harms victims and survivors of these violations continue to endure. The Mechanism has gained a greater understanding of the considerable challenges faced by civil society actors working to document sexual and gender-based violations and provide victims and survivors with much-needed psychosocial and other support. The output of this project is informing the Mechanism's substantive work and its ongoing engagement with institutional partners and victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based crimes.

45. The Mechanism's victim- and survivor-centred approach seeks to better understand the experiences, concerns and priorities of victims and survivors of international crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic. It aims at increasing the inclusivity of the Mechanism's activities by paying specific attention to categories of crimes and

survivors that have often been overlooked or underrepresented in justice and accountability efforts, including women, children and minorities. The approach also seeks to respond more effectively to the needs of victims and survivors by identifying effective humanitarian referral pathways, taking measures to avoid retraumatization, managing expectations, determining how best to support the search for missing persons, improving outreach and information-sharing, and creating safe and meaningful possibilities for engagement with the Mechanism.

46. The Mechanism made progress on developing its strategy to address crimes against children during the reporting period. The strategy is intended to ensure that the Mechanism's investigation and collection activities pay appropriate attention to crimes against children, which have at times been neglected in justice and accountability processes. Through the development of the strategy, the Mechanism is identifying measures and policies that will allow it to better respond to the needs and concerns of the children and families with whom it engages. The Mechanism is committed to instituting procedures and safeguards to prevent the retraumatization of children and support their safety and well-being, including through partnerships with child protection and humanitarian actors. The strategy builds on insights and experiences gained from working for and with children in other justice and accountability efforts, as well as the expertise and knowledge of other United Nations entities, civil society organizations and academics from disciplines such as child protection, justice for children and child rights.

47. By developing dedicated strategies on gender, victims and survivors, and crimes against children, the Mechanism seeks to ensure that it devotes the attention and resources necessary to address complex and traumatic experiences of conflict sensitively, effectively and comprehensively. The Mechanism is working to ensure that these strategies are complementary and together create a robust framework within which to support a range of accountability opportunities and contribute to broader justice efforts for the Syrian Arab Republic.

B. Funding

48. In response to the call from the General Assembly in paragraph 35 of its resolution [72/191](#), the Secretary-General decided to include the Mechanism in the proposed programme budget for 2020 ([A/74/6 \(Sect. 8\)](#) and [A/74/6 \(Sect. 8\)/Corr.1](#)). The Assembly decided to approve the request for regular budget funding for 2020 in paragraph 46 of its resolution [74/262](#).

49. The Secretary-General has also included the Mechanism in the proposed programme budget for 2021 ([A/75/6 \(Sect. 8\)](#)). As at the end of the reporting cycle, the proposal was under review by the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

C. Team

50. The Mechanism has continued to accord significant priority to recruitment. As at the end of the reporting period, 46 of the 60 approved regular budget posts had been filled. In April 2020, the Secretary-General imposed a freeze on hiring for regular budget vacancies. Ongoing recruitment for remaining vacant posts will be finalized and staff onboarded once the freeze is lifted.

51. The Mechanism's working group on organizational wellness is finalizing an internal report to support ongoing efforts to promote the safety and mental and physical well-being of team members. The report draws on 79 consultations conducted during the reporting period with individual staff members on specific

issues previously identified as priorities for the Mechanism, including addressing secondary traumatization as a result of repeated exposure to graphic materials and frequent interactions with traumatized victims and witnesses.

VI. Recommendations

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

A. Cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations

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

(a) To ensure that the Mechanism has full access to materials that are held within the United Nations system and concern crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic;

(b) To ensure that relevant United Nations agencies coordinate and cooperate fully with the Mechanism, respecting the mandate of each entity;

(c) To engage in dialogue with the Mechanism to promote coordination across the humanitarian, human rights and accountability spectrum with a view to sharing information systematically with the Mechanism;

(d) To share with the Mechanism information regarding effective humanitarian referral pathways to assist victims of international crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic;

(e) To ensure that other initiatives within the United Nations system involving the investigation, documentation and/or prosecution of crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic are established in conformity with the Mechanism's mandate and can benefit from its work and expertise.

B. Cooperation with States

54. The Mechanism requests Member States:

(a) To continue supporting the Mechanism's budgetary needs and continued inclusion in the regular budget of the United Nations, in accordance with past decisions taken by the General Assembly;

(b) To ensure broad cooperation and engagement with the Mechanism and implement any required agreements and frameworks to that end in a timely manner in consultation with the Mechanism;

(c) To coordinate the efforts of relevant national actors and raise awareness of the Mechanism's mandate in order to facilitate its work;

(d) To ensure that initiatives concerning the documentation, investigation and prosecution of crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic take into account the Mechanism's mandate to support impartial, independent and inclusive justice;

(e) To ensure that efficient and effective procedures are in place to facilitate access to their territories by the Mechanism as required for its work;

(f) For States hosting Syrian refugee communities, to provide information and facilitate introductions for the Mechanism with domestic agencies and local actors that are relevant to the Mechanism's work;

(g) To consider entering into cooperative agreements with the Mechanism to provide witness protection and support services in connection with the Mechanism's work.

C. Cooperation with civil society

55. The Mechanism requests civil society:

(a) To ensure that the Mechanism has access to all relevant materials to facilitate accountability processes and, to that end, to transfer available information and evidence to the Mechanism in a timely manner;

(b) To engage with the Mechanism regarding coordination strategies for documentation work concerning past and ongoing crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic;

(c) To engage with the Mechanism on refining and implementing its gender strategy, its strategy on crimes against children and its victim- and survivor-centred approach, particularly with regard to integrating gender perspectives throughout the Mechanism's work and accounting for and responding to the needs and concerns of victims and survivors, including children;

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

VII. Conclusion

56. The Mechanism has made tangible progress in the implementation of its mandate during the reporting period, despite the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the United Nations liquidity situation, including the associated hiring freeze. It has demonstrated agility in reprioritizing substantive and operational activities and developing new technical capabilities to support those activities in conditions of remote work. The significant increase in the number of requests for assistance received by the Mechanism from competent national jurisdictions confirms the utility of its flexible approach to cooperation, which prioritizes continuous dialogue and is responsive to the unique needs of each interlocutor.

57. The Mechanism is aided in its pursuit of inclusive justice by the specific steps it has taken to understand and account for how gender and other identity markers influence the perpetration of and vulnerability to international crimes, as well as the experience of the harm these crimes inflict. The Mechanism's efforts to bring to light and better understand the complex and profound experiences of Syrian children in relation to serious international crimes, and its focus on identifying and prioritizing the needs and preferences of victims and survivors, enhance the inclusivity of its approach. The Mechanism is committed to proactively sharing its insights and expertise with competent jurisdictions and other partners to support broader justice efforts.

58. The Mechanism is grateful for the support extended to it by States, the United Nations system, international organizations, civil society actors and individuals. Its efforts will continue to be guided by the spirit and purpose of its mandate and seek to serve the interests of the Syrian people's quest for comprehensive justice.