

Opening remarks by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at the side event, Working Together to End Impunity in Syria, during the conference Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region

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25.04.2018 - Speech 

Ministers,

Excellencies,

Experts,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At today's event, we are primarily discussing money and humanitarian measures aimed at helping people in Syria and the region. We are talking about concrete support – food supplies, schooling, housing for refugees.

However, what we cannot see is often far worse – the intangible, emotional damage. After all, what sort of future will people in Syria have if the most serious crimes go unpunished and their children's or parents' murderers are not held to account?

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the start of the conflict, we have taken great steps on the difficult path to prosecuting perpetrators in Syria. There is still no international court for such cases. However, by documenting crimes and gathering evidence, we – and above all, NGOs in Syria itself – have done important groundwork for holding perpetrators to account at a later stage.

Furthermore, some countries have already made progress in prosecuting cases at national level. In Germany, the Federal Public Prosecutor General has been investigating several cases since 2011. What is important here is that the victims are heard, supported and

given hope that their suffering will be addressed and the perpetrators brought to justice.

That is why we want to underline clearly through today's event that we need to work even more closely together with the many stakeholders in this area – NGOs, the United Nations, the OPCW, human rights lawyers and states.

And the triple IM, the International, Independent and Impartial Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, must play a key role. From the start, Germany has provided this mechanism with political and financial support, and will do so again in 2018 with funding of one million euros.

At the same time, the shocking events in Douma have confirmed my belief that we need to redouble our efforts following the unfortunate non-extension of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, as those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be identified and held to account.

From the outset, Germany has supported the French initiative on a partnership against impunity for the use of chemical weapons. This initiative now has 29 members. That shows that we are not alone in our demand for prosecution.

For this reason, I am grateful that so many outstanding experts from Syria, national law enforcement agencies and international organisations have come here today to talk about how we can combat impunity in Syria.

Let us work together because there can only be lasting peace if the perpetrators are held to account and human rights and the victims' dignity are restored to the greatest possible extent.

Thank you very much.

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