European External Action Service (EEAS)

EU Statement – UN General Assembly: International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria

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29 April 2025, New York - Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States delivered by Mr. Fabio Cannizzaro, Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, at the UN General Assembly debate on the 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

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Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Albania*, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina* and Georgia, as well as Monaco and San Marino align themselves with this statement.

We welcome today’s important debate on the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria (IIIM or Mechanism), which underscores the continued commitment of UN member states to ensuring justice for the most serious crimes committed in Syria.

We would like to thank the Head of the Mechanism, Mr. Robert Petit, for his leadership since assuming his position in May 2024, and for the Mechanism’s eleventh report to the General Assembly.

This debate comes at a historic moment for Syria. As also stated in the report, following the end of Bashar Al-Assad’s rule in December 2024, we are witnessing a unique opportunity to deliver on our collective commitment to comprehensive justice and accountability – core prerequisites for sustainable peace and reconciliation in Syria.

The report highlights significant positive developments, including the Mechanism’s first visit to Damascus in December 2024 and its constructive initial engagements with the caretaker authorities. We call on the Syrian transitional government to formally authorize the Mechanism to start operating in Syria in accordance with its mandate. This would be a crucial

step toward maximizing the Mechanism's operational work, including for preserving vital evidence at risk of loss or destruction.

We commend the Mechanism's comprehensive work, including its detailed report on torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities under the Assad regime, which was published in December 2024. We also note the significant progress made in investigations related to ISIL crimes, notably the report on the recruitment, training and use by ISIL of children in hostilities in Syria, as well as the progress in the inquiry on unlawful attacks, including chemical weapons use.

We also commend the important work of the Mechanism to collect, preserve and process the increasing amount of evidence through improved processes and innovative use of digital technology. These efforts ensure that crucial evidence is maintained with the highest standards of integrity for current and future accountability processes.

We reiterate our support to the IIIM's victim/survivor-centred approach and its commitment to inclusive justice through the implementation of thematic strategies on gender equality and analysis, children and youth, and broader justice objectives. The experiences and perspectives of all victims and survivors must be at the heart of accountability efforts. We particularly commend the Mechanism for its positive performance in relation to the Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

The Mechanism continues to play an indispensable role in supporting accountability efforts, having received 437 requests for assistance from 16 jurisdictions in relation to over 300 distinct national investigations. The continued increase in requests (93 new requests during the reporting period) speaks to the valuable role the Mechanism plays in the pursuit of accountability. We welcome the continued successful prosecutions in multiple jurisdictions, including several EU Member States, which have been supported by the Mechanism's work. In this regard, we urge all States to enhance cooperation and engagement with the IIIM, including by facilitating access to information and evidence and providing operational support for witness protection.

Mr. President,

Alongside these achievements, the report also highlights persistent challenges that require our attention. We are deeply concerned about the funding and resource limitations faced by the Mechanism. Despite the General Assembly urging the Secretary-General to include further necessary resources to address the Mechanism's significantly increased workload since 2020, there has been no increase in its regular budget resources. The exhaustion of the trust fund in 2024 has led to staffing cuts and operational constraints, which severely affect the Mechanism's capacity to fulfil its mandate effectively, particularly at this critical juncture.

This is rather the moment to step up our collective efforts. It is a crucial moment for Syria, and we must increase our support to the IIIM and accountability mechanisms in general as fundamental elements of a successful transition. Comprehensive transitional justice for victims and survivors is essential to reconciliation and to building a peaceful Syria and an inclusive political transition in line with the core principles of UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

We thus call on all States to ensure support to the Mechanism with increased funding through the regular budget and complementary voluntary contributions to address the Mechanism's increasing workload, including as a consequence of the recent change in government in Syria.

We also reiterate the importance of referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, and reaffirm our support for the proceedings initiated by the Netherlands and Canada before the International Court of Justice regarding breaches of the UN Convention Against Torture.

Strongly condemning the widespread violence against civilians in Syria's coastal region in March, we welcome the commitments made by the Syrian transitional government, in particular the establishment of an investigative committee, in order to hold the perpetrators accountable in line with international law norms and standards. We call for swift, transparent and impartial investigations into the horrific crimes committed against civilians, including summary killings, to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice, to prevent such crimes from ever recurring and to ensure that all Syrians, without distinction of any kind, can live without fear in the new Syria. We underline the importance of the protection of the rights of Syrians from all ethnic and religious backgrounds without discrimination.

Mr. President,

The fall of the Assad regime marks a historic moment and an opportunity for the Syrian people to decide the future of their country.

In this critical period, the EU stands with the Syrian people, both within Syria and across the region.

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, the EU and its Member States have been the largest humanitarian donor to Syrians and have mobilized over EUR 35.3 billion to help Syria and its neighbouring countries address the consequences of the war. To help the reconstruction, the EU has also suspended several restrictive measures. At the recent 9th Brussels Conference on "Standing with Syria: Meeting the Needs for a Successful Transition", the EU gathered key regional and international partners together with the Syrian Arab Republic. On that occasion, we reaffirmed our support for a peaceful, inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned transition, where both domestic and international affairs are conducted

in full respect of international law, and with justice, reconciliation, and reconstruction as fundamental elements.

The EU and its Member States will thus remain at the forefront of the fight against impunity in Syria, supporting efforts to gather and preserve evidence of atrocities, regardless of who may have committed them. We will continue to support the Mechanism, as well as the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, and the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team, and welcome the cooperation among all these complementary actors. We also support the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria.

In conclusion, this critical moment for Syria requires unwavering international support for accountability and justice mechanisms. The IIIM's mandate has never been more important; we must ensure it has the resources and cooperation necessary to fulfil its vital role in laying the foundation for comprehensive accountability.

Thank you.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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