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Official Records

65th plenary meeting

Tuesday, 29 April 2025, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mr. Yang (Cameroon)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 7 (continued)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

Note by the Secretary-General (A/79/759)

The President: The General Assembly will now take up a request submitted by the Secretary-General contained in document A/79/759, relating to the election of a member of the International Court of Justice.

In his note, the Secretary-General informs the General Assembly of the resignation of Judge Nawaf Salam effective 14 January 2025. A vacancy in the Court therefore occurred on 14 January 2025. On 24 January 2025, the Security Council adopted resolution 2770 (2025), whereby it decided that the date of the election to fill the vacancy should be 27 May 2025.

The agenda of the seventy-ninth session of the Assembly does not contain a sub-item on the election of members of the International Court of Justice. The Secretary-General has therefore deemed it necessary to request, pursuant to rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the seventy-ninth session of an additional sub-item entitled “Election of a member of the International Court of Justice”, under agenda item 114, entitled “Elections to fill vacancies in principal organs”.

Owing to the nature of the sub-item, unless there is an objection, may I take it that the General Assembly agrees to waive the relevant provision of rule 40 of the rules of procedure, which would require a meeting of the General Committee on the question of the inclusion of this additional sub-item in the agenda?

It was so decided.

The President: May I take it that the General Assembly, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, wishes to include in the agenda of the current session an additional sub-item entitled “Election of a member of the International Court of Justice”, as a

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sub-item of agenda item 114, entitled “Elections to fill vacancies in principal organs”, under heading I, “Organizational, administrative and other matters”?

It was so decided (decision 79/505 B).

The President: May I also take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to consider this sub-item directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: I should like to inform members that this additional sub-item becomes sub-item (c) of agenda item 114.

Agenda item 32

Prevention of armed conflict

(a) Prevention of armed conflict

Note by the Secretary-General (A/79/799)

The President: In connection with agenda item 32, the Assembly has before it a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the eleventh report 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, circulated in document A/79/799.

Pursuant to resolution 73/182 of 17 December 2018, I now give the floor to Mr. Robert Petit, 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, to present the report of the Mechanism (see A/79/799).

Mr. Petit: It is an honour to brief the General Assembly for the first time under the agenda item “Prevention of armed conflict” since I took over my role 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. I particularly welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Asaad Al-Shaibani, Minister for Foreign Affairs, at this debate.

The events of 8 December 2024 mark a pivotal moment in Syria’s history. As the Secretary-General said, it is a flame of hope that must not be extinguished. The end of more than 13 years of conflict and 50 years of authoritarian rule constitutes an opportunity to build a future Syria on justice and the rule of law. Those are the founding principles enshrined in the 2016 resolution that created the Mechanism in this very Assembly (resolution 71/248). Member States of the Assembly called for credible and comprehensive accountability to be ensured for international crimes committed in Syria in order to bring about reconciliation and sustainable peace. The changes we witnessed in December 2024 constitute a pivotal moment not only for Syria and Syrians but for the world, at a time when impunity prevails in many situations where atrocities are committed and when the international legal order is under threat.

The mass atrocities and human rights violations committed in Syria dominated headlines for years, until they were overshadowed by other events, and it seemed that impunity had prevailed and justice had lost. For 14 years, despite the selfless and dedicated commitment of Syrians to documenting their suffering and demanding accountability, hope for justice waned. One bright light was the will of Member States to create the Mechanism, and another was provided by those members who, through universal jurisdiction, doggedly pursued accountability. Now, a new reality

can give rise to the fulfilment of that hope. For those reasons, I am eager to hear from His Excellency Mr. Al-Shaibani and everyone in today's debate how we can address the situation in Syria together. At the Mechanism, we are ready to play our part as a partner going forward.

On 21 December 2024, exactly eight years to the day since the creation of the Mechanism, my team and I conducted a visit to Syria for the very first time. That initial diplomatic engagement started a constructive dialogue in exchange with the Syrian authorities — in particular with His Excellency Mr. Al-Shaibani and his team — which continues to this day. We are grateful for the warm and welcoming reception, the expressed commitment to working with us, the designation of a focal point and the ongoing dialogue. The Mechanism requires permission from the authorities to operate in Syria. Our mandate is unique. To support criminal accountability efforts, our work must withstand the scrutiny of a criminal judicial process. That is the same approach we follow with all Member States of the United Nations, with full respect for their sovereignty, whether regarding the collection and preservation of evidence or the conduct of witness interviews. During my visits, we observed massive volumes of documentation urgently in need of preservation, including the original Caesar files. They constitute evidence of the industrial scale of the use of torture against individuals whose abuse and ultimate deaths were documented to give them a veneer of legitimacy.

We welcome the measures taken by the authorities to protect such data and to restrict and regulate access to sites that hold valuable information and evidence that could help to demonstrate the criminal liability of those individuals most responsible. We also welcome the plan to appoint a transitional justice commission and a missing persons commission to facilitate Syrian-led dialogue on existing and future justice opportunities. In that context, I would like to stress that the Mechanism is coordinating closely with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and I am particularly pleased that my colleagues Commissioner Hanny Megally and Ms. Karla Quintana are present here today. While we have separate mandates, they are mutually reinforcing and complementary. I am personally grateful for the Commission's documentation and public reporting under difficult circumstances over the years. I also strongly welcome the creation of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons, and we remain committed to assisting it in its work going forward.

The Mechanism was established to advance justice and accountability for the most serious crimes under international law. We are well placed to assess and preserve evidence, interview witnesses and conduct data analyses, as well as other investigative activities that directly support existing and future justice efforts. If of interest to the authorities and the international community, the Mechanism could also offer recommendations, expertise and best practice to support a review of the legal framework and the applicable criminal law standards. We would like to learn more from the Syrian authorities about how we could best contribute and add value, in accordance with our mandate and terms of reference. Subject to agreeing on a way forward consistent with those requirements and ensuring that the necessary resources can be secured, the authorities and the Mechanism could explore how to support and coordinate, with all stakeholders, the process of transitional justice. That could include considerations related to digitizing evidence, creating databases, advancing international judicial cooperation, facilitating the trainings of the judiciary, aligning Syria's criminal code and other procedures with international standards and developing systems for witness and victim support.

For many years, comprehensive justice for Syria has been blocked, but the General Assembly did not give up on justice and created the Mechanism to ensure readiness for accountability opportunities, whenever and wherever they arose. We

have been diligently carrying out that important mandate over the past seven years, painstakingly constructing our central repository and conducting our structural investigation to create essential building blocks for justice. We developed an agile framework that allowed us to support many existing opportunities, while still building foundations for the day when comprehensive justice would be a meaningful prospect.

Despite serious resource constraints, the Mechanism has made substantial progress across multiple fronts. In 2024 alone, we conducted 154 collection activities, expanding our central repository to 280 terabytes of data. That evidence has directly supported successful prosecutions and investigations in multiple jurisdictions and led to arrest warrants for several perpetrators. To date, the Mechanism has received a total of 466 requests for assistance from 16 jurisdictions, related to 321 distinct investigations into crimes committed in Syria by a wide range of perpetrators. Notably, we supported the French investigations that led to arrest warrants for Bashar Al-Assad and his brother Maher, along with eight other senior officials, for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Again, in France, we also assisted the investigation that led to France's first convictions for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Syria. Ali Mamlouk, Jamil Hassan and Abdel Salam Mahmoud were convicted in absentia to life imprisonment in May 2024. In November 2024, with the Mechanism's support to the investigation, a United States court charged Jamil Hassan and Abdel Salam Mahmoud for conspiracy to commit war crimes. The Mechanism also contributed an analytical brief to a case against Syria for torture, which started in December before another United States court. The German judiciary has benefited from the Mechanism's contribution to cases, which led to a new conviction pronounced in December 2024, and is currently conducting five trials concerning crimes against humanity or war crimes committed in Syria, with the active support of the Mechanism.

The Mechanism also contributed to the judicial proceedings that led to the very first convictions for genocide committed in Syria, by a Dutch court in December 2024, and a Swedish court in February 2025. We continue to support other trials scheduled for this year in France, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, and in additional countries that we cannot disclose at the moment. We continue to progress our structural investigation through the work we are doing on crimes committed by the Al-Assad regime and by investigating crimes committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or Da'esh. Last summer, we finalized our comprehensive report on the recruitment and use of child soldiers by Da'esh, a report that was shared with certain jurisdictions. We also continue our investigations into the unlawful attacks on the civilian population, including through the use of chemical weapons.

In December 2024, for the first time, we publicly released a report — a redacted version of an analytical report — on the former regime's detention system. The report, based on more than 300 witness interviews, forensic medical evidence, Government documentation, an expert report and other evidence demonstrates patterns of torture, ill treatment and related violations across more than 100 Government facilities of the former regime. Completion of an Arabic version of the report is under way. The unredacted version of the report has also been made available to the proceedings before the International Court of Justice, initiated by the Netherlands and Canada, concerning Syria's obligations under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

At the heart of each document, of each testimony and of each analysis are people — many lost, many who have survived — each with a right to justice. We remain committed to our victim- and survivor-centred approach and recent efforts, including a review of our gender strategy, to further address the specific challenges faced by women detainees, highlighted in our detention report. We also remain committed to implementing our strategy on children and youth and to initiating further external consultations on the strategy, with experts from across the United

Nations system and non-governmental organizations, as well as to the tagging of information related to the missing persons in our systems, helping to clarify the fate of those thousands who have disappeared during the conflict.

Our resource situation was already challenging before the events of December 2024 and the additional constraints faced by the United Nations today. Our regular budget has not increased since 2020, despite our growing workload and the changed realities in Syria. We are facing a funding gap of \$7.5 million for 2025, which may increase once we better understand the situation in Syria and have clarity on the extent to which we can conduct operations there, in furtherance of our mandate. In 2024, we had to cut 18 positions, affecting our work — investigations slowed down, assistance was delayed, and some justice opportunities were missed. We call on States to support our work by ensuring that we have a sustainable budget that duly responds to the demands we face. We encourage States to consider making voluntary contributions, ideally multi-year commitments, so we can maintain our level of support and react expeditiously when new opportunities arise, including operations in Syria, with the permission of the authorities.

The Mechanism has been mandated to work with existing and future jurisdictions that operate in accordance with international criminal law standards and the best practices and policies of the United Nations. The transitional justice process must be inclusive and Syrian-led and -owned. They must define what justice means for them, whether at the national, regional or international level. The Mechanism is committed to cooperating. Although they must be Syrian-led and -owned, such efforts could — and should — be supported by the international community. We have learned how to address situations of mass atrocities, from Rwanda to former Yugoslavia, from Cambodia to Liberia. None of those processes were perfect. Each was a response to unique and complex challenges. They cannot and must not be seen as a blueprint for Syria but can help to pave the way forward.

We must all recognize the enormity of the challenges now facing the authorities in Syria and the stark reality that the needs of the living must be addressed as a priority. It would be futile and indeed self-defeating not to recognize that accountability can occur only if it is part of a holistic response to those concrete challenges. The support of the international community must therefore be comprehensive and responsive to Syria's needs and priorities.

However, as His Excellency Minister Al-Shaibani himself told me, victims must believe that there is hope for justice — otherwise, violence may appear to be the only remedy. In turn, such violence may well threaten the fragile state of the country, directly affecting those in Syria and those who may consider returning. The Mechanism stands by to contribute. Justice in Syria is no longer an abstract aspiration and a distant political goal. It is a concrete opportunity. Let us not lose this momentum but seize it fully.

The President: I begin by welcoming Mr. Robert Petit, 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. I thank him for briefing the General Assembly.

Let us acknowledge that this briefing takes place against a completely new background in Syria. Fourteen years of brutal conflict and violence in Syria have come to an end. The toll has been immense. Gross violations of human rights were committed. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost. More than 14 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety. The scale of destruction across the country, including to historical heritage sites, has been immense. It is now a new era in Syria. Syrians now face the task of establishing a stable, peaceful and inclusive future for everyone. All Syrians must work together to restore peace,

rebuild institutions and promote inclusive development. The human rights and dignity of all Syrians, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation or gender, must be respected and upheld. This transition will not be easy. While the moment holds promise, it also demands caution.

In order to move forward, we must support efforts grounded in inclusivity, justice and reconciliation. Without accountability for the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria, it will not be possible to ensure long-term stability, peace and security. Those responsible for human rights violations must be held accountable. That must extend to violations committed from March 2011 through December 2024 and to those committed subsequently.

As Syrians begin rebuilding, the support of the international community will be critical. That includes the support of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism. Established by the General Assembly, the Mechanism plays a vital role in collecting, preserving and analysing evidence of the most serious crimes committed in Syria since 2011. That work remains indispensable to ensuring accountability and laying the groundwork for justice and reconciliation in Syria's future.

We must match words with action — through sustained engagement, coordinated assistance and constructive diplomacy. Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity must be protected and respected by all. We must remain focused and committed, as Syrians take steps toward a more just, secure and united future.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Shaibani (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am honoured to address the General Assembly today, at the first meeting of the Assembly on Syria after the fall of the Al-Assad regime. I eagerly desired to be here in person to express my deep appreciation for what the General Assembly has done for Syria over the years, at a time when divisions prevented the Security Council from adopting decisive resolutions on Syria. It was the Assembly that bore that momentous responsibility.

It is the Assembly's concern that contributed to the establishment of unprecedented United Nations mechanisms, such as 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 has kept Syria and Syrians present in the global conscience, condemned the crimes of the Al-Assad regime and ensured that the world did not turn its back on our people. Unfortunately, the role of the United Nations in Syria over the past years has been characterized by indecision and inability to cope with the scale of the humanitarian and political catastrophe. It has not been able to impose binding resolutions to protect civilians, nor has it been able to advance a serious political process. United Nations efforts have been limited to crisis management rather than conflict resolution. Moreover, rivalry between countries has weakened some of the Organization's initiatives, especially in the humanitarian sector, and affected its neutrality and effectiveness.

Today, in this meeting on the prevention of armed conflict, Syria stands as a living testimony to the devastating cost of war and a stark reminder of the urgent need for collective action to prevent the recurrence of violence now, tomorrow and forever. We welcome the report of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (see A/79/799) and recognize it as an essential step in the process of accountability, which alone can prevent future conflicts.

I thank Mr. Petit for his comprehensive briefing and for his most recent visit to Damascus, where we had serious and constructive discussions, which will continue until we find the best means of joint cooperation.

Our experience in Syria has taught us that avoiding armed conflict is impossible without accountability and that accountability is not limited to courts and judges, but is an integral part of a national framework for transitional justice aimed at reconciliation, reparations and genuine efforts to heal wounds and meet rightful and legitimate demands, so that they do not turn into grievances that can devolve into the thorny and bitter path of violence.

However, given the complex and interwoven nature of the crimes committed in Syria over a long period of time, as we recognize the importance of moving forward, we also emphasize the need for that process to be carried out with careful deliberation and the participation of all parties, especially victims and survivors, to ensure that the process is constructive and sustainable and that it is not counterproductive.

We regard the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism as an integral part of a broader transitional justice system that not only addresses the crimes of the past, but also lays the foundation upon which justice, stability and reconciliation will be built, so that our children and grandchildren can enjoy a peaceful and prosperous future.

Our path to this new phase has been long and painful. For more than 54 years, Syria has suffered under tyranny and oppression, over a long era in which voices were silenced, dreams were killed, ambitions were smothered, and deep scars were left on our collective memory. Deep grievances were only exacerbated by the passage of time. The grievances that erupted into nationwide protests in 2011 were not spontaneous but rather the product of decades of injustice and repression, including the atrocities committed in the 1980s, which were never confronted or addressed.

The failure to address past crimes, whether at the local or international level, allowed the seeds of conflict to take root and grow, ultimately leading to 14 years of brutal repression and war. Therefore, we in the new Syrian Government are fully committed to transitional justice, not only to account for the mistakes and sins of the past, but to build a system of governance that prevents future conflicts before they begin. To achieve that grand goal, we will soon establish a transitional justice organ and another special entity to investigate the fate of hundreds of thousands of missing persons, in close coordination with the international mechanisms established by the Assembly to address that pressing issue.

However, there are immediate and structural drivers that have the potential to push Syria back into chaos if not addressed immediately. Extreme poverty, food insecurity and the destruction of livelihoods all create favourable conditions for the spread of criminal activity, radicalization and renewed armed conflict.

Allow me to put it more simply. When people lose their homes, their jobs and their hopes of rebuilding their lives, war becomes an almost inevitable tragedy. Therefore, preventing conflicts does not only involve transitional justice. It also involves economic recovery and reconstruction. Against that backdrop, unfortunately, the obsolete sanctions imposed during Al-Assad's time weaken the country's ability to prevent future conflicts.

Those sanctions no longer target those responsible for instability. Rather, they hinder our ability to lay the necessary foundations to achieve a lasting peace. Those sanctions were imposed to weaken the Al-Assad regime but, following the fall of that regime, leaving those sanctions in place only hampers Syria's economic resurgence and hinders the work of the new Government.

Without the ability to create jobs, support reconstruction or provide essential services, Syria remains vulnerable to the danger of once again being plunged into a cycle of armed conflict. Such armed conflict would not have ideological or political motives but, rather, would be the expression, quite simply, of economic disenchantment.

Those that insist on imposing sanctions today are only worsening the injustices of the past. Continuing to leave sanctions in place hinders the State's ability to pay wages, transfer funds and finance transitional justice programmes. Sanctions also hinder the efforts of civil society organizations to establish themselves in Syria or to transfer necessary funds to their employees within Syrian territory. Leaving sanctions in place also chokes legitimate trade and paves the way for the spread of criminal gangs, illicit trading networks and extremist groups.

If our common goal is to prevent conflict, we must immediately remove all obstacles which undermine Syria's stability. On behalf of Syria's people, we beseech the Assembly to heed our request to lift all sanctions imposed during the Al-Assad regime. Please do that now without delay. Keeping those sanctions in place will only worsen the suffering of the Syrian people, worsen the economic crisis and allow violence and conflicts to spiral.

Syria is at a crossroads. We have taken major strides towards stability. We have freed political prisoners, who suffered so much in the Al-Assad regime's prisons. We have preserved the State's institutions. We have engaged in national dialogues. We have opened up our country in unprecedented ways, including to human rights mechanisms at the level of the United Nations. Those mechanisms include 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 and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) fact-finding mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. We have also worked with the OPCW to deal with remaining issues regarding the chemical programmes of the fallen regime.

We have also formed an inclusive Government. We have united the armed factions in a united national army. We have reached historic agreements with the Kurds to prevent any conflict in the future. And when violence erupted in the coastal regions, at the hands of the remaining components of the sectarian regime, we responded immediately by establishing Civil Peace Committees and training investigation teams. All of that was acknowledged by the Human Rights Council resolution adopted unanimously last month.

We have done everything we can to prevent conflict. However, without real support for our economy and our political process to avoid new tensions, our efforts may be at risk as a result of factors beyond our control.

There is another threat to Syria's stability, namely continued aggression and attacks against our sovereignty. We have clearly explained that the new Syria will not be a source of instability for any regional neighbour, including Israel. However, repeated military aggressions on Syrian territory constitute a direct threat to our regional security and undermine our efforts to achieve stability in our country. Those attacks may also fuel new acts and feelings of injustice that could worsen and lead to new conflicts.

Air strikes and incursions are flagrant violations of international law. They threaten stability not only in Syria but throughout the region. We therefore further urge the Assembly to tackle that threat before it leads to greater instability in the long term.

By way of conclusion, I wish to recall those who in the darkest hours of Syria's history stood shoulder to shoulder with its people. The representatives of the international community stood on the side of justice when they stood shoulder to shoulder with us. We want them to support us in the future, not just towards justice, but in our permanent endeavours to produce peace and prevent conflicts. Please lift the unilateral sanctions that have become outdated and obsolete.

Syria must chart its future through stability and reconciliation and not through the past tragedies. There must be no return to armed conflict in our territory or any others. We cannot undertake that journey alone. Preventing conflict requires international support and comprehensive cooperation. There needs to be a shared conviction that a stable Syria serves everybody's interests. Let us work together to open a new chapter for Syria — a chapter of peace, prosperity and stability, a chapter in which war will never re-emerge. Let us work together to create the future and heal the wounds of the past, and leave sanctions behind so we can usher in our future.

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

Mr. Cannizzaro (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its Member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Monaco and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

We welcome today's important debate on the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism 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 underscores the continued commitment of States Members of the United Nations to ensuring justice for the most serious crimes committed in Syria. We would like to thank the Head of the Mechanism, Mr. Petit, for his leadership since assuming his position in May 2024, and for the eleventh report to the General Assembly (see A/79/799).

This debate comes at a historic moment for Syria. As also stated in the report, as we just heard, following the end of Bashar Al-Assad's rule in December 2024, we are witnessing a unique opportunity to deliver on our collective commitment to comprehensive justice and accountability, which are core conditions for sustainable peace and reconciliation in Syria. The report highlights significant positive developments, including the Mechanism's first visit to Damascus in December 2024 and its constructive initial engagement with the caretaker authorities.

We call on the Syrian transitional Government to formally authorize the Mechanism to start operating in Syria in accordance with its mandate. That would be a crucial step towards maximizing the Mechanism's operational work, including for preserving vital evidence at risk of loss or destruction.

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

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

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

The Mechanism continues to play an indispensable role in supporting accountability efforts. The continued increase in requests speaks to the valuable role the Mechanism plays in the pursuit of accountability. We welcome the continued successful prosecutions in multiple jurisdictions, including several EU member States, which have been supported by the Mechanism's work. In that regard, we urge all States to enhance cooperation and engagement with the Mechanism, including by facilitating access to information and evidence and providing operational support for witness protection.

Alongside those achievements, the report also highlights persistent challenges that require our attention. We are deeply concerned about the funding and resource limitations faced by the Mechanism. Despite the General Assembly urging the Secretary-General to include further necessary resources to address the Mechanism's significantly increased workload since 2020, there has been no increase in its regular budget resources. The exhaustion of the trust fund in 2024 has led to staffing cuts and operational constraints, which affect the Mechanism's capacity to fulfil its mandate effectively, particularly at this critical juncture. This is indeed the moment to step up our collective efforts. It is a crucial moment for Syria, and we must increase our support to the Mechanism and to accountability mechanisms in general, as fundamental elements of a successful transition. We thus call on all States to ensure support to the Mechanism with increased funding through the regular budget and complementary voluntary contributions.

We also reiterate the importance of referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court, and we reaffirm our support for the proceedings initiated by the Netherlands and Canada before the International Court of Justice regarding breaches of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

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

The fall of the Al-Assad regime marks a historic moment and an opportunity for the Syrian people to decide the future of their country. In this critical period, the EU stands with the Syrian people, both within Syria and across the region.

Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, the EU and its member States have been the largest humanitarian donor to Syrians and have mobilized over €35.3 billion to help Syria and its neighbouring countries address the consequences of the war. To help the reconstruction, the European Union has also recently suspended a number of restrictive measures. At the recent ninth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, the EU gathered key regional and international partners together with the Syrian Arab Republic. On that occasion, we reaffirmed our support for a peaceful, inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned transition, in which both domestic and international affairs are conducted in full respect of international law and with justice, reconciliation and reconstruction as fundamental elements.

We will thus remain at the forefront of the fight against impunity in Syria, supporting efforts to gather and preserve evidence of atrocities, regardless of who may have committed them. We will continue to support the Mechanism, as well as the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian

Arab Republic and the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and we welcome the cooperation among those complementary actors. We also support the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria.

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

Ms. Kalkku (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the eight Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Finland.

First of all, we want to express our full support for the creation of a stable, democratic, inclusive and prosperous Syria. Since the end of Al-Assad's rule in December 2024, there has been a unique opportunity to promote justice and truth for the many people that have lost their loved ones and to ensure accountability for the most serious crimes committed in Syria in one of the bloodiest armed conflicts in recent history. The fall of the Al-Assad regime marks a pivotal moment for the Syrian people to shape the future of their country. We stand with the Syrian people and reaffirm our commitment to support a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led, inclusive transition.

Mr. Da Cruz (Angola), Vice-President, took the Chair.

After 14 years of brutal civil war marked with wide-scale atrocities, human rights violations and abuses against the people in Syria, the opportunity for justice must be seized. Accountability for serious violations of international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, is a precondition for sustainable peace and development. Perpetrators of atrocity crimes must be brought to justice, not only to ensure justice for victims, but also to prevent and deter future violations.

We warmly welcome the transitional Government's facilitation of the timely visit of 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, Mr. Robert Petit, to Syria in December 2024, to ensure cooperation with the new authorities and civil society representatives and to emphasize the importance of preserving evidence.

We commend the determined efforts of Mr. Robert Petit and the Mechanism, as shown in the eleventh report (see A/79/799), presented to the General Assembly today, on the investigation of the most serious crimes committed in Syria. Since its creation in 2016, the Mechanism has been documenting, monitoring and publishing reports on abuses and violations. Its work stands as a beacon of hope for justice and accountability in the region. The meticulous documentation and cooperation with national and international judicial bodies underscore the unwavering commitment to upholding the principles of international law and the fight against impunity.

The Nordic-Baltic countries highly appreciate all the work undertaken by the Mechanism. We welcome the Mechanism's victim- and survivor-centred approach and its close cooperation with civil society. Both are vital to advancing inclusive justice and ensuring that the voices of those most affected are central to the process. We remain active supporters of the Mechanism.

We welcome the preparations for a cooperation framework with the Syrian Arab Republic to deploy and conduct operations in the country, including the decision to deploy a liaison officer and efforts to open a field office in Damascus. We trust the

Syrian transitional Government will enable the Mechanism to operate in Syria in accordance with its mandate.

The Nordic-Baltic countries welcome the efforts undertaken by many States to close the accountability gap in Syria through their national jurisdictions. The international community should work together towards a longer-term and holistic solution to bring justice for victims. The Mechanism was not created to achieve these aims alone. We call on all States to cooperate in sharing information with the Mechanism and in providing it with the necessary operational support.

We also encourage the Syrian authorities to take strong action in pursuing accountability for the crimes committed during the Al-Assad regime, including holding Al-Assad accountable. We encourage the Syrian Arab Republic to accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

The establishment of the Mechanism by the General Assembly in 2016 is an important reminder of the power of the Assembly to step in when the Security Council is unable or unwilling to act. The General Assembly must be ready to fill the gap created by the use of the veto, in line with the veto initiative.

The Nordic-Baltic countries remain convinced that sustainable and predictable resources for the Mechanism can be guaranteed only through adequate funding from the United Nations regular budget. Voluntary funding is also necessary but cannot replace assessed contributions. We call on all Member States to ensure that the Mechanism has the necessary resources to carry out its vitally important mandate.

The magnitude of the atrocities in Syria under the Al-Assad regime has shocked us over the course of a decade and has served as a painful example of the limits of international justice. It is imperative that we change that. Syria should not be a symbol of impunity any longer. We should seize this historic opportunity to work together and stand united in our pursuit of justice.

Let us honour the victims by ensuring that those responsible for the most serious crimes in Syria are held accountable. Together we can make a difference and extend our support for building a peaceful and prosperous future for Syria, grounded in accountability and international law.

Mrs. Gregoire-van Haaren (Kingdom of the Netherlands): The Benelux countries align themselves with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

On behalf of the Benelux countries — Belgium, Luxembourg and my own country, the Kingdom of the Netherlands — I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Robert Petit and his team for the comprehensive briefing on the activities, priorities and 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 (IIIM), and for the submission of its annual report (see A/79/799) to the General Assembly. It comes at a pivotal moment.

We would also like to welcome the engagement between the IIIM and the Syrian authorities. We witnessed with great relief the fall of the Al-Assad regime, and we understand that there are many different priorities that now have to be taken into account in the path to lasting peace. While this change in leadership offers a new perspective for Syria and the Syrian people, we must not forget the crimes of the past. We stand ready to support the Syrian interim authorities in their quest for justice and reconciliation.

The Benelux countries welcomed the establishment of a transitional justice commission. Together with our partners in the international community, we remain steadfast in our commitment to accountability and transitional justice as prerequisites for political stability and sustainable peace. In that context, we are deeply concerned

about reports of ongoing violence in various regions of Syria, most notably in the coastal region of Syria, in early March. Perpetrators must be held accountable in accordance with international norms and standards.

The Benelux countries emphasize the importance of continuing national and international efforts to ensure accountability for the atrocities committed by the Al-Assad regime. An example of international efforts is when, in 2022, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, joined by Canada, invoked Syria's responsibility for human rights violations, under international law, for breaches of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We welcome the visit of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to Damascus earlier this year and his discussion with the interim authorities on the fight against impunity. The work of the IIIM is as crucial as ever in ensuring that justice is served. By means of significant collaboration with the Syrian civil society organizations, and in other ways, the IIIM has proven to be an entity that ensures that the most serious crimes committed in Syria are not forgotten and do not go unpunished.

The Benelux countries would also like to commend the cooperation between the IIIM and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. We support the decision by the heads of both institutions, together with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, to cooperate and avoid duplication of work, including through the sharing of information held by the IIIM, with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons. I would like to reiterate that we fully support the positive engagement between the Syrian interim authorities and the IIIM thus far and wish for that constructive collaboration to continue and further materialize in future.

The Benelux countries have been proud supporters of the IIIM since its inception. We will continue to call on all States to cooperate with and support the IIIM to ensure that evidence of serious crimes is collected, analysed and preserved for future prosecution. If there ever was a time to do so, it is now.

Mr. Albanai (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to welcome His Excellency Mr. Asaad Al-Shaibani, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the sisterly Syrian Arab Republic. We wish him every success in his work. Allow me also to express our deepest appreciation to Mr. Robert Petit, 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 his efforts in preparing the eleventh annual report (see A/79/799) before us today.

It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The GCC countries stress the importance and vitality of comprehensive transitional justice in achieving national reconciliation and preventing armed conflicts. It provides an important way forward towards justice and the prevention of such violations. In that vein, despite good regional and international initiatives seeking to provide a conducive environment to address such violations, we stress that comprehensive transitional justice in Syria cannot be achieved without meeting the needs and aspirations of the Syrian people, or without providing all forms of humanitarian and economic support, or without building the capacities of the Syrian State, especially in the light of the deteriorating situation in Syria, which dangerously affects the humanitarian response. A 30 per cent decrease in the staff of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is expected in Syria. In addition, 50 per cent of its 122 social centres are at risk of closing by next summer. A number of non-governmental organizations, especially in north-east Syria, are expected to face a severe funding shortage, threatening the closure of hospitals serving more than 200,000 Syrians in Deir ez-Zor Governorate. More than 170 health facilities will

lose their funding in north-west Syria by the end of next month. Therefore, there is an urgent need for further support for Syria.

We stress that the continuation of sanctions against Syria impedes the aspirations of the Syrian people to achieve development, reconstruction and stability. We once again call for economically empowering Syria and lifting sanctions. We also call upon all partners and relevant organizations and States to provide all forms of support to the brotherly Syrian people. We stress that our States and the GCC will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Syria.

We reiterate that we welcome the steps taken to ensure the safety of civilians and to stem the bloodshed, as well as to achieve national reconciliation and preserve Syrian State institutions and resources. We also welcome the decision to dismantle militias and armed factions and to place all weapons under State control. Those steps are essential to preserving security and stability in Syria and to restoring the country's regional role and international stance.

In conclusion, we renew our support for regional and international efforts to promote security and stability and to preserve Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity in order to achieve the aspirations of the Syrian people and to establish a more stable and prosperous Syria.

We stress the need to fully commit to the principle of sovereign equality among States and respect for the principles of international law, especially international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We call for the principle of accountability to be the foundation of any national reconciliation process.

The international community today has a historic opportunity to decisively break the vicious cycle of violence once and for all in the Syrian Arab Republic and in every other armed conflict.

Ms. Chan Valverde (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica welcomes the eleventh report 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 (see A/79/799). We thank Mr. Robert Petit and his distinguished team for their meticulous and arduous work over the past year.

The fall of Bashar Al-Assad's regime has opened a new chapter of justice for a people that has suffered too much. The historic visit of the Head of the Mechanism to Damascus in December 2024 stands as an unprecedented opportunity in the fight against impunity and strengthens the prospect of effective accountability for all of the most serious violations of international law that have occurred on Syrian territory.

At this turning point in Syria's history, allow me to offer some thoughts on the past, present and future of the Mechanism.

The Mechanism's legacy is already written in the indelible ink of justice. Over the past decade, its meticulous compilation and classification work has allowed courts in 16 jurisdictions around the world to prosecute crimes of torture, war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated in Syria. Particularly significant judicial progress has been made in a large number of States. Each compiled criminal file represents not only judicial evidence but also the possibility of truth for those who have lost everything except their right to justice.

We note with hope the openness shown by the interim authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic so far. Costa Rica vehemently appeals to the interim authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic to maintain and deepen their dialogue with the Mechanism and to facilitate its work on Syrian territory to obtain, record and preserve evidence in all cases of mass human rights violations.

That meticulous documentation process lays the foundation for a future of reconciliation. The compilation of data and testimonies directly benefits victims and their families and provides them with a path to justice, a justice they so richly deserve. Likewise, that body of evidence strengthens the work of international tribunals in the many cases open around the world.

For that vital work to continue uninterrupted, Costa Rica makes an urgent appeal to the Assembly. The financial future of the Mechanism must be guaranteed without delay. It is essential to provide the necessary funds for its critical work, especially in order to establish a permanent office in Damascus to facilitate the Mechanism's operations and to allow for the collection and digitization of evidence before time irretrievably destroys it. That is not an optional investment. It is a moral, legal and practical imperative that cannot be ignored or postponed if we are faithfully committed to justice.

Costa Rica also welcomes the Mechanism's coordination with civil society organizations and with other agencies of the United Nations system, particularly the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, which is headed by Ms. Karla Quintana. She will bring to the Syrian people the invaluable experience of our Latin American region, experience, that is, on the painful path of clarifying enforced disappearances and shedding light on them.

Since the creation of the Mechanism, Costa Rica has reiterated its unwavering commitment to the fight against impunity. The atrocities perpetuated in Syria since 2011 cannot and must not go unpunished. Victims and their families not only deserve justice; they deserve the dignity of healing the wounds opened by years of unspeakable suffering. Every documented testimony, every piece of evidence preserved, represents a step towards healing a fractured nation.

The Syrian people have the inalienable right to write a new chapter in their history, a genuine process of national reconciliation, a future in which sustainable peace, comprehensive justice and inclusive progress are not mere aspirations but everyday realities.

Costa Rica's support for the Mechanism transcends diplomacy. It embodies our deepest held conviction that justice is not a luxury that can be postponed. Rather, it is the fundamental foundation upon which any lasting peace must be built.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome His Excellency, Mr. Asaad Hassan Al-Shaibani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic. We thank His Excellency for his important participation in today's session, which reflects the interest of the Syrian Government in effectively cooperating with the United Nations and the international community. We would also like to thank Mr. Robert Petit, 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 eleventh report of the Mechanism (see A/79/799). We express our appreciation to him and his team for their valuable efforts.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The prevention of armed conflicts is a key pillar of Qatar's foreign policy, which it seeks to achieve through various international efforts, including through mediation and preventive diplomacy and by supporting justice and accountability. In that context, the State of Qatar has played a leading role, along with the Principality of Liechtenstein, in the efforts that led to the establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism in accordance with resolution 71/248.

Today the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism is of particular importance as a key entity that supports and strengthens accountability efforts in the Syrian Arab Republic. We welcome the Mechanism's response to the positive developments in Syria, including through a field visit to Syria in December, its first field visit to Syria since it was established eight years ago, and positive engagement and constructive discussions. In that regard, we commend the Syrian Government's responsiveness and cooperation with the Mechanism as part of its clear commitment to justice and accountability, which facilitates the Mechanism's fulfilment of its mandate. Furthermore, the Syrian Government has taken practical and tangible steps to engage and cooperate with various international and United Nations bodies, which demonstrates a desire to play a positive role at various levels to ensure security, stability and human rights.

We welcome the progress made by the Mechanism in the implementation of its strategic plan, in particular the strengthening of its capacity to handle, process and analyse large amounts of complex information and evidence within the framework of strategic investigative tracks and prioritizing data integrity and accuracy. We welcome the continued interaction with civil society and various relevant actors to support conservation, collection and analysis, as well as cooperation with relevant international bodies, in particular the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the use of the archives of the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and its engagement with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. We commend the Mechanism for reaffirming its commitment to comprehensive justice for all, to the principles of impartiality and independence and following a victim and survivor-centred approach.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our commitment to continue supporting the Mechanism, based on its commitment to the principles of accountability and ending impunity for core international crimes and violations of international law, as well as our support for the brotherly Syrian people and Government in achieving their aspirations for justice, the rule of law, reconciliation, stability and sustainable peace.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): When I introduced from this rostrum, in December 2016, the text that was adopted as resolution 71/248 and that proposed the establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 (IIIM), which quickly became known as the IIIM, the proposal was met with fierce resistance from the then-delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic and a small number of other delegations, notably the Russian Federation (see A/71/PV.66). Already at the time and even more so in the coming years, the political will of the membership to ensure accountability for the most serious crimes committed in Syria prevailed. The Mechanism was established with success and considerable practical effectiveness, and its financing was soon moved to the regular budget of the United Nations.

Today we are witnessing for the first time the support of Syria, expressed by Foreign Minister Al-Shaibani, a truly historic moment for the General Assembly and the people of Syria, as well as the cause of justice. Seeing this expression of support for the rule of law is truly gratifying and could not be more timely.

We have witnessed long years of mass atrocities and the commission of the most serious crimes in Syria. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed, millions have fled their homes in search of safety, and countless families are left in the devastating uncertainty of not knowing the fate of their missing loved ones. We support in that respect the work of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in

the Syrian Arab Republic and welcome the presence of the Head of the Institution, Ms. Karla Quintana, in this Hall today.

We welcome the end of the regime of Bashar Al-Assad in late December 2024, whose rule brought untold suffering to Syria and its people. In this significant moment of change, we once again emphasize the right of the Syrian people to live in peace and in freedom, in a country that is governed by them and for them.

A sustainable peace in Syria must be achieved through a Syrian-owned, United Nations-supported process rooted in inclusivity and diversity. Preserving Syria's territorial integrity and its rich cultural legacy are key components for long-lasting peace, which entails the protection of the rights of all minorities and the meaningful participation of women at all levels of decision-making, reflecting the full diversity of Syrian society.

To support a future of justice, reconciliation and freedom for Syria, accountability for the most serious crimes is crucial in this time of transition. The end of the Al-Assad regime offers a unique window of opportunity to advance justice and fulfil our joint commitment to comprehensive accountability. The IIIM, along with the other accountability mechanisms, plays a crucial role in a rapidly evolving context, in which there is a high risk that evidence may be destroyed and opportunities for justice lost. We must seize this moment when justice is not only necessary, but also finally possible in ways it has not been for many years, but also to express support for the authorities in Syria, by considering the gradual lifting of sanctions that are still in place.

We welcome the recent collaborative efforts by the Syrian authorities towards ensuring a presence of the IIIM on the ground and encourage the prompt development of operational capacity. The IIIM has responded to an unprecedented demand from competent jurisdictions, building on its investigative advancements to offer a growing range of services for criminal investigations and prosecutions. Liechtenstein commends the IIIM's work to date and thanks Mr. Robert Petit for his capable leadership.

Recognizing the importance of its work, we have contributed \$150,000 in voluntary funding to the IIIM in late 2024. We have done so owing to the exceptional opportunity we are given, while we will continue to ask that the needs of the Mechanism be met from within the regular budget. The recent trajectory has been negative and forced the Mechanism to scale back essential services, including declining requests for analytical products and witness engagement. We call on all Member States to help close the significant funding gap to ensure the Mechanism is placed in a stronger position to respond effectively to growing demands and support meaningful progress towards accountability and lasting peace in Syria.

Mr. Geisler (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union. We sincerely thank 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 its Head, Mr. Robert Petit, for their continuous engagement and dedication to achieving justice and accountability for the most serious crimes committed in Syria. We are most grateful for his efforts in advancing the work of the IIIM and for the most recent — the eleventh — report (see A/79/799), which underlines the progress made. Our gratitude also extends to the newly established Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and its Head, Ms. Karla Quintana.

The end of the Al-Assad regime provides an unprecedented chance for lasting change. Transitional justice and respect for human rights, including women's and children's rights, will be key to achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation

in Syria. We continue to fully support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition process. The future of the country must lie in the hands of all Syrians, regardless of their ethnic background, religion or gender. We strongly welcome Syria's constructive interaction with the IIIM and remain convinced that close cooperation between the Mechanism and Syria can play a key role in a successful transitional justice process.

Germany has been supporting the IIIM since its establishment and, thanks to the substantial contributions of the IIIM, Germany has been able to initiate criminal proceedings against members of the Al-Assad regime for severe human rights violations, under the principle of universal jurisdiction. We are highly appreciative of, and extremely thankful for, the close cooperation between the IIIM and the German Federal Prosecutor-General and are committed to continuing to work together on pending cases. Germany reiterates its firm political and financial support for the IIIM. We call on all Member States to do the same and to cooperate fully with the Mechanism.

Mr. Mikanagi (Japan): I would like to extend my appreciation to Mr. Robert Petit for his first briefing as 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).

The collapse of the Al-Assad regime must be seen as an opportunity to build a society in which all Syrians can enjoy basic human rights, dignity, freedom and prosperity, and not as the beginning of a new round of turmoil and tragedy. We strongly urge all parties to immediately cease violence and comply with international law, including international humanitarian law. We are deeply concerned about the loss of many lives, including those of civilians, and the deteriorating humanitarian situation. Japan urges all parties concerned to play a constructive role in promoting an inclusive political solution through dialogue among the Syrian people. In view of the current situation in Syria, I would like to make three points on the IIIM.

First, those responsible for serious crimes, including members of the Al-Assad regime and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, must be held accountable. It is not yet clear whether the new political situation in Syria will lead to a stronger commitment to accountability for serious crimes but, without transitional justice, reconciliation cannot be achieved, nor can true national harmony be realized. Therefore, the role of the IIIM in collecting and preserving evidence is now more important than ever.

Secondly, we welcome the fact that the IIIM took swift action after the political change and that it was able to enter Damascus for the first time and hold consultations with the interim authority. We strongly expect that authority to promptly grant official permission for its activities. The IIIM cannot fulfil its mission without cooperation from the local population, including victims and civil society, and we hope that the IIIM can continue to take a victim-centred approach.

Thirdly, while recognizing the high expectations for the IIIM, we also need to address the financial challenges facing the entire United Nations system. In that regard, it is strongly recommended that duplication of the IIIM's work with broader accountability mechanisms be avoided. In that regard, we welcome the efforts of the IIIM to collaborate with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and we expect continued efforts to improve overall efficiency.

In conclusion, Japan will continue to support relevant initiatives aimed at achieving sustainable peace through a comprehensive and inclusive political process in Syria in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). Japan has consistently

supported the Syrian people and will continue to provide assistance tailored to their needs.

Lord Collins (United Kingdom): I thank Mr. Robert Petit for the briefing and the debate today. Let me also welcome Foreign Minister Al-Shaibani to the General Assembly. His presence here today is a powerful signal of the opportunities that lie ahead for Syria to carve out a more secure, peaceful and prosperous future.

I will make three points today.

First, we welcome progress in Syria's political transition since the fall of the Al-Assad regime. That includes the formation of a new Syrian Government and its commitment to holding free and fair elections in Syria. We also welcome the important steps taken since December 2024 towards social cohesion among the Syrian people. That includes the first-ever consensus on the Human Rights Council resolution (Human Rights Council resolution 58/25), which was supported by the Syrian Government, and commitments by the Syrian Government to establishing national committees for addressing transitional justice, missing persons and chemical weapons. However, as the horrific events in the coastal areas in March remind us, significant challenges remain in addressing the legacy of 14 years of war and brutality and in beginning the process of providing closure to all those affected.

Secondly, we commend the IIIM for the valuable progress it has made since December on the international pursuit of accountability. The volume of documentation and witness interviews that the IIIM team has collated is a testament to its tireless dedication to providing a credible evidence base for future prosecutions. The appointment of a IIIM liaison officer in Damascus is also a promising example of United Nations-Syria cooperation. We urge all parties to work collaboratively to ensure that the survivors receive the justice that they demand and that they deserve.

Thirdly, the United Kingdom had a leading role in supporting international and civil society accountability efforts during the Al-Assad regime, and we remain committed to pursuing accountability for victims, survivors and families in Syria. For that reason, we continue to see the IIIM as a crucial component of future Syrian-led transitional justice processes. We were proud to have co-sponsored the General Assembly resolution that established this Mechanism in 2016 (resolution 71/248) and remain committed to ensuring that it has the political backing and operational remit that it requires to succeed. This year, the United Kingdom has allocated a further \$940,000 in funding to our partners in support of effective evidence collection and preservation. We thank the IIIM for its contribution to the fight against impunity and for amplifying the voices of survivors throughout its work.

The United Kingdom will continue to support the Syrian Government and its peoples in their efforts on reconciliation and accountability to ensure a stable and prosperous future for the people of Syria.

Ms. Ni Mhuirheartaigh (Ireland): Ireland aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and adds the following.

Ireland thanks Mr. Petit, 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 his informative briefing today and for his leadership since assuming his position in May 2024.

This debate comes at a historic moment for Syria. Ireland welcomes the fall of the Al-Assad regime and the steps taken so far by the transitional authorities towards an inclusive transition process, including agreements with the Kurdish and Druze communities, the signing of an interim Constitution and the announcement of a transitional Government. We also welcome the outcome of the ninth Brussels

Conference, which saw pledges of €5.8 billion in humanitarian assistance to support Syria's recovery. Ireland will continue to support the Syrian people and is pleased to have pledged €21.8 million this year.

Ireland will also continue to support efforts on accountability. For the first time since evidence began to emerge of atrocity crimes in Syria, there is now a real opportunity to ensure comprehensive justice and accountability. Ireland shares the commitment of the Secretary-General to help Syrians build a country in which reconciliation, justice, freedom and prosperity are shared realities for all.

Ireland commends the Mechanism for its essential work in collecting evidence of international crimes committed in Syria. Despite the failure of the Security Council to progress accountability in Syria, the Mechanism is playing an essential role by supporting investigations and prosecutions in national jurisdictions. We repeat our previous call for the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Ireland welcomes the constructive initial engagement between the Mechanism and the caretaker authorities and looks forward to further cooperation between the authorities and the Mechanism. That ongoing cooperation could enhance the Mechanism's operational work, including preservation of evidence in accordance with international standards, and also further support domestic accountability initiatives.

The eleventh report of the Mechanism (see A/79/799) confirms that requests for assistance submitted to it have continued to increase, including since the end of the Al-Assad rule in Syria in December 2024. Ireland commends the way the Mechanism has evolved to respond to that increasing demand and the important contribution that it is making to accountability.

The conflict in Syria has caused immense hardship and suffering, acutely felt by women, children and older people. Ireland reiterates our support for the Mechanism's commitment to a victim- and survivor-centred approach, placing the experiences and perspectives of all victims and survivors at the heart of accountability efforts. We further welcome the Mechanism's commitment to effective dialogue and cooperation with civil society actors, who make critical contributions across the full scope of its work.

We continue to support adequate funding of the Mechanism through the United Nations regular budget. We strongly support the Mechanism's request for increased funding to address its significantly increasing workload, including as a consequence of the recent change in Government. An increase in resources is necessary to enable the Mechanism to maintain its investigative and analytical work in accordance with its mandate, and in particular in the light of the significant evidence-gathering opportunities now available in Syria.

To conclude, Ireland remains committed to supporting efforts to ensure accountability for international crimes committed in Syria. Comprehensive transitional justice for victims and survivors is essential to reconciliation, to building a peaceful Syria and to reaching a genuine solution to the conflict in the spirit of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Kössler (Austria): Austria aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

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), and we thank Mr. Robert Petit and his team for the Mechanism's eleventh report (see A/79/799).

It is our firm belief that our international order must be based on international law, a fundamental pillar of which is accountability for the most serious crimes under international law. Without accountability there can be no justice for victims and consequently no sustainable peace and reconciliation. That is why the work of the IIIM is so important.

We are witnessing a major change in the Syrian Arab Republic following the end of the Al-Assad rule, and we strongly welcome the visit of Foreign Minister Al-Shaibani to New York and his exchange with many of our colleagues and ourselves today. That change in Syria provides a significant opportunity for the Mechanism to step up its role in contributing to the accountability process now possible for Syria, and in Syria, for the first time in decades.

The first visit of the Mechanism to the Syrian Arab Republic in December 2024 was met with great expectations by victims and their families, and we share their hope and their expectations that the newly appointed Government continues its fruitful exchange with the Mechanism. In practical terms, the Mechanism should formally be allowed to start operating in the Syrian Arab Republic in line with its mandate. Furthermore, we see merit in the establishment of a field office of the IIIM in Damascus, to maximize its operational work. Related to that, we welcome the recent consensual adoption of the mandate renewal of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry for the Syrian Arab Republic of the Human Rights Council, with the support of the Syrian authorities.

Austria has a keen interest in a secure and stable environment for all Syrians within the country. As delegates may know, we are hosting a very large number of Syrian refugees in Austria and we, therefore, have a very genuine commitment to a just, inclusive and peaceful future, and our commitment to accountability is based on that.

Up until now the IIIM has made a substantial and useful contribution to the gathering of evidence and legal reconditioning for international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. That work must go on, but considering the latest developments, including massacres against civilians in the coastal region, it is clear that the IIIM for Syria must also have a forward-looking mandate. All crimes must be swiftly and transparently investigated and brought to justice. In that regard, we take good note of the efforts of the caretaker Government to establish an independent investigative committee as well as — as the Minister has explained today — its recent extension, and we hope that that committee will also cooperate with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry of the Human Rights Council.

Austria has been a strong supporter of the IIIM since its establishment, not only in political terms. We have also provided constant financial support over the past years including through voluntary contributions to the Mechanism. We are aiming, despite budgetary restrictions, to do so again this year. The inclusion in the regular 2020–2021 budget was an important step, and we believe that full funding should come from the regular budget in the future.

Accountability for the most serious crimes under international law remains a priority of Austrian foreign policy as I have hopefully proven today.

Mr. Shrier (United States of America): The United States extends its gratitude to Mr. Robert Petit and 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 their critical work to advance justice and accountability in Syria.

Stability in Syria requires holding the perpetrators of crimes committed over the past 14 years accountable and providing meaningful justice to victims. Even without

access to the country, over the past eight years the IIIM has made remarkable strides in collecting, consolidating, preserving and analysing evidence of international humanitarian law violations and human rights violations and abuses. That work has supported landmark trials convicting and indicting regime officials and members of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham for war crimes. With Al-Assad out of Syria, there is now a historic opportunity for the IIIM to expand on those strides and more comprehensively fulfil its mandate.

We welcomed the interim authorities providing access for the IIIM to enter Syria for the first time. Continued access is imperative for the urgent documentation and preservation of evidence of regime abuses to support ongoing and future accountability efforts. We urge interim authorities to provide the IIIM continued and unrestricted access to the country and support its mandate. Accountability in Syria requires a collective effort, and we encourage the interim authorities, United Nations entities and Syrian civil society organizations to effectively coordinate.

The United States supports the continued work of the IIIM and urges Member States to fund the IIIM as it receives increased demands for assistance during this window of opportunity to shape a new Syria.

Meaningful justice and accountability are critical to prevent atrocities, such as those we saw on the coast, and build sustainable peace in the country, marred by destabilizing violence. Now is the time more than ever to reaffirm the IIIM's mandate and support that critical work.

The Acting President: Before proceeding further with the debate, members are reminded that, as announced in *The Journal of the United Nations*, we will hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Santiago Peña Palacios, President of the Republic of Paraguay, at the sixty-sixth plenary meeting. After the address, the sixty-fifth plenary meeting will be resumed to continue the debate.

The meeting was suspended at 11.55 a.m. and resumed at 12.30 p.m.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France.

Mr. Barrot (France) (spoke in French): There can be no peace without justice, and that is why the unspeakable and innumerable crimes of Bashar Al-Assad and his brutal regime cannot go unpunished. There can be no justice without truth, and that is why, despite the emotion, disgust and terror that are gripping us, we must look at the atrocities committed by the regime against the Syrian people with our eyes wide open.

We must seek justice for the 500,000 Syrians murdered and the 15,000 children killed or injured since the brutal repression of the 2011 revolution. We must seek justice for the thousands of women, children and men asphyxiated by sarin gas — a poison widely used by the regime against its own people. We must seek justice for the victims of arbitrary detentions, sexual violence, torture and the gruesome campaign of Bashar Al-Assad's regime. We must seek justice for Syrians displaced and massacred in Aleppo, Idlib and eastern Ghouta. We must seek justice for the countless disfigured shadows in the dungeons of Saydnaya prison — the torture camp and human slaughterhouse designed for extermination. We must seek justice for the victims of the horrific press device — an instrument of death that I have seen with my own eyes and will never forget. It is an industrial machine designed to crush and compress bodies, since the regime cannot crush people's spirit. None of that was enough to put out the flame of the Syrian resistance that has overcome its torturers, but none of those acts must go unpunished.

Nor can anyone forget the crimes committed by the Islamist terrorism of Da'esh. I am thinking of the terrorist attacks perpetrated in Syria and elsewhere. I

am thinking of the victims of the attacks of 13 November 2015 in Paris, Nice and Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray. I am thinking of the public beheadings, the persecution of minority groups, the attempted genocide of the Yazidi people and the vile practice of sexual slavery.

It was in order to prevent such tragedies that the Charter of the United Nations was drawn up and our Organization was created 80 years ago. The report before us (see A/79/799) is irrefutable. It provides overwhelming evidence that Bashar Al-Assad's regime is responsible for crimes against humanity.

There can be no peace without justice, and no justice without truth. That is why we are here today — to support mechanisms such as 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 enables evidence to be collected and preserved. It was that evidence that, on 24 May 2024, led to three senior Syrian officials being sentenced to life imprisonment by the Paris Court of Assizes for complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes. It is that evidence that is currently being used in 40 investigations in France. As it pledged at the Paris Conference on Syria on 13 February, France will fully support a political transition enabling the Syrian people to live in peace and freedom.

However, the fight against impunity does not end with the atrocities of the Al-Assad regime. The Syrian transitional authorities must also strive for justice, as they are doing with the Mechanism and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The atrocities committed on the Syrian coast in March claimed almost 1,000 civilian lives, most of whom were murdered solely owing to their faith. Those massacres, which we condemned in the strongest terms, must be punished inexorably, as the Syrian authorities have promised. The new Syria cannot open this new chapter in its history with a bloodstained first page.

France will continue to take action so that justice is served in Syria and wherever atrocities are perpetrated. That is the prerequisite for the moral and spiritual recovery of a country that has broken free from its shackles and aspires to a better future. In order for that still fragile hope to become a reality, France will stand with the women and men of Syria, as it has done faithfully since 2011, for truth, justice and peace.

Mr. Greco (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and would like to add some remarks in its national capacity.

At the outset, we would like to congratulate Mr. Robert Petit on taking up his new role 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). We would also like to acknowledge the presence and statement of Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Al-Shaibani, which testifies to the significant developments Syria has undergone in the past few months. For the first time in many years, the Syrian people can look with hope towards the prospect of a more stable, peaceful and prosperous future for their country. It is in that context that Italy wishes to reiterate its continued support for a Syrian-owned, Syrian-led and United Nations-facilitated political transition, and in that respect, we welcome the continuing efforts of the Special Envoy, Mr. Geir Pedersen.

We are also convinced that accountability for the most serious crimes committed by any party during the conflict — in particular war crimes and crimes against humanity — must be pursued in the framework of, and in line with, the national reconciliation process. Accountability for those horrendous crimes is not only a moral imperative but also a deterrent for future violations and a fundamental element of any reconciliation process. Impunity must end, and the new political environment

in Syria is a unique opportunity for meaningful transitional justice for the Syrian people, in which national ownership must play a key role.

It is in that spirit that Italy strongly supports the IIIM — together with the other United Nations bodies established for the purpose of accountability in Syria, such as the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic — as a key mechanism for the collection, consolidation, preservation, analysis and sharing of evidence of grave violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Italy is appreciative of the progress achieved by the Mechanism during the reporting period and welcomes the increasing cooperation between the Mechanism and the national authorities in investigating and prosecuting the gravest crimes committed in Syria. National prosecutions and sentences in several countries show that the impunity gap is narrowing. At the same time, we call on the interim Syrian authorities to ensure the Mechanism's full operation on Syrian territory, also with a view to building capacity and supporting efforts by Syrian courts and investigators.

The pattern observed in Syria over the years of the civil war has been a shocking one. The publication in December 2024 on the Mechanism's website of a public, redacted version of a report on the criminal activities, including torture, ill-treatment and unlawful killings, in more than 100 detention facilities throughout the country is a stark reminder of the systematic brutalities committed for more than a decade under the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. Indiscriminate violence has often targeted the most vulnerable, such as women, children and minorities. It is in that context that Italy wishes to express its appreciation for the efforts made by the Mechanism to develop thematic strategies focused on those vulnerable categories on the basis of a victim- and survivor-centred approach. Cooperation with civil society organizations within and outside Syria is of paramount importance in that respect. Inclusive justice for the Syrian people can be achieved only if the perspectives of those who have suffered the most as a result of the conflict are taken on board.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to reiterate that Italy supports the funding of the IIIM through the regular United Nations budget and through voluntary contributions. It is essential that the Mechanism can count on a regular United Nations financial endowment in order to plan and progress in its work. Italy will continue to support within United Nations competent bodies a regular and adequate provision of funds for the Mechanism.

Mr. Fepuleai (New Zealand): New Zealand thanks the Head of the Mechanism, Mr. Robert Petit, for presenting the eleventh report 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 (see A/79/799) and for his work as the Head of the Mechanism.

New Zealand reiterates its strong support for the Mechanism's essential work in pursuit of justice and accountability for international crimes committed in Syria. New Zealand remains steadfast in our support for international law and the judicial institutions which uphold the international rules-based system.

The report comes at a time of significant change. As the report acknowledged, there is now an opportunity to deliver on the international community's commitment to comprehensive justice and accountability in the Syrian Arab Republic. New Zealand welcomes the Secretary-General's commitment to helping Syrians build a country in which reconciliation, justice, freedom and prosperity are shared realities for all, as a path to sustainable peace.

New Zealand is pleased to note that the Head of the Mechanism visited the Syrian Arab Republic for the first time in late December 2024 and the positive initial engagements with the interim authorities since then. We encourage continued effort to enable the Mechanism to commence operations in the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with its mandate.

New Zealand supports the Mechanism's work and we will continue to follow its progress closely.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking Mr Robert Petit, 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, on behalf of my country, Switzerland, for presenting the report (see A/79/799), and I congratulate the Mechanism on the substantial progress it has made over the past year.

The overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad marked a turning point in Syria's history. Switzerland reaffirms its support for the aspirations of Syrians to live in freedom, security and dignity — aspirations that cannot be realized if the perpetrators of serious violations of international law remain unpunished and if justice is not done for the tens of thousands of victims of that conflict. At a time when a new momentum for progress on this path seems to be emerging, it is essential that the international community remain fully committed to accountability, justice and reparation. It is in that spirit that Switzerland has supported the Mechanism since its establishment and continues to do so with determination.

The current context gives the Mechanism's mandate unprecedented importance. The first visit by its Head to Damascus, eight years to the day since its establishment, is a powerful symbol of the progress that can be made in implementing its mandate.

Allow me to highlight three points.

First, the new situation and the dialogue established by the Mechanism with the transitional Syrian authorities offer a window of opportunity to advance justice for the countless victims of the crimes committed throughout Syria since 2011. In that new context, support for the Mechanism's mandate is absolutely necessary. It is essential that the Mechanism's access to the whole of Syria be guaranteed and that archives and evidence be preserved.

Secondly, the Mechanism can be assured of a significant contribution from civil society in documenting the crimes committed. In that regard, the key role played by women in ensuring accountability since the beginning of the conflict must be highlighted. Switzerland and the Netherlands are committed to facilitating collaboration between the Mechanism and Syrian civil society organizations through the Lausanne process. Switzerland remains committed to hosting its next meeting and to continuing its support for that process.

Finally, the Mechanism plays a unique role in promoting impartial justice, focused on the expectations of victims. The growing and sustained number of requests for assistance bears witness to the confidence in its mandate. It is reflected in concrete results. However, those successes are only possible if the Mechanism receives sustainable funding. Given the marked increase in those activities and the changing context, the Mechanism's financial needs have multiplied. The credibility of our collective commitment to fighting impunity in Syria depends on strengthening that financial sustainability.

Switzerland would like to pay tribute to the Mechanism's remarkable commitment. Its work is fundamental to achieving lasting peace, now more than ever. We reaffirm our full support and stress the need to provide the necessary resources for its work.

Mrs. Blokar Drobič (Slovenia): Slovenia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union and would like to add a few remarks in its national capacity.

At the outset, we would 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, Mr. Robert Petit, for presenting the Mechanism's eleventh report (see A/79/799) to the General Assembly and for his strong leadership of that important Mechanism.

With the fall of Al-Assad's regime, Syrian people demand and deserve a secure, sustainable, inclusive and peaceful future, based on justice and the rule of law. Those were the fundamental principles that brought about the creation of the Mechanism in the General Assembly in 2016.

Slovenia advocated the creation of the Mechanism and has been its staunch supporter ever since its establishment. We remain convinced that in order for peace to be truly sustainable and society to be resilient and at peace with itself, the accountability of perpetrators and justice for victims and survivors remain essential. That should be a part of a credible and inclusive political transition, in accordance with the key principles of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).

For decades, Syrians have endured injustice, and they know first-hand that impunity breeds impunity. Hospital bombings, the use of chemical weapons, the persecution of minorities, systematic torture, killings and other crimes have caused immeasurable suffering for more than a decade. Impunity is, therefore, simply not acceptable.

We understand the complexity of the issue as well as the fact that the list of urgent measures that Syria needs is extensive. We believe, however, that accountability must not be forgotten but ensured, not only for the heinous crimes committed against the Syrian people by the former regime, but also for those perpetrated by armed groups, including the recent violence and killings. Credible and comprehensive accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human rights violations and abuses should be ensured through fair and independent proceedings in accordance with international standards.

Shedding light on the most severe violations of human rights is also key to national reconciliation, necessary for the peaceful future of the country and its people. Therefore, we encourage further efforts in that regard.

We commend the Mechanism's important work in collecting and preserving evidence of crimes committed. It is clear that the progress of investigations and prosecutions must be pursued under Syrian leadership. For justice in Syria to prevail, we call on all relevant stakeholders, including the Syrian transitional authorities, to continue engaging, coordinating and cooperating with the Mechanism. In that vein, formal authorization from the Syrian transitional authorities for the Mechanism to start working in Syria in accordance with its mandate would be an important step in that direction.

This is a critical moment for Syria, and the international community needs to stand in support of the Syrian people in their endeavour for truth, justice and reconciliation. That also means stepping up the support for the Mechanism, including sufficient funding, that is required to carry out its mandate in full.

Ms. Vittay (Hungary): Hungary aligns itself with the statement of the European Union, made on behalf of its 27 member States. We also extend our appreciation to Mr. Robert Petit, 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 presenting the Mechanism's eleventh report (see A/79/799).

Fourteen years into the Syrian conflict, the suffering of the Syrian people remains profound. Yet today there is a historic opportunity to reunite, rebuild and lay the foundations for a future rooted in peace and dignity. Hungary is looking to the Syrian interim Government with the expectation that it will make good use of this opportunity.

A few weeks ago, Special Envoy Pedersen reminded us that:

“Syrian families continue to mourn the loss of loved ones, communities remain fractured, millions remain uprooted from their homes, and far too many persist in their search for the missing.”

Hungary strongly condemns the recent surge in violence targeting civilians, mainly minority Alawites in Syria's coastal region, which tragically demonstrates the serious tensions in its society. We call upon the relevant authorities to protect all civilians, including ethnic and religious minorities, to ensure accountability for the perpetrators and to uphold their obligations under international law.

It is imperative to create the conditions for an inclusive, peaceful political transition — one that enables the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. In that regard, the transitional authorities bear a special responsibility. They must uphold human rights, including the human rights of women and children, guarantee non-sectarian governance and protect all religious and ethnic communities — among them Christian minorities — without discrimination. It is equally vital to preserve Syria's irreplaceable cultural heritage.

Hungary continues to support the work of Special Envoy Pedersen and underlines the importance of an inclusive and Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people, in line with the core principles of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). Hungary also emphasizes the importance of the fight against terrorism, the prevention of the re-emergence of terrorist groups and the destruction of Syria's remaining chemical weapons stockpiles.

In that context, we welcome the reported progress within the IIIM's structural investigations. Those efforts continue to build essential foundations for justice, both now and in the future, including in cases related to detention crimes linked to the Al-Assad regime, atrocities committed by Da'esh and unlawful attacks involving chemical weapons. We commend the Mechanism's proactive engagement with national war crimes units, through the sharing of data, analyses and case-related insights that facilitate justice in third-State jurisdictions.

Hungary is firmly committed to accountability. In recent years, the High Court of Budapest concluded its first case involving a Da'esh-affiliated individual responsible for crimes against humanity in Syria, adjudicated under the principle of universal jurisdiction. That case was handled with the utmost care, underscoring our readiness to support broader accountability efforts. At the same time, we stress that transitional justice processes must be rooted in Syria and led by Syrians. We welcome the IIIM's ongoing support for such domestic initiatives, as reflected in the report. Comprehensive transitional justice is indispensable for achieving meaningful reconciliation.

In conclusion, we reiterate our steadfast commitment to the Mechanism, as the ongoing conflict continues to have serious repercussions for regional stability and international security and look forward to continuing our constructive dialogue in the future.

Mrs. Hindlsová (Czechia): At the outset, let me express our gratitude to Mr. Robert Petit, 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 the Mechanism's eleventh report (see A/79/799).

The Czech Republic fully supports the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and its member States and wishes to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

The report describes in detail the comprehensive work of the Mechanism, which has proven its crucial role in accountability efforts for Syria. An interplay among actors involved in the accountability system is vitally important. In that regard, we positively note the significance of the Mechanism's evidence-sharing for national jurisdictions, as well as for the proceedings before the International Court of Justice. We are also convinced that cooperation between the Mechanism and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its Investigation and Identification Team related to the use of toxic chemicals is critical for bringing those responsible to justice.

The report noted important developments with respect to the constructive engagement of the Syrian transitional Government with the Mechanism. We hope that the formal authorization to start operating in Syria will follow soon, in order to allow the Mechanism to assess evidence preservation needs and priorities on the ground.

We note that sustainable and predictable financing of the Mechanism is a highly pertinent issue, in particular taking into account the current developments. Mindful of the Mechanism's worthwhile mandate, the Czech Republic has contributed to the Mechanism since its establishment and continued to do so with extrabudgetary funding to complement the regular budget.

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): At the outset, I would like to thank the President for convening this meeting and Mr. Robert Petit for his comprehensive briefing. I also warmly welcome Foreign Minister Al-Shaibani. His presence here today reflects the commitment of Syria to accountability and dialogue under the new Administration.

In Syria, a new chapter opened in December 2024 with the fall of the Al-Assad regime and the triumph of the Syrian people. After years of enduring the brutality of the regime, the Syrian people have reclaimed their destiny at last.

The convening of the National Dialogue Conference, the announcement of the constitutional declaration and the establishment of an inclusive transitional Government are important milestones on the path towards peace and reconciliation. We firmly believe that in a conflict such as Syria's, in which hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians lost their lives and countless others were forcibly detained or disappeared, there can be no genuine reconciliation and no lasting peace until accountability is ensured.

Addressing the legitimate grievances of the Syrian people must remain at the centre of all post-conflict efforts. In that respect, we welcome the increased engagement between the Syrian Administration and 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). In that regard, the visit of the Head of the IIIM to Damascus in December was a significant development. It marks the first such high-level contact between the Mechanism and the Syrian authorities. We view that development as a potential step towards greater transparency and cooperation. We encourage the Mechanism to continue and enhance that dialogue.

Türkiye has consistently stood at the forefront of international efforts to alleviate the immense human suffering caused by the conflict in Syria. We continue to host millions of Syrians and provide and facilitate uninterrupted humanitarian assistance across our borders. At the same time, we remain firmly committed to promoting accountability and combating impunity. With that understanding, Türkiye has supported and closely cooperated with all United Nations accountability mechanisms in relation to Syria. In that regard, we recognize the vital role the Mechanism plays in documenting the serious crimes committed since 2011. As a co-sponsor of resolution 71/248, which created the Mechanism, and a contributor to Mechanism's budget, Türkiye will continue to support its essential work. We also encourage the international community to allocate adequate funding for the Mechanism in order to sustain its activities.

In conclusion, Türkiye reaffirms its commitment to supporting the Syrian people in building a future based on justice, dignity and peace, so as to prevent atrocities from happening again.

Mr. Tymoshenko (Ukraine): The delegation of Ukraine aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the delegation of the European Union and wishes to make the following remarks in its national capacity.

Ukraine welcomes the eleventh report 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 (see A/79/799) and commends the Mechanism's tireless work in the pursuit of justice for victims and survivors of the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

Today we meet at a historic juncture for Syria. Following the end of Bashar Al-Assad's rule in December 2024, a long-awaited opportunity for comprehensive justice and accountability has emerged. For the first time in 14 years, there is a real prospect of delivering on the promises made by the international community — promises of justice, truth, reconciliation and sustainable peace.

Ukraine strongly supports the efforts of the Mechanism to ensure that the perpetrators of international crimes are held accountable. We commend the Mechanism's first-ever visit to the Syrian Arab Republic in December 2024 and its initial positive engagement with the caretaker authorities. We emphasize the importance of full cooperation by all Member States with the Mechanism, including the facilitation of access, the implementation of cooperation frameworks and the provision of support services for witnesses. We also underscore the need for coordination with the United Nations system and other international organizations to strengthen evidence-sharing mechanisms and avoid duplication of effort.

Accountability is the cornerstone of sustainable peace, not an obstacle to it. All victims and survivors in Syria demand and deserve justice that is fair, independent and inclusive. We therefore reiterate our strong support for the Mechanism's victim- and survivor-centred approach, its thematic strategies on gender, children and youth and its broader justice objectives. Only by ensuring that the voices of all victims are heard and addressed can we hope to achieve lasting reconciliation and build resilient, peaceful societies. Furthermore, we urgently call for the immediate withdrawal of Russian military forces from Syria. The continued presence of foreign forces in the country undermines efforts to achieve justice, accountability and lasting peace.

In conclusion, Ukraine calls on all Member States to prioritize accountability for the most serious international crimes committed in Syria and to support an inclusive, comprehensive transitional justice process that upholds the rights and dignity of all those affected.

Mr. Ćurić Hrvatinić (Croatia): Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union, and I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

For 14 years, the Syrian people suffered unspeakable horrors, and for 14 years, Croatia, like many here, was calling for accountability, speaking up for the people of Syria and lending support to efforts to achieve justice. In the past years, it seemed, at times, that we were all just repeating the same speech over and over again: calling for access, calling for accountability, advocating for the missing — but to no avail.

The recent visits to Damascus by the Head of the Mechanism and the constructive conversations with the Syrian authorities offer promise and hope. Croatia is closely following the transformation that Syria is currently undergoing. That transition represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reverse the cycle of conflict that has fed despair, displacement and terrorism. At this moment, the Syrian people rightfully expect and deserve concrete efforts that make fair and independent criminal proceedings possible, support truth and reconciliation processes and lay the foundation for a peaceful and sustainable future for Syria. Peace and accountability are mutually reinforcing and complementary, and that is something that many States here can attest to from their own experience.

The recent violence in the coastal region, including killings on the basis of religion and sect, is a regrettable development, and we implore the authorities to take the necessary measures to prevent such crimes. Only by upholding the equal rights of all Syrians can the country achieve peace and progress.

Croatia has been supporting Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons with development and humanitarian projects in Syria and in neighbouring countries, and we will continue to do so. We stand with the Syrian people in their pursuit of justice and their efforts to build a stable, secure and economically viable Syria.

We welcome the eleventh report 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 (see A/79/799), and we thank the Head of the Mechanism, Mr. Robert Petit, for the presentation of the report to the General Assembly. We wish him and his team every success in this new chapter for the Mechanism and have faith that they can help deliver justice for the Syrian people.

We commend the Mechanism for its dedication to ensuring justice and accountability for the most serious crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The report confirms that the Mechanism continues to act as a vital pillar of the international accountability architecture. Its commitment to a victim- and survivor-centred approach, its thematic strategies on gender and children and its emphasis on inclusivity are all essential for a comprehensive and just response to atrocities. We particularly welcome its coordination with other key bodies, such as the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, in addition to its contribution to prosecutions in national jurisdictions.

Despite that progress, the Mechanism continues to face serious financial and operational challenges. It needs help to meet its growing workload and fulfil its mandate effectively, especially in the light of new opportunities on the ground following recent political changes in Syria. We encourage continued cooperation between the Mechanism and the Syrian authorities, and we call upon all Member States to support the Mechanism's work, including through technical cooperation, information-sharing and assistance with witness protection.

We reiterate our full support for the Mechanism and its mission and therefore call on the Syrian transitional Government to formally authorize the Mechanism to start operating in Syria in accordance with its mandate.

Mr. Skachkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The position of the Russian Federation on the so-called “International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism” to investigate the events in the Syrian Arab Republic remains unchanged and unequivocal. There is no legal basis for the existence of that structure, and therefore it cannot be deemed a legitimate part of the United Nations system.

The establishment of the Mechanism was pushed through by a group of Western countries via a vote on a resolution of the General Assembly (resolution 71/248), which does not have and has never had investigative and prosecutorial functions and has no authority to establish bodies with such a mandate. Such matters are within the sole purview of the Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

The eleventh report of the Mechanism (see A/79/799), much like its previous reports, is shorn of any concrete information. It does not demonstrate that it bases its work on evidence. We see no grounds for the Mechanism’s requests to get access to Syrian documentation. We stand convinced that all this work should be conducted via information transfer from the Mechanism to the Syrians. It is the Syrians who should be receiving all of the materials that the Mechanism has at its disposal so that they can conduct independent investigations.

We have already seen how such commissions work. The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a case in point. Although that body was properly established, it never did help Iraq to prosecute ISIL terrorists. It was always working for the benefit of Western States pumping information out of Iraqi State archives, despite statements to the contrary. As a result, the commission concluded its work ignominiously, essentially without producing any results.

We are also disquieted by the fact that the Mechanism is publicly positioning its support to the case brought by Canada and the Netherlands against Syria at the International Court of Justice. That essentially means that a United Nations body is partaking in these proceedings against a Member State. It is therefore clear that there cannot be any talk of impartiality. Irrespective of the domestic political situation, Syria — and not the former Syrian authorities — will remain the respondent in this case.

What is all the more concerning is the fresh escalation in the Mechanism’s budgetary appetites, given the acute funding deficit in the United Nations system. At this time, when truly important peacekeeping and humanitarian initiatives are short on funding, the Mechanism is asking for additional funds, specifically \$7.5 million. It wants to use those funds to set up a permanent presence in Syria, inter alia, despite the fact that the Mechanism continues to pump roughly \$20 million per year out of the United Nations budget. The Mechanism continues to waste resources that could be better used to rebuild Syria’s destroyed infrastructure, to strengthen Syria’s national legal institutions, to ensure the safe return of refugees, to demine and to provide humanitarian assistance. The Mechanism is not a technical assistance instrument. The expectation for the Mechanism to make a constructive contribution to the recovery of Syria and its institutions is not only baseless, but naive.

In the presidential statement issued on 14 March (S/PRST/2025/4), there is an unambiguous call by the Security Council for a Syrian-led and -owned inclusive political process, with United Nations support and in accordance with the key principles listed in resolution 2254 (2015). The key role of meting out justice should therefore be played by the Syrians themselves. Relying on United Nations bodies

that are beholden to the influence of external actors is not a good course. There is not a single case of such mechanisms benefiting the country where they were working. Indeed, there are countless examples of the opposite. Such bodies are not characterized by impartiality; they exist only to serve the interests of their donors. The Russian Federation will continue to support the painstaking implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which calls for a political process led by the Syrians themselves, with the United Nations acting as mediator. There can be no place for external, illegitimate and politically motivated instruments exerting influence in that process.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting.

We shall hear the remaining speakers this afternoon following the consideration of the agenda items announced in the Journal of the United Nations.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 32.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.