

Statement of Canada to the General Assembly of the United Nations for the Formal Meeting on the International, Independent, and Impartial Mechanism

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April 23, 2019

President,

I would like to thank Madame Marchi-Uhel and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for this briefing and the Mechanism's Third Report to the General Assembly.

I want to start by reiterating Canada's strong support to the IIIM and the important work it does in pursuit of justice and accountability. The crimes being committed in Syria, including the use of chemical weapons, are a clear violation of the norms and standards that the international community has put in place. The state of impunity for crimes committed in Syria is unacceptable. We must not allow what is happening in Syria to be normalized.

Canada sees the IIIM as a critical tool for ensuring that the perpetrators of the most serious crimes – including war crimes and crimes against humanity – are held to account. We have faith that the work done by the Mechanism will contribute to bringing justice eventually for the victims, and that it will also contribute more broadly to eventual transitional justice efforts in Syria. We have carefully noted the recommendations outlined in the report.

In February 2019, Canada was pleased to announce an additional \$1.5 million dollars to the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism, bringing our total contribution to \$2.9M. Canada calls on states to continue to support the critical work done by the IIIM, including through voluntary funding for 2019 and by supporting its inclusion in the UN regular budget in 2020.

We are determined to hold all perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity accountable, and to continue advocating for the rights of civilians affected by the devastating conflict in Syria. Canada is discussing modalities for cooperation and information sharing. Canada also commends the Mechanism for its ongoing work in the field of witness protection.

We are pleased to note that support to the Mechanism continues to grow. The increasing number of requests for assistance from national war crimes units since April 2018, to support ongoing investigations and prosecutions, demonstrates the need for this organization and the high-quality work it produces.

Impartial justice is an indispensable part of achieving a sustainable peace in Syria. Syrians are still subject to arbitrary arrests and detentions, which are overwhelmingly undertaken by the Syrian regime. Canada calls on all parties to the conflict to respect the rights of civilians and comply with International Humanitarian Law. In addition, many Syrians lack civil documentation – essential to perform day-to-day activities – and adequate basic services. Property repossession and demolition continue, which will make it impossible for many refugees and internally displaced persons to ever return to the homes they left during the conflict. On-going hostilities – as noted by the most recent report of the Commission of Inquiry – negatively affect the safe and sustainable return of millions of internally displaced persons and refugees.

Canada's actions reflect our conviction that a durable peace in Syria requires justice for victims of crimes committed during the conflict. Syrians need the support of the international community, and will continue to need it in the years to come. For these reasons, Canada urges everyone present today to support the important work that the Mechanism is doing.

Thank you.

Date Modified:

2019-04-26