

High-Level briefing on ensuring accountability for Syria with a focus on the UN-mandated

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International, Impartial and Independent mechanism (IIIM)

37th session of the Human Rights Council

Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein

26 February 2018

Excellencies,
Colleagues, Friends,

The conflict in Syria has featured unrelenting, gross and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, many amounting to international crimes. These take place with full impunity. Lack of accountability at the national and international levels has encouraged the commission of further violations.

This is why the establishment of an international, impartial and independent mechanism to assist in investigating and prosecuting international crimes committed in Syria is such a significant step. A year ago, at a similar event, I informed you of my Office's efforts to start up the Mechanism, . By June 2017, in a record time, we had succeeded in setting up the Mechanism, with a budget, funds, an office and a team, enabling the Secretary General to appoint Catherine Marchi-Uhel, who is here today.

The mandate of the Mechanism focuses on ensuring that information about serious crimes is collected, collated, analysed and preserved. It supports the rights of victims to know the truth, to have access to justice and to obtain a remedy for the crimes they have endured. Its work is complementary to the efforts by my Office and the Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry to document and publicly report on patterns of human rights violations and abuses in Syria, as well as the extent of the crimes committed by the Government, anti-Government armed groups and terrorist organisations, in particular Daesh. The respective mandates and operations of my Office, of the Mechanism and of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria are closely related and are also mutually reinforcing.

During this session, the Council will decide whether to renew the mandate of the Syria Commission of Inquiry, and I strongly encourage it to do so. The Mechanism does not replace the Commission: it rather builds on its work. The Commission is expected to continue to collect information, publicly report on broad patterns of violations and make public recommendations. Its work is highly visible. In contrast, the Mechanism is not expected to publicly report on its substantive work. Its complementary role is rather to

consolidate and analyse evidence, and prepare files to assist courts. I understand that these bodies are liaising closely, to ensure that they share information in a manner that best ensures security and confidentiality.

I also reiterate my call to the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. It is essential that the international community respond to the magnitude and horror of the violations and crimes that have been and are being committed. Those suspected of committing international crimes must know they are under watch and will be brought to justice. All efforts at negotiation and mediation efforts must include the victims' rights to truth, reparation, and justice.