



General Assembly

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Official Records

President: Mr. Bozkir (Turkey)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 34 (continued)

Prevention of armed conflict

(a) Prevention of armed conflict

Notes by the Secretary-General (A/75/311 and A/75/743)

The President: This year marks a decade of conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. The 10-year period has been marred by the most heinous attacks and acts, including torture, forced disappearances, sexual violence, attacks on civilians and the use of chemical weapons. We have heard first-hand accounts of horror and suffering from Syrian representatives of civil society here in the General Assembly, and on 30 March, at an informal plenary meeting of the Assembly, we were briefed by the Secretary-General on the current dire situation in Syria.

I myself recently visited Hatay province in Turkey, which borders the hardest-hit north-western region of Syria. Hatay hosts 450,000 Syrian refugees, and at the Boynuyöğün temporary accommodation centre, I met with Syrian children who have never known a true home of their own and women who are resilient in their determination to rebuild a good life, despite years of hardship.

From the Bükülmez border post I could see the tent city of Atme, where more than 170,000 internally displaced Syrians have sought shelter. In that moment, I hoped that those Syrians, who include 100,000

children and young people, along with 39,000 women, would benefit from the vital supplies that I had been surrounded by during my visit to the United Nations trans-shipment hub in Reyhanlı.

It is shameful that after 10 years, we are still advocating for humanitarian access. I am hopeful that the critical United Nations cross-border aid operation, which is a lifeline for millions of Syrians in the north-east, will continue uninterrupted. I hereby call on the relevant Member States to ensure that this mandate is extended beyond July. The Syrian people deserve more than this. They deserve peace. They deserve freedom to live and a life of their choosing. They deserve justice.

Today we will hear the reports (see A/75/311 and A/75/743) 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 (IIIM). The Mechanism, which was created in 2016 by resolution 71/248, is a testament to the Assembly's innovativeness and agility in response to the needs of the people we serve. The IIIM is mandated 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 national, regional or international courts or tribunals that have or in future may have jurisdiction over such crimes. I am pleased to note that requests have been coming in, and, now that the path towards justice has been paved, the first steps are being taken.

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That is not an easy journey. It is a triggering one that has the capacity to retraumatize survivors. To that end, I commend the Mechanism for adopting an approach centred on victims and survivors. Furthermore, as an International Gender Champion, I welcome the Mechanism's gender strategy and efforts to develop practical guidance for interviewing victims of sexual violence in the Syrian context and to integrate gender perspectives into its substantive work. I also commend the Mechanism for its close cooperation with a range of stakeholders, including the United Nations, other international organizations, States and civil society. We cannot underestimate the importance of civil society's engagement in this matter, as the Mechanism seeks to fully implement its mandate and facilitate justice.

It is essential to ensure that the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism is sufficiently funded, and I ask all Member States to continue supporting it. Let us not forget that accountability and impartial and inclusive justice are among the preconditions for further reconciliation and political processes in Syria. We cannot change the past, but we can take action today to ensure that we uphold the rights and dignity of the Syrian people in future.

In accordance with General Assembly decision 75/558 of March 2021, I now invite the Assembly to view a pre-recorded statement presenting the report of the Mechanism by Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head 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 pre-recorded video statement was shown in the General Assembly Hall (see A/75/900, annex).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

Mr. Skoog (European Union): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I thank you, Mr. President, for setting the stage for today's debate on 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 (IIIM), which once again underlines the continued principled commitment of the wider United Nations membership to ensuring justice for the most serious crimes committed in Syria. I would like to thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head of the Mechanism, and her team for the latest reports (see A/75/311 and A/75/743), and for their leadership, their diligent, systematic work and their ability to adapt to the new circumstances she described to us earlier. We are once again very pleased to see the progress that the Mechanism has made during the reporting period and above all, the IIIM's continued efforts to engage and coordinate with all stakeholders, especially civil society.

It is also appropriate to mention on this occasion the latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (A/HRC/46/54), which examined the widespread enforced disappearances practised by the Syrian regime and other parties to the Syrian conflict, as well as the associated torture and other crimes, such as rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

Ten years ago, Syrians took to the streets to demand democracy and respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EU is determined that as we heard today, the crimes perpetrated during the 10 years since the uprising, in blatant disregard for international humanitarian law and human rights, will not vanquish the Syrian people's aspirations for dignity, justice and peace. It is moreover the EU's conviction that accountability and justice for victims are essential for a stable, peaceful Syria, based on a credible, inclusive and viable political solution in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). It is therefore essential to end the atrocities, including the tragedy of the disappeared, for which the regime and its external supporters bear the main responsibility. It is vital that the United Nations dedicate the energy and resources required to pursue and ensure accountability for those crimes. As we just heard, that is a shared responsibility.

The EU calls strongly for progress on the issue of detainees in the hands of the regime and missing persons, in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). We will remain at the forefront of fighting impunity. All those responsible for war crimes or crimes against humanity must be held accountable. The EU therefore continues to support efforts to gather evidence related

to the atrocities. That includes continued support for the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, as well as the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, in order to ensure that the facts surrounding the crimes committed in the course of the conflict, including the disappearances described in the Commission's report, are documented, with a view to future legal action.

The EU welcomes the special attention given by the IIIM to sexual and gender-based crimes and crimes against children, and the Mechanism's work on concluding a gender strategy. Given the seriousness of the crimes, the EU continues to call on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. The prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity under national jurisdiction, where possible, can make an important contribution to securing accountability. Prosecutions and final judgments have been brought against perpetrators in several EU countries, and those efforts are being pursued in a number of jurisdictions. The Netherlands is engaged in an initiative to hold Syria to account for breaching the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The EU has adopted targeted sanctions against individuals and entities behind the repression of the Syrian people. The sanctions will not be lifted unless that repression, including the continuing disappearances, ceases. Finally, the EU aligns itself with the call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, which has been endorsed by the Security Council.

In conclusion, the EU promotes a global order based on the rule of law, in which there is no shelter for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes under international law. There cannot be sustainable peace without justice in Syria or elsewhere. The EU will continue to extend its full support to the IIIM, as well as the complementary mechanisms contributing to the fight against impunity, such as the Commission of Inquiry and the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic on a point of order.

Mr. Altarsha (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I requested the floor on a point of order when my European Union colleague began his statement, but

you allowed him to continue before giving me the floor, Mr. President.

I have only one correction to make of my colleague. It is one that we have made time and again, but since no one listens, we will reiterate it by saying that we are the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations. The President referred to us as such when he opened today's meeting and it has been mentioned before. Using the name of the Syrian Arab Republic will not add value to a statement. If my colleague wishes to raise specific concerns that his country or group of countries has, he is welcome to do so. But if he wants to do so, he must do it the right way, by using the correct names of all Member States. He should do that in order to deliver his message with professionalism while representing his country as a diplomat and respecting the principle of equality among all Member States. No one should be allowed to use unacceptable terms in this meeting, and I hope that everyone will respect that point.

The President: The remarks of the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic will be reflected in the record of today's meeting. I also appeal to members to conform to the practice of the United Nations whereby debates are conducted in a respectful manner.

Mr. Salovaara (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries — Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Finland.

This year marks a grim anniversary. A full decade has passed since the conflict in Syria began. During this decade of fighting, hundreds of thousands have lost their lives or disappeared. Thousands more have been subjected to torture, rape or other forms of cruel and degrading treatment. Millions have fled their homes. Towns and cities have been left in ruins, with homes, schools and even hospitals demolished. While the international community has repeatedly called on the parties to respect international law, events in Syria have been repeatedly marked by blatant disregard for international humanitarian law and human rights law. Countless atrocities have reportedly been committed by all the parties during the protracted conflict. Given its status, capabilities and external supporters, the Al-Assad regime and its allies bear the main responsibility for many of the flagrant violations of international law. However, reports by experts have demonstrated that there are no clean hands in Syria, and all the perpetrators must be held to account.

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 (IIIM) has a mandate to collect evidence of such crimes, irrespective of the perpetrator. Evidence is key to successful criminal proceedings. Without it, there can be no accountability. Collecting, preserving and categorizing evidence is a meticulous task, which is one of the reasons that the Mechanism's work is crucial, and we commend its efforts in that regard.

The Nordic countries are firm supporters of a rules-based international order and remain steadfast in their commitment to fighting impunity for the most serious international crimes. No sustainable and inclusive peace is possible without holding accountable those responsible for the conflict-related atrocities. The victims and survivors and their families deserve justice. States have the primary responsibility for investigating and prosecuting crimes committed on their territory. We regret that to date no credible judicial processes have been initiated in Syria. However, we commend the ongoing efforts to prosecute those crimes in a number of countries, based on universal jurisdiction. We also reiterate our call to the Security Council to exercise its powers under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

The Nordic countries would like to thank the IIIM for its most recent reports (see A/75/311 and A/75/743) and commend its leadership for the work it has carried out. It has operated in a challenging political reality since its creation. The coronavirus disease pandemic and the liquidity constraints of the United Nations have posed additional difficulties over the past year. Despite those circumstances, the Mechanism has advanced in all areas of its mandate, as is outlined in the reports. We reiterate our appreciation for the way in which the IIIM engages with all stakeholders, including civil society. That is illustrated by the approximately 60 cooperation frameworks it has established with States, international organizations and civil-society actors. Even outside the formal cooperation frameworks, we call on all stakeholders to cooperate fully with the Mechanism. The growing number of requests for assistance by national jurisdictions for information and evidence from the IIIM demonstrates the increasing interest of

national authorities in the Mechanism and a growing demand for the evidence it has collected so far.

We welcome the steps taken by the Mechanism to finalize its overarching gender strategy and its efforts to address crimes against children through a separate but complementary strategy. We further commend the Mechanism for its continuing victim-and-survivor-centred approach and for paying special attention to crimes that often go unreported and unrecognized.

Finally, the Mechanism's important work necessitates secure and predictable resources over the long term. The Nordic countries remain convinced that the United Nations regular budget is the best funding mechanism to ensure that. In conclusion, the Nordic countries remain fully committed to the Mechanism and its mandate.

Mr. Altarsha (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation would like to stress that its participation in today's meeting and general discussion about the so-called 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 (IIIM) should not in any way be interpreted as accepting the existence and mandate of the Mechanism or its reports (see A/75/311 and A/75/743). It should not be interpreted as a willingness to discuss the reports or as recognition of the so-called IIIM in any way, shape or form.

The Syrian Arab Republic dissociates itself completely from resolution 71/248, which was not adopted by consensus and which illegally established the so-called IIIM. We do not recognize that illegal body, as it was established by a purely exclusionary process that expressly violated Articles 10, 11, 12 and 22 of the Charter of the United Nations as well as the working methods and procedures of the General Assembly. I refer here to the Governments that have supported the establishment and funding of the Mechanism since 2016 and seek to involve everyone here today in continuing to support and fund the Mechanism from the regular budget of the United Nations. I call on the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and all delegations to review once again in detail the documents and letters regarding the IIIM addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly by the permanent delegation of the Syrian

Arab Republic. The most recent letter was issued as official document A/75/777 and provides legal and political proof of the grave legal gaps and violations that undermined the adoption process of resolution 71/248, which established the Mechanism. We offer the following evidence with regard to the legal and procedural outcomes.

First, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic never requested technical or legal assistance from the United Nations to establish the Mechanism. No United Nations body or representative ever consulted with the Syrian Government or sought its approval to establish the so-called IIIM. Furthermore, the General Assembly exceeded its powers and infringed on the mandate of the Security Council when it created a mechanism that it did not have the power to establish.

Secondly, pursuant to Articles 10, 11, 12 and 22 of the Charter, the so-called IIIM cannot be considered a subsidiary body established by the General Assembly. The Secretary-General should therefore not have taken any decision to appoint a head or deputy head of the so-called IIIM or allocate a secretariat to it.

Thirdly, from a legal or procedural point of view, the so-called IIIM cannot be granted any legal position or legal status.

Fourthly, the so-called IIIM should not have a mandate or power to conclude agreements with Member States or other entities. In that context, my Government stresses its absolute rejection and reservations regarding the twisted and dishonest attempts to provide the so-called IIIM with information and documents supplied by the Syrian Government to the United Nations and other relevant international entities linked to the situation in Syria, while stressing the need to respect the confidential nature of the information provided by my country and the need to restrict access to it. The United Nations cannot accept contributions or allocate funding from its budget to support the establishment and operation of the so-called IIIM. Consequently, any information or evidence collected, standardized, preserved or analysed by the Mechanism cannot be considered admissible in any future legal or judicial proceedings, given that the mandate granted to it is not bound by any time, place, restrictions or criteria in line with the Charter, or by the established working methods of our international Organization. We have requested time and again that the introducers, sponsors and supporters of the so-called IIIM reply to our legal

arguments and the evidence mentioned in our previous letters. We are still waiting for a response.

In addition, the reliance of the so-called IIIM on information provided by certain Governments hostile to Syria that continue to politicize human rights and other issues in order to serve their interventionist agendas and colonial ambitions, or gathered from so-called open sources and provided by a number of terrorist groups, particularly the White Helmets and the terrorist Al-Nusra Front, as well as illegal armed entities supported by the occupation forces in my country, destroys the credibility of the work of this illegal Mechanism.

I would like to provide the Assembly with an example considered to be a good practice that proves that the Security Council is the sole body with the explicit power to establish such mechanisms in response to a request from the Government of the State concerned and following consultations with that Government on the conditions and modalities of work of those bodies. Members will recall Security Council resolution 2379 (2017), which requested that the Secretary-General establish an investigative team, headed by a special adviser, to support local efforts to hold the terrorist organization of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) accountable by gathering and storing evidence of acts that might amount to war crimes in Iraq. Prior to the Security Council's adoption of that resolution, the Secretary-General held lengthy consultations with the Iraqi Government and exchanged correspondence for months before reaching an agreement on the criteria and code of conduct that would govern the activities of the investigative team. That all took place before the Security Council adopted the resolution by consensus. We therefore ask, why the double standards? Why the selectivity with regard to the so-called IIIM? Why were there no consultations or coordination with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, the State concerned? We never requested assistance from the United Nations in that regard. In addition, the Assembly exceeded its powers and infringed on the mandate of the Security Council when it established the Mechanism.

Let me remind my colleagues and the Secretariat of this long-established Organization that those who fund and support the so-called IIIM are the same parties that are violating my country's sovereignty. They support terrorist armed groups and prevent Syrian refugees and displaced persons from returning to their homes. They are also hindering the reconstruction process in

Syria and imposing a wide range of unilateral coercive measures against the Syrian people that amount to economic terrorism. They arrogantly occupy parts of my country.

In conclusion, the Assembly will recall that the Syrian Arab Republic, despite the terrorist war against it, is proud to have established deep-rooted legal, judicial and national institutions. It has the true will and capability needed to achieve justice, equality, accountability, reparation and reconciliation. If organs of the United Nations wish to provide it with technical support to build and strengthen the capacities of those national institutions, they know the right address in my country. They well know which door to knock on and the procedures that must be applied to provide their support.

We call on the Assembly today to thoroughly consider what we have stated about the political facts behind the establishment of the so-called IIIM and urge members to take the right and wise decision to reject the recognition of that illegal entity, refrain from cooperating with a body that violates the working methods of the United Nations and thwart the attempts of some countries to involve others and impose on them the burden of funding an illegal entity through the regular budget of the United Nations. I am obliged to point to the dangerous legal and political consequences of promoting the Mechanism, which could set a grave legal precedent that runs counter to international law and principles, contradicts United Nations frameworks and becomes a model that will have to be confronted in other countries.

Mr. Stefanile (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Head of Delegation of the European Union.

We thank you, Mr. President, for your introductory remarks. We also thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel for introducing the seventh report (see A/75/743) on the work 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 (IIIM).

As has already been pointed out in recent meetings of the General Assembly and other related events, this year marks a decade of the terrible crisis in Syria, which has severely disrupted the fabric of Syrian society, bringing about unimaginable levels of loss, suffering

and destruction. The only way out of such a prolonged crisis is to make urgent progress in implementing Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), charting a path towards a peaceful solution to the conflict and starting with the organization of free and fair elections. Within that context, a pivotal basis for lasting peace is ensuring full accountability for the most serious crimes committed during the conflict, in particular war crimes and crimes against humanity. That is not only a moral imperative, but also a deterrent to future violations and a fundamental element of any reconciliation process.

The pattern observed in Syria over the past 10 years is particularly shocking, with indiscriminate violence often targeting the most vulnerable, such as women, girls, children and minorities. Impunity must end. Justice for the victims of these crimes must be pursued as an essential condition for sustainable peace in Syria. It is in that spirit that Italy has strongly supported the IIIM, as well as the other United Nations bodies established for the purpose of accountability in Syria, as a key mechanism for the collection, consolidation, preservation and analysis of the evidence of violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law. A specific reference to the Mechanism and to the importance of its work is contained in the joint statement issued on 15 March by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Italy particularly appreciates the progress achieved by the Mechanism during the reporting period, despite the constraints related to the coronavirus disease pandemic, and welcomes the increasing cooperation between the Mechanism and national authorities in investigating and prosecuting the gravest crimes committed in Syria. National prosecutions should be complemented by a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, a call that Italy has consistently supported.

Finally, we believe it is important to ensure that the Mechanism can count on a regular United Nations financial endowment in order to effectively plan and execute its work. Italy will therefore continue to back, within the pertinent United Nations bodies, the consistent and adequate provision of funds in support of the Mechanism.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting and for your introductory remarks. I would also like to thank the Head 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 (IIIM), Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, for introducing the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh reports on the implementation of the mandate of the Mechanism, covering a period of two years.

Slovakia fully associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and delivered earlier by the Head of Delegation of the European Union.

Confronted with endless accounts of horrific crimes committed on Syrian territory and the lack of any tangible response, especially where accountability was concerned, the General Assembly decided to take action by adopting resolution 71/248. The Assembly emphasized the importance of ensuring “credible and comprehensive accountability” for serious international crimes as part of any political process to end the crisis in Syria. Today, the mandate and functioning of the Mechanism remain as relevant as ever for closing the impunity gap and ensuring accountability for crimes committed by any party in the Syrian conflict.

The Mechanism is a unique and pioneering structure in international efforts to ensure accountability. We all wish that it was not necessary but, regrettably, that is not the case. By collecting, analysing and preserving evidence, it assists and facilitates criminal proceedings carried out by national authorities, as well as by regional or international courts. By requiring the recipient jurisdiction to respect international human rights law and standards, including the right to a fair trial, the IIIM contributes to strengthening the rule of law and due process. The total of 93 requests for assistance so far received from 11 jurisdictions clearly demonstrate the value of the Mechanism, and the number of processed requests underlines its tangible contribution. As far as the use of the evidence gathered by the Mechanism is concerned, all potential jurisdictional grounds, including universal jurisdiction, have to be taken into account by national authorities.

In order to benefit from the full potential of the Mechanism, States have to assist it in carrying out its mandate. Besides that, the IIIM’s cooperation with entities of the United Nations system and other international bodies is vital. In that respect, Slovakia fully supports the recommendations contained in the seventh report (see A/75/743) whereby the United

Nations and other international organizations are requested, among other things, to provide full access for the Mechanism to materials that are held within the United Nations system concerning crimes in the Syrian Arab Republic and ensure United Nations agencies’ full cooperation and coordination with it.

Similarly, States have to make sure that national investigative and prosecutorial authorities can cooperate smoothly with the Mechanism, thereby helping advance its mandate and at the same time benefiting from its work. Considering the fact that an organization needs predictable, stable and sustainable financing, Slovakia has supported the inclusion of the IIIM in the United Nations regular budget in previous years and will continue to support its provision of the required funds.

Last but not least, I would like to reiterate our profound appreciation to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel and her team for all the work they have done so far to make the IIIM a fully functional accountability mechanism. Their task has been made even more demanding due to the current pandemic and its various consequences, including our Organization’s difficult financial situation.

In conclusion, Slovakia continues to be a firm supporter of the Mechanism. We believe firmly that bringing the perpetrators of international crimes to justice while maintaining a victim-centred approach is a basic requirement for the resolution of conflict and subsequent reconciliation efforts. Effective accountability mechanisms should also serve as a standing warning to any potential perpetrators of crimes under international law that their acts cannot and will not go unpunished.

Ms. Chan Valverde (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Ten years into the Syrian conflict, the violence continues; the disappearances and arbitrary detentions continue; the attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure continue; the foreign occupation continues, the material deprivation continues; the refugee crisis continues. One of the largest humanitarian crises in the world continues. And yet the deadlock in the Security Council also continues.

In this decade-long crisis, Syrian children have spent more time dodging bombs, landmines and cluster munitions than balls on the playground. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has further exacerbated an already unstable situation in

which the Syrian people continue to be victims of systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. However, since 2016 there has been a change. That year, seeking to promote accountability for widespread abuses, the General Assembly stepped up and created 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. The Mechanism is a game-changer. It sends an unequivocal message to perpetrators on all sides that the international community will not stand idly by in the face of atrocities in Syria or anywhere else in the world.

Costa Rica welcomes the seventh report of the Mechanism (see A/75/743) and notes that despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the liquidity constraints of the United Nations, the Mechanism has worked tirelessly to advance all aspects of its mandate by improving its currently remote methods of work, revising its investigative and assessment measures and allocating its limited resources strategically.

Costa Rica would like to underscore the following additional points. First, we want to highlight the call made in the Mechanism's report for the United Nations and other international organizations and civil society to engage fully with the Mechanism in improving and implementing its strategies on gender, crimes against children and victim-and-survivor-centred approaches. Gender analysis is essential in ensuring meaningful justice for the women, men, girls and boys affected by gross violations of international law in Syria. The centrality of victims and their special status in the design and implementation of justice processes are crucial to ensuring accountability. In that regard, civil society maintains its important role in fostering an overall understanding of the Mechanism's mandate and work, including the implications of that work for gender parity and justice. Costa Rica welcomes the fact that the Mechanism's pays great attention to sexual and gender-based crimes in the Syrian conflict, helping to ensure that the voices of Syrian women are heard and heeded in its pursuit of justice and accountability.

Secondly, Costa Rica deplores the fact that the Mechanism is still waiting for access to the relevant information gathered by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. In accordance with

resolution 75/193, we once again urgently call on the Secretary-General to ensure that this information is processed expeditiously so that it can be shared with the Mechanism without delay before the close of the current session of the General Assembly. Furthermore, Costa Rica urges the relevant United Nations agencies, the States concerned and civil-society organizations to coordinate and cooperate fully with the Mechanism, including by sharing information to which they have access related to crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Thirdly, Costa Rica urges Member States to continue funding the Mechanism through the United Nations regular budget and resolutely reject any attempt to weaken accountability mechanisms through the Organization's budget negotiations.

Fourthly, Costa Rica calls on the permanent members of the Security Council to cease political posturing and reject any threat to use the veto with regard to the situation in Syria. Costa Rica also urges the Council as a whole to refer the case to the International Criminal Court without further delay.

Lastly, Costa Rica urges all State arms exporters to terminate their transfers of weapons and ammunition to any of the parties in Syria, offering as they do little hope for improving the political and operational dynamics of the conflict but, on the contrary, severely hampering any possibility of reaching a negotiated peace.

Accountability for international crimes and gross human rights violations is a central pillar of today's human rights regime and must be a priority for all States. The question now is not whether we must ensure accountability in the context of Syria or other countries but how best to achieve that goal.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): Ten years ago, the Al-Assad regime met the Syrian people's peaceful demands for dignity, respect and fundamental freedoms with violence and repression. For more than a decade, the Syrian people have endured the unimaginable — from torture to attacks on hospitals and health care and to cutting off humanitarian aid. Our inability to even imagine what that must be like is exactly why we need 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 (IIIM). Its work builds on the work of the United Nations

Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic in documenting the Al-Assad regime's responsibility for mass atrocities. This way, we need not attempt to imagine. The evidence is there for everyone to see.

We are therefore proud to support the IIIM's work and welcome its most recent reports. In particular, I would like to applaud Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head of the Mechanism, for her significant efforts. Our commitment to accountability for the perpetrators of atrocities in Syria and justice for their victims is unwavering. Without accountability, the Syrian people will never experience a stable, just and enduring peace. The United States strongly supports funding for the IIIM from the United Nations regular budget through assessed contributions. We urge all Member States to continue to support this essential and appropriate arrangement so that the Mechanism's important work will be on a firm financial footing.

The IIIM's structural investigations and case-building work provide the foundation for the criminal accountability efforts that are necessary to combat impunity. We strongly support making that information available in order to assist in new prosecutions where jurisdictions exist. The recent conviction in Germany of Eyad Al-Gharib, a former official of the Syrian regime, for aiding and abetting crimes against humanity demonstrates the valuable role that independent documentation can play in facilitating justice processes outside Syria.

We would also like to applaud the IIIM's commitment to partnering with Syrian human rights groups and including the perspectives of Syrian women and girls in its work. Its laudable efforts to build trusted relationships with civil society and groups that represent victims is a key component of its success. In particular, I would like to commend the work of the groups of survivors and family members in the Truth and Justice Charter in support of a Syria of the future where freedom, dignity and security prevail. The United States will continue to support programmes that provide legal and psychosocial services for Syrian survivors of torture and former political prisoners, as well as their families. We will support justice and accountability by adding survivors' voices and perspectives to discussions on justice and the future of Syria.

Unfortunately, even in the face of all of the overwhelming evidence documented by the IIIM,

Russia continues to defend the Al-Assad regime, spread disinformation and attack the integrity of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The OPCW's most recent findings make it clear that yet another chemical-weapon attack is attributable to the Al-Assad regime. We welcome today's decision by the OPCW Conference of the States Parties to suspend Syria's rights and privileges under the Chemical Weapons Convention until it completes the steps set out in the OPCW's Executive Council decision of 9 July 2020. There must be consequences for the use of chemical weapons.

In the meantime, the work of the IIIM is essential to furthering justice and ensuring a sustainable political solution to the Syrian conflict according to the parameters outlined in Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). It remains deeply concerning that certain members of the Security Council have prevented the Council from acting to ensure accountability for the Syrian people.

Lastly, the Syrian people should be heard, and every individual Syrian should have an opportunity to seek justice. Without accountability, there will be no justice, and without justice, there will be no peace.

Mr. Sinirlioglu (Turkey): I would like to start by thanking you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting and for your statement. I also want to thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel for her comprehensive briefing.

Last month, we marked the tenth anniversary of the start of the Syrian war. For an entire decade, the Syrian people have been paying a very heavy price in their unrelenting quest for freedom and dignity. They have gone through unimaginable suffering, misery and loss because of the regime's brutal attacks. Hundreds of thousands of them have been killed. Many others have been gassed, bombed, besieged, abducted, forcefully disappeared, tortured, sexually abused, recruited as child soldiers or denied food and medicine. Tens of thousands have perished in prisons. Millions have been internally displaced or have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

Turkey has hosted 4 million Syrians. When we add to that the internally displaced persons on the other side of the border, we are addressing the needs of almost 9 million Syrians. Throughout the conflict, the use of chemical weapons has been part of the regime's ruthless war on its own people. The Al-Assad regime's audacity in repeatedly resorting to chemical weapons clearly

demonstrates the grave consequences of impunity. Yet the regime's well-documented track record of chemical attacks continues to grow.

The latest in a string of such reports has recently been published by the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The report establishes that on 4 February 2018, chlorine was used by the regime's air force in an attack on civilians in Saraqib. With this report, it has now been proved that the Al-Assad regime is responsible for at least eight chemical-weapon attacks on its own population. Such war crimes and crimes against humanity cannot go unpunished. It is high time to mobilize the international community to hold the regime to account. In that regard, we hail the adoption of a decision today by an overwhelming majority at the OPCW Conference of the States Parties as a positive first step towards ending impunity in Syria.

It is our collective legal and moral obligation to protect Syrian civilians against the regime's atrocities and hold the perpetrators accountable. The creation 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 (IIIM) has demonstrated the membership's strong commitment to ensuring accountability for crimes committed in Syria. Accountability is needed not only to administer justice, but also to ensure reconciliation between Syrians. There will be no lasting peace without accountability and transitional justice. That is the only way to prevent a recurrence of such crimes in future. A genuine political transition and a new Syria can be built only on a sound basis of closure and the feeling that justice has been served.

As a sponsor of resolution 71/248, which established the IIIM, Turkey strongly supports the Mechanism. We commend Ms. Marchi-Uhel for her leadership and swift operationalization. We welcome the impressive progress in the IIIM's operations across all aspects of its mandate in the reporting period despite the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease pandemic and the liquidity crisis. We applaud the deepening cooperation among the IIIM, the OPCW and civil society, while hoping that the archives of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism will soon be added to that. We look forward to stronger collaboration between the Mechanism and the legitimate Syrian opposition,

which has access on the ground and to the survivors of serious crimes. Together with the OPCW, the IIIM plays a vital role in ensuring that impunity will not take root in post-conflict Syria and that crimes will not go unpunished. In view of the regime's egregious crimes documented throughout the past decade, efforts towards accountability must prioritize investigations of the regime's atrocities and violations.

Turkey will continue to support international efforts to document and investigate the most serious crimes. The landmark decision of the Koblenz court sentencing a former intelligence agent of the Syrian regime on charges of aiding and abetting crimes against humanity is an important step in the right direction. However, that is just the tip of the iceberg. The road leading to justice for atrocities in Syria will be long and arduous. Civil-society actors have been playing an important role in revealing gross human rights violations and supporting the people's legitimate aspirations. They are the main agents documenting the most serious crimes committed by the regime and by terrorist organizations. We commend their bravery and appreciate their hard work.

Today, representatives of a large majority of Member States will take the floor and call for accountability in Syria. Almost all of us will condemn the Syrian regime as the perpetrator of grave crimes. But we have also heard lies, fabrications and delusional comments by the representative of the Syrian regime in yet another hopeless defence of its war crimes and crimes against humanity. The faces behind those comments change, but the substance does not. It is shameless, outrageous and criminal.

In conclusion, I would like to underline that Turkey will continue to advocate for accountability in Syria and push for achieving a political settlement in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of Switzerland I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate and your statement. I would also like to thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, the Head 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, for her presentation of the Mechanism's reports (see A/75/311 and A/75/743). We commend the Mechanism for its unwavering commitment and the

progress it has made despite the challenges related to the pandemic.

“A peace process that does not ensure the rights of victims will never truly be a peace process”. Those were the recent words of a representative of Syrian civil society calling for justice to be placed at the centre of a sustainable peace, and Switzerland endorses them. Justice must be ensured for all individuals whose rights have been violated. The Mechanism is a vital tool for achieving that goal, which is why Switzerland has supported it from its establishment and continues to do so. Let me emphasize three main points.

First, the Mechanism contributes to ensuring accountability, which is at the very heart of the process. It is only through such crucial work that lasting peace can be established in Syria. While the main goal is to support criminal justice, the Mechanism’s mandate enables it to go beyond that and, for example, to help in the search for missing persons, which lends itself to a victim-centred approach to justice specifically aimed at reducing suffering. It is part of a broader system of tools for strengthening the process of confronting the past.

Secondly, the participation of civil society in efforts to bring about justice is imperative for the promotion of peace. In Syria, such organizations play a critical role in documenting crimes, especially since neither the Mechanism nor the Independent International Commission of Inquiry of the Human Rights Council has access to the country. That is why, through the Lausanne process, Switzerland and the Netherlands are facilitating cooperation and information-sharing between the Mechanism and Syrian non-governmental organizations.

Thirdly, we call on Member States to work closely with the Mechanism. Prosecutions under way in several States demonstrate the relevance of the Mechanism’s work and the principle of universal jurisdiction, as illustrated by the recent landmark judgment in Koblenz. The Mechanism’s increased cooperation with national jurisdictions reflects its critical role. In Switzerland, the legislative framework for international mutual criminal assistance was recently amended to enable cooperation with the Mechanism and other non-State criminal institutions. The General Assembly followed a moral imperative in 2016 when it adopted resolution 71/248, establishing the Mechanism for Syria. It is essential to ensure sustainable funding for the Mechanism in order

for it to continue its work, and Switzerland therefore welcomes its inclusion in the regular budget.

Switzerland will continue to support the Mechanism and urges all Member States to do the same. Society and victims in Syria are counting on our commitment to bringing justice and peace to Syria.

Mr. Auväärt (Estonia): Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

Let me express our gratitude to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, the Head 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 (IIIM), for her presentation today.

The conflict in Syria has now raged for more than 10 years and has become one of the greatest humanitarian crises since the Second World War. In the spring of 2011, peaceful protesters took to the streets across Syria demanding basic human rights and dignity. They were met with a violent crackdown by the Syrian regime. After more than half a million deaths and millions displaced, the situation remains desperate.

While the war continues, the pandemic has created additional challenges for the Syrian people, including those in overcrowded camps for refugees and internally displaced persons, which has further weakened the crippled health-care system. The Security Council’s renewal of the cross-border aid mechanism this summer will be crucial. The only solution to the situation in Syria is a political one in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). There can be no sustainable peace without justice. We must do everything we can to ensure accountability for the war crimes and crimes against humanity that have been perpetrated in Syria.

We welcome the steps taken to uphold accountability at the level of national jurisdictions. For the first time, an official of the Syrian regime was convicted of crimes against humanity, in Germany in February. The Netherlands and Canada have also invoked Syria’s responsibility for human rights violations under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. At the same time, we regret that the Security Council has collectively failed to do anything impactful towards

ending the conflict and establishing accountability. As a member of the Council, we reiterate our call to it as a whole to refer the Syria situation to the International Criminal Court.

Investigative mechanisms such as the IIIM, established by the General Assembly, and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry of the Human Rights Council, play a central role in collecting evidence of crimes committed. Estonia supports the work and mandate of the IIIM and welcomes the Mechanism's latest reports (see A/75/311 and A/75/743). We are impressed with the level of adjustments that the IIIM has made in its working methods and activities in the light of the current restrictions resulting from the coronavirus disease pandemic. The growing number of requests to the IIIM for assistance attests to its critical relevance to fight impunity in domestic jurisdictions outside Syria.

We specifically thank the Mechanism for making an effort to pay attention to sexual and gender-based crimes and crimes against children, in line with its inclusive approach to justice. We encourage the IIIM to continue its work on its overarching gender strategy and victim-and-survivor-centred approach. Considering the gravity and scale of the issue of missing persons, Estonia appreciates that the Mechanism is looking into increasing the transfer of information to actors mandated to search for the missing. We applaud the increased engagement by the IIIM with Syrian civil-society actors aimed at better understanding the needs of local communities.

Finally, Estonia welcomes the IIIM's efforts to use technological solutions new to the area of criminal investigations for both the preservation and analysis of evidence, including for faster and more robust and accurate analytical processes. In order to provide a stable base for the Mechanism's important work, Estonia continues to support its financing from the United Nations regular budget and calls on all States in this Hall to do so.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that Estonia remains committed to the rules-based international order. We call on all States and the international community to support all accountability efforts for Syria, including the work of the IIIM. The victims of atrocities committed in Syria deserve no less than justice and peace.

Mr. Sparber (Liechtenstein): Liechtenstein underlines the need for continued engagement to ensure accountability for the crimes committed in the Syrian conflict, and we welcome the important role of the General Assembly in that respect. We salute Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, the Head 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 (IIIM), for her strong leadership since the creation of the Mechanism. The IIIM embodies the high level of professional competence and technical expertise and the depth of commitment commensurate to its task.

In December 2016, Liechtenstein had the honour to introduce the draft resolution that later became resolution 71/248, creating the IIIM — an innovation in our common effort to ensure accountability for the most serious crimes under international law. Its creation was driven equally by the horror of the atrocities committed on a daily basis in Syria, our collective shame and frustration over the Security Council's inaction and our firm belief that accountability was not only necessary but possible. At the time, it was a pioneering effort, a journey into uncharted territory. Today, as the Syrian conflict has stretched across a decade, we are reminded of the IIIM's vital importance in ensuring both justice and a lasting peace. The IIIM has quickly established itself as a successful model for accountability work. It has achieved concrete results and enjoys solid and growing political support, most prominently expressed through the Assembly's decision to secure regular United Nations budget funding.

The most obvious illustration of the concrete work and strong response is the extensive sharing of information that has enabled the IIIM to provide vital evidence to courts exercising universal jurisdiction. At the end of its last reporting cycle, the Mechanism had concluded 59 cooperation frameworks with a diverse range of actors and entities, including State entities, international organizations and civil-society actors, and with ongoing discussions on additional cooperation agreements.

Further evidence of the IIIM's political acceptance has come in the form of the replication of its model, first created by the Assembly. A nearly identical mechanism was established by the Human Rights Council for the situation in Myanmar. In terms of the IIIM's budget, we

were encouraged that on 27 December 2019, the General Assembly voted for the first time to include the IIIM in the regular budget of the United Nations through its adoption of resolution 74/262, ensuring that its funding will be sustainable. Such a positive response by States from all regions speaks to the success of the IIIM and the important work it is accomplishing.

During the reporting period, the IIIM saw a steep increase in the number of requests submitted by national jurisdictions, a testament to the strength of the Mechanism's partnership with national courts and prosecutors. By 31 January, the Mechanism had received 93 requests for assistance from 11 competent jurisdictions. A total of 36 requests for assistance have been processed and closed, while work is ongoing for another 36. To date, the Mechanism has assisted 36 distinct investigations conducted at the domestic level by providing support evidence, relevant information and analytical products, establishing contacts between judicial authorities and witnesses and serving as a bridge between civil-society organizations and national judicial authorities.

Moreover, we are encouraged to see the Mechanism deepening its cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and receiving additional materials from the OPCW, while noting that it is still waiting for access to materials from the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, which we hope it will soon receive. At the time of reporting, owing to the number and breadth of the requests recently received, the Mechanism had not begun work on 21 requests for assistance. Evidentiary contributions from civil society have improved the Mechanism's capacity to respond to the requests and will continue to be critical in supporting national jurisdictions and leading to the opening of more criminal trials.

Finally, the Mechanism has been proactively approaching authorities investigating crimes to deepen its understanding of domestic jurisdictions' needs with a view to informing its strategies and priorities, while additional analytical products to facilitate ongoing and future prosecutions are being developed simultaneously. In short, the IIIM has galvanized the efforts of the international community to fight impunity for the atrocities committed in Syria. It has given hope to the thousands upon thousands of victims that the world is, after all, not indifferent to their suffering. It has shown that innovative approaches in the area of

accountability are possible and necessary and that they can be effective.

Despite its successes, the IIIM can be only a partial answer to the enormous accountability challenge that the Syrian conflict poses. While it has de facto prosecutorial competence, it is, of course, not a court. An important void therefore remains to be filled. We would like to thank all the States that have stepped up and undertaken criminal proceedings in their national courts on the basis of the principle of universal jurisdiction. We very much hope that those proceedings, including the recent successful conclusion of a case in Koblenz, are only the first of such State responses needed to definitively close the impunity gap created by the Syrian judiciary's unwillingness to do its work, and by the fact that two permanent members of the Security Council have blocked the path to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC), in defiance of the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the United Nations membership and of the fact that the ICC was created precisely for the type of situation that has evolved in Syria. More is needed to ensure that justice is served for the victims of the Syrian conflict. The simultaneous use of the accountability approaches that have been mentioned, as well as the development of new approaches that could serve as alternatives to national universal jurisdiction cases, is necessary to help fill the accountability gap in one of the most complex conflicts of our time.

The creation of the IIIM is an important expression of the crucial importance of the Assembly when meaningful action in the Security Council is not forthcoming. It is our strong hope that this type of action will be replicated with respect to other challenging imperatives on which the Council is deadlocked. We must also ensure that the accountability discussion does not take place in a bubble and isolated from the rest of our conversation on Syria. There is a growing recognition that the inclusion of the justice dimension in the discussion of the political process tasked with charting the way to sustainable peace for Syria is of the essence. One of the best moments for the victims of the Syrian conflict in the past few years was the day that the IIIM was created. As countless members of the Assembly have said, there can be no sustainable peace in Syria without justice.

Mr. Kridelka (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for her very informative briefing and applaud her work, as well as that of her team, as Head 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 (IIIM).

I would like to make three points. The first is about justice as a key element in the process designed to lead to peace. The second relates to cooperation and support, which are now needed more than ever from all of the IIIM stakeholders. The third is the importance of inclusive justice.

First, I would like to again recall the relevance of the IIIM's mandate. Since the Syrian conflict began 10 years ago, the parties have violated international humanitarian law and international human rights law on multiple occasions. The victims number in the hundreds of thousands. Their loved ones and the survivors continue to ask that perpetrators on all sides be held responsible for their acts, which in many cases may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity or even genocide.

There is one constant in the tragedy unfolding before our eyes in Syria, as in other bloody conflicts around the world, which is that there can be no lasting peace without justice for the victims. That is why the Mechanism plays a crucial role. For example, it recently helped to secure a conviction in a national court applying the principle of universal jurisdiction. Because of the severity of the crimes committed, Belgium continues to request that the Security Council refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, as we did during our term on the Council in 2019 and 2020.

Secondly, the effective implementation of the IIIM's mandate is based on good cooperation among all Member States, civil society, the United Nations system and other international organizations. In that regard, Belgium first and foremost encourages States that have not yet done so to conclude a cooperation framework with the Mechanism, as we did in Brussels in 2019 by updating our legislation in that area. My country was one of the largest initial voluntary contributors to the IIIM, furnishing approximately \$1.6 million. Belgium will continue to support the adequate funding of the IIIM from the regular budget of the United Nations. Lastly, we welcome the fact that the Mechanism has

numerous contacts with Syrian civil society. We also want to highlight the good cooperation between it and the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We hope that the Mechanism will soon be granted access to evidence from the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism.

In conclusion, my third and last point is that I would like to applaud the IIIM's work, which is based on a holistic and inclusive understanding of justice, particularly with regard to the various categories of victims and survivors. Belgium welcomes the development of specific strategies for sexual and gender-based crimes, as well as crimes committed against children. That approach helps acknowledge all victims and will therefore be useful in the process towards lasting peace in Syria.

Mrs. Chatardová (Czech Republic): The Czech Republic welcomes the annual debate in the General Assembly on the reports 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 (IIIM). We thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel for her presentation of the reports (see A/75/311 and A/75/743).

We support the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and would like to add the following in our national capacity.

First, we congratulate the Head of the Mechanism and her team on the progress they have made in implementing the IIIM's mandate. We are pleased to see that the Mechanism is maintaining a clear focus on the collection and consolidation of evidence of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses. It remains crucial to ensure that criminal law standards in the IIIM's analytical and case-building work are upheld. We welcome the adoption of targeted strategies with a focus on sexual and gender-based crimes and crimes against children.

Secondly, the Czech Republic continues to be an active supporter of the Mechanism. We were a sponsor of resolution 71/248, which set up the Mechanism in December 2016, and we have voluntarily contributed to the Mechanism's budget since the beginning in order to ensure the continuity and stability of its work. We

will contribute again this year. At the same time we strongly support its funding from the regular United Nations budget. Predictable, sustainable and therefore impartial funding through the United Nations regular budget is essential to the Mechanism's future, along with cooperation from States and the relevant United Nations organs and agencies, including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic.

Thirdly, as the Mechanism continues to develop its structural investigations, violations of international law in Syria remain systematic. The state of impunity for crimes committed in Syria, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, especially by the use of chemical weapons, is unacceptable. Those responsible for such violations must be held accountable. We therefore reiterate our call to the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. In the meantime, we welcome the prosecution under various national jurisdictions of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole, and are pleased with the increasing number of requests for assistance. We firmly believe that the work of the Mechanism is critical to ensuring accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims and survivors.

Mr. Nam Hyok Kim (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea hopes that the current meeting being held under the agenda item "Prevention of armed conflict" can be an important opportunity to contribute to safeguarding the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, as well as to supporting and promoting the process of finding a political solution to the Syrian issue. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to clarify its position with regard to 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.

First, the establishment and activity of the Mechanism constitute a clear violation of the purposes and principles of the Charter, as well as the principles of sovereign equality, respect for self-determination and non-interference in internal affairs, which are basic pillars of international relations. We note that the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 71/248, establishing the Mechanism, was non-transparent and

not based on consensus. It is well known that legal technical assistance by the United Nations to any Member State should be provided only in response to a request by the State concerned. However, the resolution in question was adopted without prior consultation with or agreement from the Syrian Arab Republic. Furthermore, based on the principles and relevant articles of the Charter, the Assembly does not have the authority or mandate to establish any investigative or judicial organ, as that power is vested only in the Security Council.

Consequently, the adoption of resolution 71/248 set a precedent approving an abnormal and illegal practice within the framework of the United Nations. What we cannot ignore is that a mechanism advocating independence and impartiality is engaged in interfering in Syria's internal affairs while basing its activity on fabricated information and false testimonies offered by some countries and individuals against the Syrian Arab Republic. The establishment of the Mechanism is a typical example of the politicization and double standards at work in human rights issues. Nothing can justify allowing this illegal Mechanism to carry out its activity under the United Nations umbrella while sponsoring and funding its activities.

Secondly, the United Nations should support and promote the political process in Syria and the Syrian issue should be addressed in the interests of the Syrian people. The stabilization of the situation and the peace process in the Syrian Arab Republic should be spearheaded by the Syrian people, without interference from outside forces. The United Nations should not be subjected to political and financial pressure by certain countries. It should preserve its impartiality, objectivity and credibility as a facilitator in the process of finding a political solution to the Syrian issue.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to express its constant support of and solidarity with the Government and the people of the Syrian Arab Republic in their struggle to defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity and genuine human rights. We once again stress that the Syrian issue should be addressed in a peaceful way by political means without foreign interference, in conformity with the demands and in the interests of the Syrian people.

Ms. Webster (Australia): Australia welcomes the submission of the report (see A/75/743) 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 decade of conflict has left millions of people displaced. Hundreds of thousands have been killed. An untold number have experienced horrific abuses at the hands of warring parties. Torture, rape, kidnapping, arbitrary detention—those and many other unspeakable crimes have become an all-too-common occurrence for the millions of people unable to escape the ravages of war.

As we sit here today discussing these matters from a place of relative safety, let us be under no illusion regarding the weight of the international community's responsibility. There are those among us who seek to discredit the exceptional work of initiatives like the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria. We must not let that happen. We must staunchly defend the principles of accountability and justice. Impunity must not be allowed to win the day. At the same time, we must ensure that the pursuit of justice does not come at the expense of the victim. Australia applauds the Mechanism's adoption of a victim-and-survivor-centric approach to its work. We strongly support the Mechanism's efforts to infuse its investigations with gendered perspectives and its increased focus on crimes committed against children. All too often, the most vulnerable are also the least visible. Yet thanks to the work of the Mechanism, that need not be the case.

Australia has been an ardent supporter of the Mechanism since its inception in 2016. We believe in the virtue of its mission and will continue to support and defend it as it undertakes its essential work. We implore all others who wish to live in a world governed by the principles of accountability and justice to do the same.

Ms. Katholnig (Austria): My delegation fully aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer. I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

Austria welcomes today's debate on 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 (IIIM). We warmly thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel and her team for their most recent report (A/75/743).

We commend the progress that the Mechanism has made in the reporting period, especially considering the restrictions it has been facing due to the coronavirus disease pandemic. Austria fully supports the Mechanism and its important work in collecting, consolidating, preserving and analysing evidence of the violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Syria. We believe that as an organ created by the General Assembly, its inclusion in the regular budget was overdue and we stress the necessity of its continued funding from it. We believe that cooperation with the Mechanism on the part of the United Nations, other international organizations, individual States and civil society is key to the fulfilment of its mandate. In that regard, Austria passed new legislation last year that provides for cooperation with and legal assistance to the IIIM through our judicial authorities, and we encourage other States to do the same.

For international and national justice to succeed, we need evidence. The IIIM and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic are doing very important work in that regard. Although the Mechanism is not a court or tribunal, its establishment by the General Assembly was an important step towards ensuring justice for serious crimes committed in Syria. However, the international community must do more to ensure accountability in Syria, and we have to strengthen our efforts in that regard. We reiterate our call on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC), which was created precisely for this type of problem.

Since the ICC's limited capacities would enable it to prosecute only a small number of high-level perpetrators, we believe that in addition, a special tribunal should be established in the region to ensure accountability for the most serious crimes. That should go hand in hand with capacity-building for national justice to ensure due process at the national and local levels. Meanwhile, the prosecution of war crimes under national jurisdictions where possible, as well as the exploration of other avenues for securing some form of accountability, is key. In that regard, we commend the Netherlands and Canada for their efforts to hold the Syrian Government accountable under the United

Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Ten years into one of the bloodiest and most well-documented conflicts in history, Syria continues to experience extreme levels of violence and frequent violations and abuses of human rights. Austria wishes to remind the Syrian Government and its allies of their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We call for an effective nationwide ceasefire in Syria and an inclusive political process, built on justice for all victims and on national reconciliation. While we hope that the atrocities in Syria will end, we must not forget about them and they must not go unanswered. Those responsible for breaches of international law, many of which may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, must be held accountable. Credible and comprehensive accountability is a prerequisite for sustainable peace in Syria.

Mr. Xing Jisheng (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): A full decade has passed since the Syrian crisis began, bringing deep suffering to the country and its people. The international community should draw profound lessons from the crisis and advance a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. China supports the efforts of the United Nations to assist through its good offices in the political arena, pursuant to Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). We also support the Astana process and the constructive role of the relevant countries in the region.

China has consistently pressed for ensuring the Syrian parties' compliance with international humanitarian law and opposed any action that violates international humanitarian law and human rights. We believe that when dealing with the issue of impunity, it is essential to respect judicial sovereignty and enable the countries concerned to play a leading role. Efforts in that regard should also serve the overarching goal of a political settlement. The international community should show genuine respect for Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. Actions taken within the framework of the United Nations should help maintain unity among Member States and build consensus and resolve differences among the Syrian parties. Focusing on sanctions and pressure only complicates matters.

China's position on the establishment 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 remains unchanged. Its creation was controversial, as the country concerned was not fully consulted and the Mechanism did not have the support of the country's Government. Member States have diverging views on the work and reports of the Mechanism, and China does not support including the work of the Mechanism in the regular budget of the United Nations.

The settlement of the Syrian issue must be done in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and in line with the basic norms governing international relations. The future of Syria must be decided by the Syrian people on their own. On that basis, China stands ready to work together with the international community and contribute to a comprehensive, proper and fair settlement of the Syrian issue.

Mrs. Jiménez Alegría (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for introducing the seventh report (see A/75/743) 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.

Mexico has supported the Mechanism since its establishment four years ago. We therefore welcome the progress reported today, especially given the logistical challenges caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic. Last month marked 10 years since the start of the conflict in Syria. We have condemned the abuses, human rights violations and atrocities committed during the conflict at every possible opportunity. A decade of suffering and human cost highlights the urgent need to find ways to ensure accountability so that those crimes do not go unpunished and the victims receive justice. That is a sine qua non for lasting peace and for preventing and deterring such crimes in future.

The Mechanism was established by the General Assembly in response to the Security Council's failure to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court under article 13(b) of the Rome Statute. Mexico deplores the fact that the use of the veto has blocked that pathway, considering that this provision was made precisely for this type of situation. We reiterate that the

veto is not a privilege but a serious responsibility borne by the permanent members of the Security Council. For that reason, the initiative promoted by Mexico, together with France, is based on the premise that the veto should not be used when efforts are being made to prevent or put a stop to atrocity crimes. We would like to urge States that are not yet part of the initiative, which already has 105 signatories, to join the call to end inaction and impunity.

Despite the fact that it is dealing with so many adversities, it should be noted that the Mechanism is receiving an increasing number of requests for assistance from various jurisdictions. That attests to the strong commitment to the Syrian people and to strengthening the rule of law. The judgment against a former Syrian official handed down by a court in Koblenz and the cases under way in the Netherlands and France, to mention only a few, are proof of the commitment to combating impunity. The criminal proceedings in national jurisdictions confirm the utility of the Mechanism, whose investigations and repository of evidence have proven to be central in building cases. Similarly, a holistic approach, with victims and survivors at the centre of the work, is essential if the perpetrators of crimes against women, children and vulnerable groups are also to be held accountable. It is important that the international community continue to support the work of the Mechanism in fulfilling its mandate, here at the United Nations as well as through cooperation with local authorities and civil society organizations. We must continue working to close the justice gaps that have opened for victims.

In conclusion, Mexico reiterates that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. Only a political track can lead to solutions that can put an end to the suffering of millions of people. Combating impunity and ensuring accountability are just some of the core principles that will make the political process a successful one.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening and setting the right tone for today's meeting. I would also like to thank Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel for her briefing, as well as her dedication and commitment to making 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 (IIIM) successful in achieving its goals. Ukraine

is proud to have been one of the Mechanism's active supporters since its establishment was first conceived and has followed its progress keenly.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

The people of Syria have suffered enough. The longer the war waged by the Syrian regime against its own people continues with the direct support of Mr. Al-Assad's Russian ally, the more tragic the implications. Ensuring accountability for crimes committed in Syria since the beginning of the bloody 10-year conflict is not only a core demand based on the concept of the universal rule of law, but a moral obligation of the international community with regard to ensuring justice for victims. There is no room for impunity when such heinous crimes take place.

Establishing accountability for the perpetrators of grave violations and abuses and bringing justice to their victims are important steps for reconciliation and sustainable peace, which should be based on a comprehensive political solution in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). I would like to point out that just yesterday, at an informal meeting in this Hall, we discussed reform of the Security Council, with the right of the veto mentioned by some delegations. On too many occasions we have witnessed how allies of the Syrian regime — Russia foremost among them — have abused their veto power to prevent such justice. It is not only the people of Syria who have experienced this. My own country, Ukraine, is a victim of Russia's veto obsession too.

As one of the sponsors of the Mechanism in 2016, my delegation remains firmly convinced that the IIIM is absolutely necessary and highly relevant. At a time of deadlock in the Security Council, the wider international community must think creatively about a way forward in ensuring accountability for those who have committed and are committing massive, systematic and widespread crimes on Syrian soil. With that in mind, Ukraine echoes the strong call to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We are pleased to note that the Mechanism has made meaningful headway in implementing its mandate over the past year despite the coronavirus disease pandemic. Ukraine also endorses the recommendations in the latest report (see A/75/743) aimed at building on the

Mechanism's cooperation with the United Nations, Member States and civil society.

We also should not fail to mention the activities of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, which recently presented its own report (A/HRC/46/54) on facts relating to the murders, torture and inhumane treatment of people in Syria, including women and children, and thoroughly examined the widespread enforced disappearances effected by the Syrian regime and its allies.

In conclusion, Ukraine reiterates its full support for the IIIM, the Commission of Inquiry and the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in their crucial task of collecting evidence of crimes committed in Syria since 2011.

Mr. Mikeladze (Georgia): Georgia welcomes today's debate and fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

We would also like to express our appreciation to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, the Head 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 (IIIM), and her team for their work as reflected in the seventh report of the Mechanism (see A/75/743), which was presented today.

We are extremely concerned about the fact that the people of Syria continue to suffer enormously, a full decade after the conflict began. More than 11.5 million people have been displaced, equal to more than half of Syria's entire pre-conflict population. Grave violations and abuses of international human rights and international humanitarian law persist, aggravating the scope of impunity at appalling levels. The situation has been further exacerbated by the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

Against that background, the IIIM, established in 2016 through the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 71/248, continues to be a clear demonstration of the positive role we can all collectively play on issues on which the Security Council is unfortunately blocked. We would like to reiterate Georgia's strong support for the Mechanism, which we believe can make a significant contribution to ensuring accountability

for crimes committed during the conflict in Syria by documenting violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law and facilitating and expediting fair and independent criminal proceedings. In that regard, we welcome the Mechanism's increasing cooperation with national proceedings and its effective contribution to investigations at the domestic level in numerous countries.

The creation of this United Nations-mandated body constitutes a collective commitment by the membership to fighting impunity, which must remain a priority. We firmly believe that there can be no sustainable or inclusive peace in Syria without achieving justice for the victims and ensuring accountability for those who have perpetrated these crimes. In that regard, we call on the regime to cooperate fully with the Mechanism, in particular by providing it with relevant information and documentation.

Georgia is among the Member States that have contributed financially to the support of the Mechanism from its inception. We have been staunch supporters of its inclusion in the regular budget of the United Nations, and we will continue to be in the future. We remain committed to continuing our support and engagement with the international community in its endeavour to end impunity and bring justice to the Syrian people.

Mr. Hawke (New Zealand): I would like to start by thanking Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, the Head 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, for presenting the reports of the Mechanism (see A/75/311 and A/75/743) on the crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. New Zealand appreciates the opportunity to discuss the important work of the Mechanism at this plenary meeting of the General Assembly, particularly as we were unable to do so last year. New Zealand reiterates its strong support for the Mechanism and its work. This year is the eleventh since the conflict in Syria began, and the humanitarian crisis continues on an unthinkable scale. With its mandate to assist in the investigation and prosecution of the most horrific crimes committed in Syria for more than a decade, we cannot stress enough how critical the work of the Mechanism is. The victims and survivors of those crimes have a right to justice and accountability, and that is an important precursor to any sustainable peace.

New Zealand is pleased to observe from the reports of the Mechanism that progress continues to be made towards the fulfilment of its mandate, notwithstanding the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease pandemic and the liquidity situation facing the United Nations. The substantial increase in requests for assistance that the Mechanism has received from competent jurisdictions is a testament to its work and its promise as an enabler of justice for victims. We commend the continued utilization of new technologies, such as automated reviews of evidentiary material, to improve the efficiency of the Mechanism's work. We further welcome the Mechanism's development of dedicated strategies on gender, victims, survivors and crimes against children, and we encourage the Mechanism to integrate the consideration of sexual orientation and persons with disabilities in its work.

We will be following the work of the Mechanism closely. It can continue to count on New Zealand's full support.

Mr. Zellenrath (Netherlands): My delegation warmly welcomes today's debate on 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 (IIIM). I thank the Head of the Mechanism and her team for their recent comprehensive report (see A/75/743) and their indispensable work.

We fully align ourselves with the statement made earlier by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and would like to add the following remarks in our national capacity.

Ten years after the start of peaceful protests in Syria and their subsequent violent repression, gross human rights violations persist there to this day. Over the past decade, Syrians have been tortured, murdered, forcibly displaced and subjected to chemical-weapon attacks. The Syrian regime has cruelly and systematically repressed and committed crimes against its own citizens, causing unimaginable suffering. We cannot turn a blind eye on this decade of grave human rights violations. We have to raise our voice, protect the values we stand for and ensure that the perpetrators will face justice for the crimes they have committed.

The IIIM has proven to be a unique international criminal justice entity for ensuring that those crimes will not be forgotten. The collection, consolidation,

preservation and analysis of evidence and the preparation of case files are all indispensable steps in the fight against impunity. The work of the IIIM is crucial to supporting accountability efforts at the national, regional and international levels. Its strong focus on independence and impartiality is key to maintaining our trust and confidence.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands has supported the IIIM since its inception, and we strongly believe that there can be no lasting peace without justice. Accountability is a topic very close to our heart and a key human rights priority of our foreign affairs policy. Those are not just words; we put them into action. The Netherlands, together with Canada, has taken further steps to hold Syria directly accountable for its violations of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In invoking Syria's responsibility for non-compliance with the Convention, the Netherlands and Canada will follow the means that it provides for the settlement of disputes, with a view to obtaining justice for the Syrian victims of the most serious human rights violations and bringing the perpetrators to justice. We feel strengthened by the many declarations of support that we have received for this step. The pressure on the perpetrators is increasing.

We are currently seeing national efforts based on universal jurisdiction, such as the domestic proceedings in Germany, France and Sweden, which will further contribute to ending impunity. In The Hague today, the Conference of the State Parties of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) rightly suspended Syria's voting rights in the OPCW for breaching the Chemicals Weapons Convention. In short, if we are to remain committed to upholding the rules-based international order then we should use all the international tools at our disposal to support accountability efforts for Syria, from national efforts to the Convention against Torture, to the International Criminal Court and the IIIM. We need to persevere, because achieving accountability is a long and often painful process, but we owe it to the victims and survivors to ensure lasting peace.

Mr. Wickremasinghe (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes today's debate on 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 (IIIM). Securing the accountability of the perpetrators of the gravest crimes committed in Syria must be a top priority for the United Nations and the international community. The IIIM is an essential part of our collective efforts to strengthen accountability in Syria, and it has the United Kingdom's full support.

With the Syrian crisis in its eleventh year, there can be little doubt that the conflict is one of the most terrible human disasters of the twenty-first century. It is also undoubtedly one of the best-documented conflicts in the modern era. Evidence showing that the Al-Assad regime bears the greatest responsibility for the crimes committed is mounting. The most recent report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/46/54) sheds further light on a decade of atrocities in Syria, documenting the regime's horrific attacks against civilians and its use of chemical weapons no fewer than 32 times.

The April 2020 and April 2021 reports of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons provide further evidence of the regime's use of chemical weapons. The United Kingdom condemns those despicable acts in the strongest terms. We have so far provided more than £13 million since 2012 in support of the international efforts to gather evidence of human rights abuses and violations and address the harm to victims. Our funding has included more than £1.2 million in support of the IIIM itself, and we will continue to work together to achieve accountability where Syria is concerned. The latest IIIM reports (see A/75/311 and A/75/743) show that further progress has been made towards securing accountability for those who have committed the gravest crimes in Syria. The reports are a testament to the IIIM's resolve on the issue, demonstrating its contribution to improving how evidence is collected and used to prosecute those who have committed crimes in Syria. Increased information-sharing through the IIIM will strengthen our collective efforts to achieve accountability.

Lastly, the United Kingdom would like to voice its particular support for the reports' focus on developing targeted responses for women and children. We also fully endorse the survivor-based approach outlined in the reports. Supporting those who are most vulnerable in Syrian society will be essential in the pursuit of justice for all, and the United Kingdom will fully support the IIIM to that end.

Mr. Ghorbanpour Najafabadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has brought profound suffering and misery to that civilized country and its people. The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns in the strongest terms all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law on Syrian territory. It is our unwavering and principled position that the perpetrators of such violations must be held accountable and face justice.

Foreign terrorist fighters, as well as those who have been involved in the deployment and facilitation of their deployment to Syria; those who have directly trained and equipped terrorists or assisted them in the country; who have furnished chemical weapons to terrorists and trained them in their use against civilians; the Governments occupying Syria and exploiting its natural resources and smuggling its oil and cultural heritage; and all who have intervened in the war-ravaged country, either militarily or by supporting terrorists in order to pursue and implement their corrupt policies of regime change, must be held accountable for the perpetual misery that they have sown and reaped within Syria and for its people. Efforts to bring such people to justice are sought in order to prevent a repetition of the same scenarios elsewhere in the world and to ensure sustainable peace in the country. Unlawful and inhuman unilateral coercive measures against Syria, as a crime against humanity, must be lifted immediately, and a Syrian-owned and Syrian-lead political process facilitated by the United Nations and the Astana process should be encouraged.

I would like to reiterate my delegation's consistently held position, which is based on international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, on the so-called 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. My delegation rejects any politically motivated initiative or State-specific resolution that is lacking in non-selectivity and objectivity, deliberately ignores the guiding principles of sovereign equality, non-intervention in the internal affairs of States and the prior consent of the States concerned, and circumvents the primary responsibility of sovereign States in the investigation and prosecution of any crimes on their territory. Unfortunately, the so-called Mechanism was established through an exclusionary and non-transparent process without any

consultation or coordination with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Despite the fact that the General Assembly, without a consensus, adopted resolution 71/248, it unequivocally encroaches on the powers and jurisdictions of other United Nations bodies by creating a quasi-judicial mechanism in violation of Articles 10, 11, 12 and 22 of the Charter, and the resolution itself ignores all fundamental principles of international law and the Charter. The Mechanism therefore cannot be considered to be a United Nations body in the context of Article 22 of the Charter. It cannot benefit from United Nations privileges and immunities, nor should its ambiguous and non-transparent activities be financed by the United Nations budget. In that regard, the so-called Mechanism lacks the legitimacy to contract and cooperate with other United Nations bodies in order to receive information from them. Furthermore, since it was established without prior consultation with the Syrian Arab Republic, and the country's clear consent was not secured by the United Nations — and the Mechanism has manifestly exceeded its mandates on the strength of resolution 71/248 — its findings, evidence and information are therefore devoid of any credibility, legitimacy or legality to be used in any international, regional or domestic judicial system.

The unwillingness of the sponsors of the Mechanism to support the establishment of similar mechanisms to address the daily commission of all four core heinous crimes under international law in Palestine, for more than seven decades, and Yemen, for six years, on one hand, while on the other orchestrating various efforts by adopting different United Nations resolutions, holding General Assembly meetings and establishing a number of commissions and mechanisms for the Syrian Arab Republic, is a clear manifestation of a narrow political agenda in the guise of a quest for justice and human rights.

The recent developments in the International Criminal Court further exemplify how the rule of power is defying the rule of law in various ways. Furthermore, the proponents of the Mechanism who refrain from repatriating foreign terrorist fighters from the Syrian Arab Republic for prosecution in their national courts are dishonest in their claims regarding the fight against impunity. Rather, their position shows that the establishment of the Mechanism is not actually against terrorists but against the Government of the

Syrian Arab Republic itself, in a broader and politically motivated sense.

Lastly, I want to once again reiterate that as long as it disregards the Charter and international law, the Mechanism cannot be considered a legitimate source of evidence for judicial proceedings, including within international courts and tribunals. In that regard, my delegation rejects any exploitation of the organs of the United Nations that is contrary to the principles of the Charter. We believe that such an initiative jeopardizes the credibility and integrity of the United Nations system, as well as the rule of law, and neither instils peace and stability nor promotes and protects human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Skachkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I want to say upfront that Russia does not recognize the so-called “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” (IIIM). A body established by an illegitimate decision can never demonstrate its legitimacy, and that applies by extension to the products of its work. We nevertheless thought that it would be useful to say a few words about the report of the “IIIM” (see A/75/743). We note that the General Assembly has been obliged to waste time and resources discussing yet another document that it is difficult to call a report. After all, we know that a report should contain substantive information, of which this document has none.

On a pretext of confidentiality, the General Assembly has been presented with yet another pro forma response. What kind of confidentiality are we talking about when, as the report informs us, the “Mechanism” has begun actively disseminating various “analytical products” and “evidentiary modules”? And yet the General Assembly, to which the Mechanism reports, can only guess at the results of its “work”.

As we know, the funding of this illegitimate entity has now been incorporated into the United Nations regular budget, in breach of the long-standing practice of reaching a consensus in the Fifth Committee. As a State that has paid its contribution to the United Nations budget in full, Russia would like to know what the United Nations funds have been spent on. United Nations personnel who report to the Secretary-General are working for the “Mechanism”, and some 50 positions

funded under the regular budget have already been filled. Where is the transparency and accountability that is a feature of United Nations bodies? I would like to ask the leaders of the “Mechanism” if they are hiding anything from the members of the General Assembly or are reluctant to admit something.

The report even fails to include information on the cases it is working on. For some unknown reason this body does not deem it necessary to specify what illegal acts, suspects and national jurisdictions are involved. We are told only that huge amounts of information have been collected and that their volume is expanding endlessly thanks to cooperation among a wide range of actors. Soon the computers will crash. However, at the same time silence reigns over the sources of the “evidence”, the procedures for collection and processing and the identity of the actual individuals who are cooperating with the “Mechanism”. We are told that in 2020, the Mechanism supposedly conducted 130 collections. Why has the General Assembly not been informed about which States those missions are being carried out in? If it is in the Syrian Arab Republic, on what grounds are the missions present there and what status do they have?

As before, the Russian Federation sees no possibility for cooperation with the “Mechanism” and believes that no evidence collected by such an illegitimate entity can ever be used for the purposes of any national or international criminal proceedings.

Mr. Rae (Canada): I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I would first of all like to thank Ms. Marchi-Uhel for her update to the General Assembly on the activities 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 (IIIM), the first in two years owing to circumstances caused by the pandemic last spring. These briefings are critical and a key mechanism for sharing with the world’s public the depth and breadth of the atrocities committed by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and its supporters, as well as others.

In response to the Russian representative’s comments, I would say only that it would not be much of an independent investigative mechanism if it divulged all of its activities as an independent investigator. What department of justice anywhere in the world would reveal

whom it was investigating or why it was investigating them? It is a preposterous suggestion. I would like to echo and reaffirm Canada’s strong support for the work of the IIIM. I think that the activities of the General Assembly in establishing it were critically important and that when there is paralysis in the Security Council, the Assembly has an obligation to act. No one has a veto in the General Assembly, and it is important to remember that.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to justice for victims and accountability for all the perpetrators on Syrian territory. The IIIM’s work documenting, preserving and consolidating more than 7 million pieces of evidence is an invaluable resource and a warning to other regimes and any armed groups that would be willing to harm their own civilian populations. We also applaud the Mechanism’s progress towards the implementation of its gender strategy and its ongoing engagement in cooperating with civil society, including victims and survivor groups. Justice initiatives must take a victim-centred approach. We welcome the IIIM’s openness to supporting broader accountability efforts not based on criminal justice, which speaks to the utility and the flexibility of the Mechanism.

(spoke in French)

Canada’s support for the Mechanism includes \$2.9 million in voluntary contributions to help it achieve full capacity and strengthen the progress that has already been made. We are pleased that the Mechanism is now funded by the United Nations regular budget. The work of the IIIM is integral to the very mission of the United Nations. This important development will ensure that the process of bringing justice to the Syrians will be supported in a sustainable and long-term manner. Such continued support is very important, as we know that it will be impossible to achieve peace in the region without ensuring accountability for the injustices and violence that the Syrian people have endured for more than a decade of conflict. The documentation, investigations and prosecution of those responsible for crimes represent unequivocal preconditions for ensuring that the Syrians can return to and rebuild their communities.

(spoke in English)

I would also like to underline that this includes accountability for the use of chemical weapons, and Canada welcomes the collaboration between the IIIM and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical

Weapons (OPCW) in that regard. The recently released second report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team brings the number of confirmed chemical-weapon attacks by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to eight, but we have to remember that there is evidence that the same Government has conducted more than 100 attacks over the course of the conflict. Those horrific attacks have killed or injured hundreds of innocent civilians. The international community cannot let such crimes go unpunished, and the perpetrators of those appalling war crimes must be held to account. That is why Canada strongly supported the July 2020 decision by which the OPCW's Executive Council found that the Syrian Arab Republic had not complied with its responsibilities under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). It is also why earlier today, at the Conference of States Parties to the CWC, Canada joined its allies in voting to hold the Syrian Arab Republic accountable for its repeated violations of the Convention.

As a full decade of conflict in Syria has now elapsed, Canada believes that the international community must continue to explore new paths towards justice and, ultimately, towards peace. That is why we are proud to be partnering with the Netherlands to hold Syria accountable for its human rights violations under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We are pleased to have an existing memorandum of understanding with the IIIM that will undoubtedly help to facilitate the process. Through the memorandum of understanding, Canada is able to share important pieces of evidence, provide information about identifying potential witnesses and assist in arranging and conducting interviews of such witnesses to aid the IIIM in its mandate.

I have to say that today's debate has made it clear that there is a division of opinion about what is central and what is not central to the role of the United Nations. There are those who say that the one central principle of the United Nations is the principle of sovereignty. To them I would say, yes, sovereignty is critically important, but so is the role of international law. Sovereignty does not mean no accountability. Sovereignty does not mean that a Government can kill its own citizens at will. Accountability is a cornerstone of the United Nations. If it were not for the pursuit of accountability, the United Nations would not have been formed. The rule of law and accountability are

absolutely central to the Charter of the United Nations, to the institutions we have created since San Francisco in 1945 and to where we need to go.

Mr. Guerra Sansonetti (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is committed to the fight against impunity and to ensuring accountability for the most serious crimes, including crimes against humanity that because of their brutality and magnitude violate human dignity and the fundamental values of peaceful coexistence in our societies. That is why our country has been active in combating impunity for those crimes, not only to ensure international peace and security but also to preserve and strengthen the rule of law at both the national and international levels.

With regard to today's agenda item, we would like to point out that our delegation voted against resolution 71/248, which led to the irregular and controversial establishment 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. The Mechanism contradicts and flagrantly violates the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as the most basic norms of international relations. We should also recall that through the establishment of the Mechanism, a circumstantial majority forced the General Assembly to usurp the responsibilities of the Security Council, which is not only the sole organ empowered to establish investigative mechanisms or tribunals with obligatory legal authority over individuals and States, but is also currently functioning with regard to every aspect of the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The creation of a mechanism claiming to carry out duties that are the purview of a judicial or investigative body, in disregard for the primary role of sovereign States in investigating and prosecuting the perpetrators of crimes that may have been committed on their national territory, and which has been wholly rejected by the State concerned, establishes a negative precedent for the work of the General Assembly. Through resolution 71/248, the General Assembly sought to establish a mechanism with responsibilities that should be borne by a judicial or investigative entity. That is why any hypothetical evidence that may be collected throughout its mandate lacks validity and legal standing for potential criminal proceedings against Syria, whose

institutions are fully capable of serving justice and ensuring accountability for atrocity crimes without the need for interference or assistance from other parties, which could lead to another crisis.

We believe that we are dealing with an inquisitorial entity that is seeking to advance, under a cloak of putative justice, the political agenda of a small group of Governments that are attempting to put pressure on the Syrian Government, thereby violating the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of States, among other things. We therefore reject any attempt to fund a political destabilization operation using our Organization's resources.

Given the circumstances, this is a clear example of the selectivity and double standards demonstrated by the Western Powers to which we have become accustomed, particularly where human rights are concerned. Those same Powers that today are imposing measures that amount to systematic, criminal and deliberate economic terrorism in order to strangle the Syrian people also say they want to deliver justice. It is those same Powers that despite the atrocities that have been committed against the heroic Palestinian people, for example, have never attempted to seek accountability, much less ensure that justice is served.

The so-called Mechanism, which was flawed from the outset and has been funded by voluntary contributions from donor countries, is neither impartial nor independent, because it reflects the mean-spirited national interests of other stakeholders rather than the interests of the Syrian people. Their reports lack methodological rigour and are based on secondary and even third sources. We in Venezuela call for an end to attempts to use the General Assembly to attack independent and sovereign States. If we are genuinely interested in achieving a lasting peace in the Syrian Arab Republic that will ensure the welfare of its people, we must put an end to divisive approaches that complicate the situation and even threaten to jeopardize the neutrality and impartiality of the United Nations and its role as facilitator of the political process in Syria. We are obliged to respect that process as responsible members of the international community.

In conclusion, we hope that in future we can work to build a consensus on initiatives that are in line with the vital goals of peace, stability and justice in Syria, which will enable us to support efforts to promote national reconciliation and find a political solution

through a Syrian-led political process without any interference of any kind. Such efforts should also be in line with the spirit and letter of the Charter of the United Nations, and especially the principles of respect for sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and non-interference.

Mrs. Dime Labille (France) (*spoke in French*): France aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

I would like to thank Miss Catherine Marchi-Uhel for her briefing and to applaud the progress made 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, which she is leading in difficult circumstances.

After 10 years of conflict, Syria has been ravaged. Half of its population is displaced or has sought refuge in neighbouring countries. More than 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Tens of thousands are missing. The resurgence of Da'esh, mainly in areas controlled by the regime, and the ongoing hostilities in the north-west and north-east, are worrisome signs. On several occasions the regime has perpetrated attacks with chemical weapons on its own people. Acts that could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity continue to be committed daily by all parties, in particular by the Syrian regime, as has been confirmed by several reliable and independent reports, including those by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. It will also be crucial to make progress rapidly on the issue of persons detained by the Syrian regime and missing persons.

The crimes committed in Syria cannot go unpunished. Every effort must be made to ensure that justice is served for all the victims of the conflict. The work of the Mechanism is a cornerstone in that regard, and France has fully supported it since its establishment. It plays a dual role, as the central repository of information and evidence of crimes committed since 2011 and as a facilitator of justice in support of investigations.

The Mechanism has made progress in two key areas, providing courts with files of evidence and engaging with broad segments of Syrian civil society.

We welcome the systematic recognition of gender-related issues throughout its work.

As described in the most recent report (see A/75/743), the Mechanism faces many challenges in the current context of the pandemic, which complicates its work, including on the large volume and diversity of evidence to be organized despite tight budget constraints. We are pleased to see that despite the health context, the Mechanism has made progress in its mandate by developing remote working methods and allocating its limited resources strategically. France will continue to work with its partners to ensure that the Mechanism will be funded by the United Nations regular budget, in accordance with the previous recommendations of the Secretary-General.

France will remain fully committed to the fight against impunity, which is an essential condition for lasting peace in Syria. We commend Syria's civil-society actors for their courage and urge them to continue their cooperation with the Mechanism. Their contribution to justice is crucial. Similarly, the relevant United Nations bodies, including the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as those of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, such as the Investigation and Identification Team, should continue to cooperate with the Mechanism in line with their respective mandates. The Mechanism is at the heart of a network of stakeholders working simultaneously to achieve the goal of combating impunity, including for the use of chemical weapons.

Lastly, we invite all States concerned about fighting impunity in Syria to formalize cooperation agreements with the Mechanism, as France is now doing. We encourage the competent courts to work together to share information and resources, while continuing to rely on the Mechanism. That kind of cooperation enabled the historic trial that took place in Koblenz, and more than 40 investigations are currently under way in France. In that regard, we reiterate our unwavering position that the perpetrators of chemical-weapon attacks should be punished. To that end, in 2018 we launched the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which now numbers 40 States and the European Union.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate what we all already know, which is that without justice we cannot ensure lasting peace or the return of refugees and displaced

persons in Syria. Only a political solution that respects people's rights will enable Syria, as a whole, to recover and avoid another lost decade. It is now more urgent than ever to implement a broader United Nations-led political process to address every aspect of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). We encourage the Special Envoy for Syria to work to that end. It is also essential to make rapid progress on the issue of people detained by the Syrian regime and missing persons. France will support all initiatives aimed at making progress in that area.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting pursuant to resolution 75/193. We would like also to express our appreciation to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head 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 (IIIM), for her efforts and those of her team, as well as for the report before us (see A/75/743).

The annual meeting is particularly important this year because last month marked a decade since the Syrian people first began protesting peacefully to demand their legitimate rights. Their protests were met with excessive violence, leading to a crisis that has lasted for years and to the perpetration of grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law as well as immeasurable humanitarian suffering. Accountability for the most serious crimes, which are violations of international law, is an important element in ensuring sustainable peace. The State of Qatar, together with Liechtenstein, was at the forefront of the efforts by countries that resulted in the establishment of the IIIM, based on our commitment to the legal and ethical responsibility to ensure justice and accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as to addressing the problem of impunity.

The atrocities that have been committed in Syria are well documented. They include the use of prohibited chemical weapons against civilians, which is a flagrant violation of international law. Several documented reports about that have been forthcoming, the most recent of them last week's second report of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on the incident that took place in Saraqib.

Considering the close link between justice and peace and the importance of investigating allegations, collecting evidence and making it available for future efforts pertaining to accountability, we welcome the Mechanism's performance, as noted in the report, and the progress it has made in line with its guiding principles of impartiality and independence. We commend its achievements in refining its working methods, expanding the central repository of information and evidence and increasing its interaction with Syrian civil society. Despite the challenges created by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the Mechanism has continued its activities and its data collection and analysis while conducting remote interviews and investigations.

We would like to emphasize the importance of ensuring that the Mechanism continues to receive sufficient and predictable funding from the United Nations regular budget, which will help to strengthen its credibility and independence.

In conclusion, the only way to ensure an end to all violations in Syria is to resolve the crisis there. That is why Qatar will continue its efforts, in cooperation with its international partners, to support every possible way to contribute constructively to ending the crisis through a purposeful political process leading to a political transition in line with the Geneva declaration and the full implementation of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). The political process must also acknowledge the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and preserve Syria's unity, sovereignty and independence.

The State of Qatar reiterates its position condemning violence against civilians and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, regardless of the perpetrators. We will continue to support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism so that it can fulfil its important mandate.

Mrs. Guerra Tamayo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba was one of the Member States that voted against the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 71/248, which established 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. As we indicated during the adoption of the resolution, Cuba does not support and never will support any mechanism

that deliberately disregards the principles that guide our Organization, such as sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and non-intervention in the internal affairs of States. Furthermore, we must underscore that there is no precedent in the history of the United Nations for adopting and implementing such a mechanism. It violates the norms and principles of international law and sets a dangerous precedent for the Organization's practices. The United Nations should not endorse a document that reflects such blatant disregard for the primary responsibility of sovereign States — in this case, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and its judicial system — to investigate and prosecute any crimes that may have been committed on their territory.

The Mechanism's illegality is apparent from several perspectives. First, the mandate entrusted to it has no foundation in the Charter of the United Nations. It exceeds the General Assembly's competencies and functions as stipulated in Articles 10, 12 and 22 of the Charter. It is termed a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, which unlawfully endows it with a legal personality and privileges and immunities for the Mechanism and its staff. In addition, the basic terms of reference for the Mechanism were not defined and Member States were unable to take a position on the issue, much less make decisions on the terms of reference prior to their adoption.

The Mechanism was also given functions similar to those of a prosecutor, with the goal of establishing a link between the evidence of criminal acts and the possible perpetrators of those acts and of sharing information with national, regional or international courts or tribunals that they believe have jurisdiction. That is legal arbitrariness, since not even in traditional judiciaries can one body be both judge and prosecutor. Furthermore, the change in the model of funding for the Mechanism does not enjoy consensus among our membership, as we have seen from voting results on the issue in the Fifth Committee and the Assembly. Mechanisms of this kind should not be funded with Member States' dues, particularly if the State concerned has not approved or does not participate in it. Based on all of this, Cuba believes that the Mechanism is flawed. The inconsistencies and contradictions in today's report (see A/75/743) only confirm our view.

Today we are not only discussing the fact that a sovereign Member State is being unjustly singled out, which is a practice we reject, we are also addressing the credibility of the Organization, given that it is unable to

respect its own constitutive Charter. Cuba reiterates its opposition to the Mechanism established by resolution 71/248 and underscores that we will not be able to prevent any conflicts, far less ensure international peace and security, if we do not adhere strictly to the Charter of the United Nations and to international law.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to convey my greetings to Ms. Catherine Marchi-Uhel, Head 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. We appreciate her key role and difficult mission of collecting information and evidence on violations committed by the Syrian authorities, which still continue today. We stress that while the path of reconciliation is not an easy one, there can never be peace without justice and there can be no lasting peace in Syria without accountability. We also thank the Head of the Mechanism for her periodic reports, which demonstrate the efforts of her team to collect information and evidence under difficult circumstances and with integrity and professionalism.

My country believes in the ability of the international community and its institutions to protect people and guarantee their rights around the world. Those rights have been affected by terrorism, intolerance and brutality as well as by the kind of political arrogance that considers only individual interests. The road to achieving justice is a long and difficult one, and the right steps, impartial steps, must be taken to that end. Justice can be achieved only with transparency. The needs of the Syrian people will be met only when those morally responsible for their murders are held accountable. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would like to underscore the profound importance of protecting civilians and children, particularly in armed conflicts. Based on that, my country has joined many international frameworks that strengthen protection. I would like to reiterate my country's commitment to international law and international humanitarian law and our determination to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

My delegation would like to express its serious concerns about the major impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on our brother people of Syria. The most recent United Nations reports reflect an increase in the number of deaths and burials in

Syria, which means that the real number of COVID-19 cases is much higher than the official statistics. We all know that the pandemic is a major challenge for an already ruined health system and will lead to further deterioration of the social, economic and humanitarian situations in Syria.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports the work of the United Nations and its Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, and every other effort to bring an end to the tragic situation in Syria. We support the resumption of the work of the Syrian Constitutional Committee. We helped to facilitate a political solution by hosting two conferences, Riyadh I and II, which led to the establishment of the High Negotiations Committee. We spared no effort in that area and will continue our work to unify the Syrian opposition under a single position. Given the support for international efforts to bring about a just and comprehensive settlement to the Syrian crisis, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia contributed \$1 million to the voluntary fund of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism. We affirm our commitment to supporting political solutions, including the efforts made by the United Nations to end the suffering that has led to serious humanitarian crimes. We believe that our contribution reflects a collective responsibility around the world and in the region in particular, and we are ready to ensure that the work of the Mechanism is supported by all States, not just a particular group of countries. The countries of the region should contribute to supporting the Mechanism and its efforts.

Saudi Arabia, along with a number of countries, continues to support the Mechanism and its efforts because we sympathize with the long-drawn-out suffering of our brother people of Syria. We hope that such efforts, as well as all others under the umbrella of the United Nations, can help the Syrian people realize their legitimate ambitions and aspirations and ensure that all who have contributed to the heinous crimes committed against the patient and downtrodden people of Syria are held accountable.

Mr. Montenegro Borge (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Nicaraguans are a peace-loving people who respect international law and human rights. We do not recognize or accept initiatives that violate the sovereignty of our peoples, particularly reports that support selectivity and the politicization of human rights. Nicaragua voted against the establishment of the controversial 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 because it was imposed on a country that was under attack and whose sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence were being violated.

The hasty and biased assertions in the reports have ignored the progress made in the area of human rights in our sister Syrian Arab Republic in unprecedented circumstances. Nicaragua reaffirms its solidarity with the people and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and rejects the misnamed International Mechanism. It is essential to ensure that the United Nations preserves its neutrality and credibility as a facilitator of the political process under way in Syria and is not subjected to political and financial pressures and unfair attempts at politicization on the part of some Governments. We believe that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and its legal and judicial institutions are fully capable of dispensing justice and ensuring accountability without external destructive interference. Member States must be aware of the serious precedent that has been set and of the legal and political implications of the biased attempts to promote the Mechanism.

If we are to genuinely address the humanitarian situation in Syria, we must take a wise and constructive approach that requires an end to all forms of isolation, hostility and unilateral coercive measures. That will enable us to pave the way for an environment that is conducive to achieving a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political solution without external interference, thereby re-establishing Syria's security and stability and enabling the reconstruction of what terrorism has destroyed, as well as the dignified and voluntary return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes. It is important to call for redoubling efforts at the national, regional and international levels in support of a solution to the crisis in Syria that will enable the country's reconstruction and restoration to peace in line with the aspirations of its people.

The President: We have heard the last speaker on this item.

The right of reply has been requested. Before giving the floor to speakers in the exercise of right of reply, I would like to remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and five minutes for

the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Altarsha (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): In the interests of time, I will not speak for 10 minutes.

Many representatives have spoken in today's debate and we have listened carefully to them all. All mentioned the importance of collecting evidence in line with the statement made by the Head 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. We want to emphasize the fact that we do not accept the Mechanism. Its evidence is collected remotely and its Head has said that it is important to guarantee the credibility of the evidence as well as the highest standards of criminal justice in order to ensure the admissibility of the evidence in court and its availability to those seeking information. Ultimately, we talk about respecting security and confidentiality. How can we accept such fallacies?

My colleague from Canada said that the relevant information is confidential and cannot be divulged. He welcomes the Mechanism's activities, but if those activities are confidential, what exactly is he welcoming? Let us assume that by some miracle, the Mechanism was impartial and objective and that its findings concluded that Syria had done no wrong. Would he then welcome those findings? I do not believe so. Another of my colleagues talked about the occupation and the crisis of displaced persons. She mentioned that the occupation in Syria continues, which is true in some of the northern and north-western parts of my country, occupied by a Member State whose representative is present among us. That Member State has sent its forces to Syria and is boasting about its troops mingling with forces and combatants related to the Al-Nusra Front, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, the White Helmets and other terrorist groups. Its delegation's representative said that the legitimate demands of the Syrian people were met with suppression and murder. But what about the soldiers of the Syrian Arab Army? Were they killed with olive branches? I believe they were killed by weapons supplied by that same country to forces in Syria.

Many others talked about chemical weapons and reports of their use. In that context, we must note that certain European countries pressed for the illegitimate

establishment of the so-called Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). They subsequently covered up its unprofessional and incorrect working methods and then used a misleading report in order to make accusations about Syria. The report was issued on a very specific date, which demonstrated the control that a group of States has over the OPCW while using it to achieve their own goals, such as the mobilization of a large number of countries in support of a draft resolution against my country.

My colleague from Turkey referred to terrorist acts, violations and war crimes. I would like to ask a very simple question, however, which is who enabled, facilitated and transferred terrorists to my country? Were they allowed to cross the borders of neighbouring countries into Syria or did they fall from the sky? Both possibilities constitute strange phenomena that merit study. Turkey has opened its borders to more than 170,000 terrorist fighters, many of whom are still in my country. I would like to ask the Turkish representative to acknowledge the reality of the situation and remind him that his people occupied my country for 400 years before we forced them to leave. I would ask him to read the history books.

With regard to the foreign terrorist fighters and their families in detention centres in Syria, an entire camp in the north-eastern part of the country is hosting more than 65,000 people, more than 90 per cent of whom are women and children. A significant percentage of them are still nationals of their home countries, although some European countries are attempting to revoke their nationality in order to evade their responsibility for them. We would like to remind members that one cannot expect a cactus to bear apples. One should check the origin and history of things so as not to be surprised by the future.

Finally, in a press briefing, the President of my country said,

“The Europeans are sending weapons to terrorists with the knowledge that they are terrorists. What will unfortunately result is that Europe’s backyard will become one of terrorism, for which the peoples of Europe will pay the price. Chaos and poverty lead to extremism and then to terrorism. If Europeans continue to send weapons, Europe will become a breeding ground for terrorism, and Europe will pay the price. Unfortunately,

many officials in Europe are illogical, unrealistic and non-objective. They act based on negative emotions rather than reason. Political interests are not based on love or hate. As the representative of the European Union, you must ask yourself, ‘What benefits are to be reaped from what is happening in the region?’ What is happening in the region runs contrary to your interests”.

In conclusion, my colleague the representative of Canada also referred to eight chemical-weapon attacks documented in the reports of the OPCW’s Investigation and Identification Team. He then mentioned that there have been more than 100 terrorist attacks using chemical weapons. Are we now just throwing out numbers in making accusations?

Mrs. Crabtree (Turkey): I do not consider the previous speaker my legitimate counterpart, as he does not represent the Syrian people. I will therefore not dignify his delusional allegations with an answer.

The President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 34.

Agenda item 120

Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments

(j) Confirmation of the appointment of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

Note by the Secretary-General (A/75/855)

The President: In paragraph 22 of part B of resolution 1240 (XIII) of 14 October 1958, on the establishment of the Special Fund, the General Assembly provided that the Secretary-General, having consulted the Governing Council of the Special Fund, would appoint the Managing Director, subject to confirmation by the Assembly. That procedure has been construed as also applying to the appointment of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

By its decision 71/418 of 19 April 2017, the General Assembly confirmed the appointment by the Secretary-General of Mr. Achim Steiner of Germany as Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme for a four-year term of office beginning on 17 June 2017 and ending on 16 June 2021.

Following consultations with members of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the Secretary-General now requests the General Assembly to confirm the reappointment of Mr. Achim Steiner as Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme for a further four-year term of office beginning on 17 June 2021. May I take it that the General Assembly approves that proposal?

It was so decided (decision 75/416).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (j) of agenda item 120?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.