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Programme budget for 2024

## Revised estimates relating to the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

### Forty-fourth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for 2024

#### I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered an advance version of the report of the Secretary-General on the revised estimates relating to the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic ([A/78/706](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Committee received additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses dated 19 February 2024.

2. In his revised estimates, the Secretary-General proposes additional resource requirements for the period from 1 April to 31 December 2024 arising from resolution [77/301](#) on the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, for which no provisions were made in the programme budget for 2024. The budgetary implications, net of staff assessment, for 2024 relating to resolution [77/301](#) amount to \$2,991,700, including \$24,500 under section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, and \$2,967,200 under section 24, Human rights (*ibid.*, summary and para. 1).

#### II. Background

3. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, at its seventy-seventh session, the General Assembly adopted resolution [77/301](#) with budgetary implications for 2024 and beyond and that, under the terms of paragraphs 2, 3, 4, 6 and 10, the Assembly:

(a) Decided to establish, under the auspices of the United Nations, the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and to



provide adequate support to victims, survivors and the families of those missing, in close cooperation and complementarity with all relevant actors;

(b) Decided that the Independent Institution shall have a structural element that ensures the full and meaningful participation and representation of victims, survivors and the families of missing persons in the Syrian Arab Republic in its operationalization and work and that it shall engage with women's organizations and other civil society organizations in a regular and sustained manner;

(c) Decided that the Independent Institution shall apply a victim- and survivor-centred approach, shall be inclusive of families and shall be guided by the principles and fundamental features of gender inclusivity, non-discrimination, "do no harm", independence, impartiality, transparency, and confidentiality of sources and information, and the operational standards of complementarity and non-duplication, presumption of life, sustainability, accessibility, and multidiscipline, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General on missing people in the Syrian Arab Republic ([A/76/890](#));

(d) Requested the Secretary-General to take, without delay, the steps, measures and arrangements necessary for the speedy establishment and full functioning of the Independent Institution, building on existing capacities and survivor-informed best practices, including recruiting or allocating impartial and experienced staff with relevant skills and expertise;

(e) Requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution within 100 working days of its adoption, and further to report on the activities of the Independent Institution on an annual basis ([A/78/706](#), para. 2).

4. It is indicated in the report of the Secretary-General that, on 1 December 2023, the Secretary-General submitted a report on the implementation of the resolution ([A/78/627](#)), which outlined the steps already taken and those further envisaged towards the start-up, establishment and full functioning of the Independent Institution and described the process of the development of the terms of reference of the Independent Institution, including the terms of reference and scope of the work starting from 1 April 2024 ([A/78/706](#), para. 4, and [A/78/627](#), annex I). The Secretary-General also indicates in his report that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) established a start-up team to carry out preliminary tasks towards the establishment of the Independent Institution, using existing capacities, and that Geneva was selected as the seat of the Independent Institution ([A/78/706](#), paras. 5 and 6). Pursuant to resolution [77/301](#), and as reflected in the terms of reference, the Advisory Committee notes, inter alia, the principles and standards of independence and impartiality of the Independent Institution.

#### **Cooperation with other United Nations entities**

5. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with information regarding the relationship between the Independent Institution and other United Nations entities, whereby the United Nations system was requested to cooperate fully with the Independent Institution and to promptly respond to any requests, including access to information and documentation, in particular, to provide the Institution with any information and data it may possess, as well as any other forms of assistance necessary to fulfil the mandate of the Institution (see resolution [77/301](#), para. 9). Upon enquiry, the Committee was provided with a comprehensive list of the United Nations offices that include the Syrian Arab Republic as part of their portfolio, including: the United Nations country team, composed of 16 resident entities and offices and 7 non-resident entities; the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; 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 Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic; the OHCHR Syrian Arab Republic country office; and the United Nations Human Rights Training and Documentation Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region.

6. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that modalities of cooperation would be developed on a case-by-case basis and that duplication would be avoided through a mapping process detailing responsible entities and coordinating mechanisms. Potential synergies within the broader United Nations system would be considered and pursued to the fullest extent possible, ensuring the most effective and efficient use of resources while fulfilling the mandate. The Committee was also provided with information regarding the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, established in 1981 by agreement between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities under the auspices of the United Nations, as an established institution for missing persons in conflict or non-conflict areas.

**7. The Advisory Committee notes the existing expertise and information available within the United Nations system, including with the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, and trusts that collaborative efforts and synergies with other United Nations entities will be developed in a cost-effective manner to allow for greater efficiencies. The Committee trusts that updates regarding cooperation initiatives and the support obtained will be provided in future budget submissions.**

#### **Seat of the Independent Institution**

8. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the selection of Geneva as the seat of the Independent Institution had been based on the opportunities offered for cooperation with some of the key actors that were present in the city, while also meeting such criteria as accessibility, impartiality, security, cost-effectiveness and access to other relevant organizations and entities, as outlined in the terms of reference ([A/78/627](#), annex I, paras. 12 and 45). The Committee was also informed that, as the host of several institutions focused on the Syrian Arab Republic, Geneva would be able to provide easy access for victims, survivors and families and that it was noted in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution [77/301](#), with regard to the determination of the seat of the Independent Institution, that the decision as to the seat should take into consideration easy access by victims, survivors and families, including those with disabilities; the guarantee of their security and safety; the feasibility of practical and operational protection of sensitive information and data; and the need to ensure that the Institution has the potential to evolve into a hybrid and ultimately a national mechanism, if and when circumstances permit. The Committee notes that it requested, and did not receive, information as to the possible locations considered for the seat of the Institution and the related cost-benefit analysis.

9. The Advisory Committee was informed that the number of cases of affected persons was expected to be substantial and that initial estimates indicated that at least 100,000 people remained missing across all parts of the Syrian Arab Republic, affecting an even greater number of families. Furthermore, in paragraph 2 of resolution [77/301](#), it is indicated that the scope of the mandate relates to “all missing persons” in the Syrian Arab Republic, for which resource requirements for mandate implementation are proposed. Upon further enquiry, the Committee was informed that the total number of Syrian refugees registered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the Operational Data Portal was 5,075,989 refugees, with the following breakdown by country/region of asylum: Türkiye, 3,174,851; Lebanon, 784,884; Jordan, 643,199; Iraq, 273,258; Egypt, 154,794; and North Africa, 45,003. Furthermore, European countries host over 1,000,000 Syrian

asylum-seekers and refugees, with 70 per cent hosted in Germany (59 per cent) and Sweden (11 per cent) and the remainder hosted in other European countries (see also *ibid.*, para. 27).

10. The Advisory Committee notes the initial location of Geneva for the seat of the Independent Institution given the location of human rights and other related mechanisms, the required cooperation with other institutions focused on the Syrian Arab Republic located in Geneva, and the provision of administrative and other support services by the United Nations Office at Geneva to the Institution. The Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will ensure the full and effective implementation of mandated activities, including through coordination and cooperation among United Nations entities, while identifying efficiencies and avoiding duplication of efforts. The Committee finally notes that the vast majority of Syrian refugees currently have refugee status in the region while the minority are located elsewhere. Taking into consideration proximity and accessibility needs, the Committee trusts that a further assessment of locations for the Independent Institution will be conducted, including the related cost-benefit analysis, and that an update will be provided in future budget submissions, as appropriate.

### III. Resource requirements

11. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that estimated additional resource requirements for the period from 1 April to 31 December 2024 amount to \$2,991,700 (net of staff assessment), under section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management (\$24,500), and under section 24, Human rights (\$2,967,200). To carry out the activities indicated in paragraph 9 of the report in 2024, additional posts as well as non-post resources will be required in 2024 as a separate component from OHCHR under section 24, Human rights ([A/78/706](#), paras. 7, 10, 13–15 and table 1).

12. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, an additional amount of \$278,600 would be required in 2024 under section 36, Staff assessment, of the programme budget for 2024, which would be offset by an equivalent increase of \$278,600 under income section 1, Income from staff assessment. Requirements for resources for 2025 and beyond would be included in the respective proposed programme budget under section 2 and as a separate component under section 24 (*ibid.*, paras. 17 and 18 and table 2).

13. As regards resource requirements for 2025 and beyond, it is indicated in the report of the Secretary-General that, prior to the adoption of the resolution by the General Assembly, it was estimated that adoption of the draft resolution would give rise to budgetary implications of up to \$3.0 million in 2024 and in the range of \$10.0 million to \$12.0 million annually starting in 2025, once the Independent Institution is fully operational. This would include post resources, to cover the activities of the newly established Independent Institution, as well as for the processing of related documentation in all official languages by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management of the Secretariat (*ibid.*, paras. 3 and 7).

14. The activities to be undertaken in 2024 to implement the requests of the General Assembly are indicated in the report of the Secretary-General and are as follows (the mandate of the Independent Institution comprises two interrelated and mutually reinforcing components, in clarifying the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and in providing adequate support to victims, survivors and the families of those missing):

- (a) Ensure that a comprehensive security risk assessment is conducted and appropriate security risk management measures are established;
- (b) Consider and conclude cooperation agreements with relevant actors;
- (c) Map the needs of families, as well as existing actors holding relevant information on missing persons in the Syrian Arab Republic or carrying out activities relevant to the mandate of the Independent Institution;
- (d) Design a system ensuring the meaningful and full participation of victims, survivors and families in the work of the Independent Institution, as well as regular engagement with women's organizations and other civil society organizations;
- (e) Design an appropriate information management system in line with its mandate and terms of reference, in particular to consolidate existing information and data;
- (f) Design an initial search plan in coordination with relevant actors, in particular families;
- (g) Develop and implement an initial outreach policy, set up working procedures for registering claims, and duly organize case files, information and data;
- (h) Continue to liaise with relevant actors, including United Nations and other entities or bodies, with Member States and with families and civil society organizations (*ibid.*, paras. 8 and 9).

#### **Post resources; organizational units**

15. The proposed post resources in the amount of \$2,200,200 consist of the establishment of 28 posts for the Independent Institution under section 24, Human rights (1 Assistant Secretary-General, 1 D-1, 3 P-5, 7 P-4, 9 P-3, 4 P-2, 1 General Service (Principal level) and 2 General Service (Other level)) from April to December 2024 (*ibid.*, paras. 7 and 13). Details of the post functions are provided in paragraphs 13 to 15 of the report, including that the resource estimate for posts is based on a 50 per cent vacancy rate. The organizational structure and post distribution for 2024 are provided in annex I and descriptions of the functions of the 28 posts are provided in annex II. In the report of the Secretary-General, it is indicated that additional posts, necessary for delivering the mandate of the Independent Institution, will be proposed for establishment in 2025 and that the updated organizational structure and post distribution for 2025 will be included in the proposed programme budget for 2025, under section 24, Human rights.

16. In his report, the Secretary-General indicates that, to implement its mandate, the Independent Institution would consist of the following organizational units: Executive Office; Search and Data Analysis Section; Victim Participation and Support Section; Administrative Services Section; and Advisory Board (*pro bono*) (*ibid.*, para. 14). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with additional information regarding the proposed posts, the recruitment plan for the proposed posts under each section and the services to be provided by the United Nations Office at Geneva.

**17. The Advisory Committee is of the view that a phased approach to staffing the Independent Institution is necessary in order to determine post requirements based on the mandated activities to be undertaken following the establishment of the Institution (see also para. 10 above and para. 24 below). The Committee notes the nature of the mandate of the Independent Institution, the timeline for the establishment of the Institution, including the onboarding, and the subsequent commencement of the activities of the Institution. As such, the Committee recommends against the establishment of the following posts: Human**

**Rights Officer (P-4) in the Executive Office; Information Systems Officer (P-4) in the Search and Data Analysis Section; and two posts of Human Rights Officer (P-3 and P-4) in the Victim Participation and Support Section. The Committee also recommends the establishment of an Associate Human Rights Officer (P-2) in lieu of the post of Human Rights Officer (P-3) in the Search and Data Analysis Section.**

18. The Advisory Committee notes the availability of administrative support in the United Nations Office at Geneva and other entities located in Geneva to the Independent Institution (see also para. 10 above and para. 24 below). The Committee therefore recommends against the establishment of the posts of Administrative Officer (P-3) and Senior Human Resources Assistant (General Service (Principal level)) in the Administrative Services Section and recommends that the related functions be performed using existing resources of the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Institution and other entities in Geneva.

19. The Advisory Committee trusts that the recruitment of all posts in the Independent Institution will take into account the geographical representation of Member States and the rejuvenation of the Secretariat. The Committee underscores the importance of the Arabic language qualification in the recruitment of staff in order to ensure effective communication in all areas of operation with families, civil society organizations, other entities and stakeholders.

#### *Vacancy rate*

20. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the staffing proposal for 2024 was focused on recruiting a foundational team that included various essential roles reflecting a multidisciplinary approach and that the posts were planned to be filled through fixed-term appointments. The Committee was informed that the earliest fixed-term recruitments would near completion by April–May 2024 and that the onboarding of the 28 posts would be staggered throughout the year, with roles prioritized on the basis of evolving operational needs and priorities of the Institution. In addition, the Committee was informed that, to ensure operational continuity from the start-up phase to the official commencement of the Independent Institution in April, the plan was to issue temporary job openings to encumber key posts and maintain essential functions until the fixed-term recruitment processes were fully realized.

21. The Advisory Committee notes the date of 1 April 2024 for the establishment of the activities of the Independent Institution, the use of temporary job openings to encumber key posts, and that the resource estimate for posts is based on a 50 per cent vacancy rate over a nine-month period in accordance with the practice for newly established posts. In view of the start date of the activities of the Independent Institution, the Committee would have expected resource estimates based on a higher vacancy rate. The Committee trusts that further clarification on the vacancy rate will be provided to the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the present report.

22. Subject to its recommendation in paragraphs 17 and 18 above, the Advisory Committee recommends the approval of the proposed post resources. Any related non-post resources should be adjusted accordingly.

#### **Non-post resources**

23. The non-post requirements as detailed in paragraph 15 of the report of the Secretary-General include an amount of \$767,000 under non-post objects of expenditure under section 24, Human rights, for: consultants (\$70,500); travel of staff

(\$72,800); contractual services (\$217,000); general operating expenses (\$278,000); supplies and materials (\$1,800); furniture and equipment (\$22,400); and grants and contributions (\$104,500) (ibid., para. 15 and table 1). In his report, the Secretary-General indicates an amount of \$24,500 for other staff costs under section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, for the costs of documentation services for the new annual report, an addition to the documentation workload of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management starting in 2024 and annually thereafter of one pre-session document with an estimated word count of 8,500 words to be issued in all six official languages (ibid., paras. 11 and 16).

24. The requirements for general operating expenses in the amount of \$278,000 comprise the rental of premises at the United Nations Office at Geneva, the rental of meeting rooms during meetings at the Office and in field missions and cost-recovery services charged by the Office as the main service provider of the Independent Institution (ibid., para. 15 (d)). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was provided with the list of services and costs associated with the services to be provided by the Office and information on the proposed administrative support services to be provided by the Administrative Services Section of the Independent Institution. **In view of the date of 1 April 2024 for the establishment of the activities of the Independent Institution, and the need to identify further efficiencies while avoiding duplication of efforts, the Advisory Committee considers that the requirement is not fully justified and recommends a reduction of 10 per cent (\$27,800) to the proposed resources for general operating expenses (see also paras. 10, 17 and 18 above).**

25. The requirements for travel of staff (\$72,800) include three trips to the Middle East and three to Europe by three staff members to undertake interviews and meet with Syrian families, and two to New York by the Head of the Independent Institution and one staff member to hold consultations and meetings. The Advisory Committee notes that travel requirements are also included under grants and contributions (\$104,500) relating to travel of the Advisory Board and for 25 participants to attend a meeting of the civil society platform in Geneva (A/78/706, para. 15 (b) and (g)). **In view of the date of 1 April 2024 for the establishment of the activities of the Independent Institution, the uncertainty regarding the recruitment dates of new staff in 2024, and the contained cost of travel from Geneva to other European locations, the Advisory Committee considers that the proposed requirements for travel are not fully justified and, therefore, recommends a reduction of 10 per cent (\$17,700) to the total proposed resources for travel of staff and under grants and contributions. The Committee trusts that further efficiencies will be found during the initial phases of the establishment of the Institution by using all virtual communication tools.**

26. As regards requirements for furniture and equipment (\$22,400) to provide for the acquisition of mobile phones required due to the sensitivity of the data, the Advisory Committee was informed that staff members would require mobile device support to both maintain information security and mitigate harm to staff from secondary trauma under the overarching requirement of “do no harm”. The Committee was also informed that mobile phones represented the primary threat vector for actors involved in missing persons work and that the Independent Institution would uphold its responsibility to mitigate that risk for its staff, as well as victims and families. The Committee was also informed of the need to govern the use of Independent Institution information and monitor the use of all devices. Nevertheless, the Committee notes the absence of requirements for laptops or computers and the lack of information thereon.

27. Subject to its recommendations in paragraphs 22, 24 and 25 above, the Advisory Committee recommends the approval of the proposed non-post resources.

## **IV. Conclusion**

28. It is indicated in the report of the Secretary-General that the budgetary implications for 2024 resulting from the adoption of General Assembly resolution [77/301](#), for which no provisions were made in the programme budget for 2024, amount to \$2,991,700, net of staff assessment, and are summarized in table 2 (ibid., para. 19 and table 2). The actions requested of the General Assembly are set out in paragraph 20 of the report of the Secretary-General.

29. Subject to its observations and recommendations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly approve:

(a) Additional appropriations for 2024 in the amount of \$2,432,900, arising from General Assembly resolution [77/301](#), comprising \$24,500 under section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, and \$2,408,400 under section 24, Human rights;

(b) The establishment of 22 posts (1 Assistant Secretary-General, 1 D-1, 3 P-5, 4 P-4, 6 P-3, 5 P-2 and 2 General Service (Other level)) for the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, under section 24, Human rights;

(c) An additional appropriation in the amount of \$214,200 under section 36, Staff assessment, of the programme budget for 2024, arising from General Assembly resolution [77/301](#). The amount of \$214,200 would be offset by an equivalent increase of \$214,200 under income section 1, Income from staff assessment.

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