

2020 / 2021 Annual Report



ADVANCING ACCOUNTABILITY
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE
EFFORTS

Annual Report

April
2020

March
2021



Commission for International Justice and Accountability

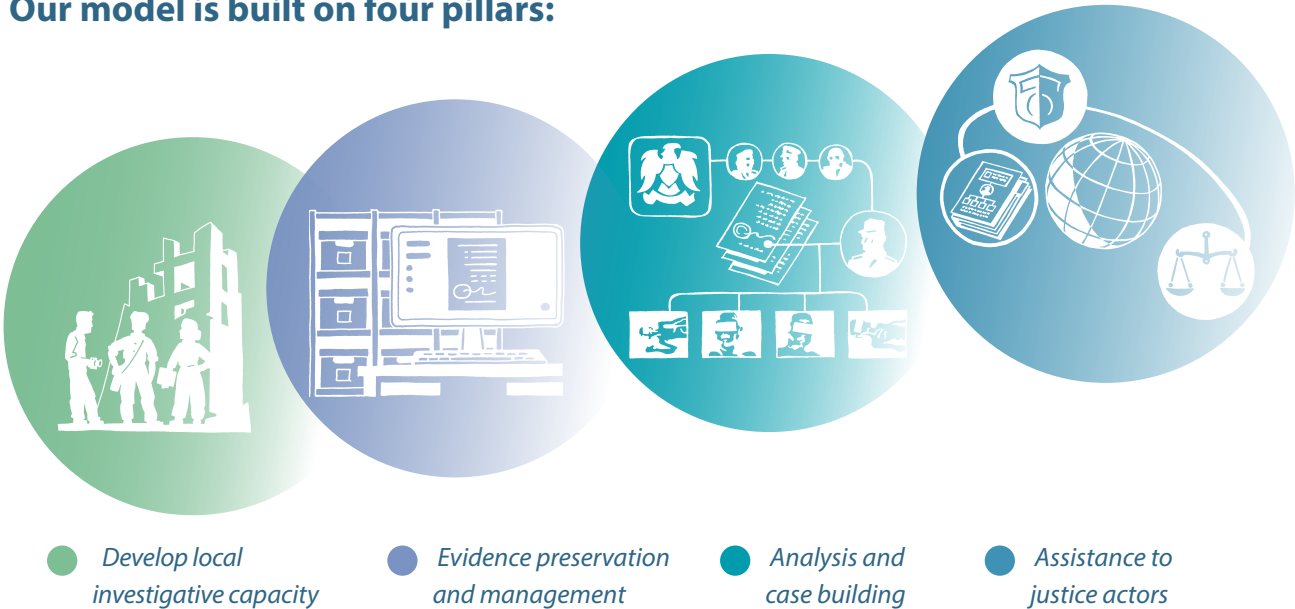
The Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation dedicated to furthering criminal justice efforts through investigations in order to prevent the loss and destruction of vital evidence. CIJA supports prosecutorial efforts to end impunity, whether at the national or international level.

CIJA's aim is to expand opportunities to achieve justice for a broad range of crimes that impact vulnerable populations across the globe, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, terrorism, human trafficking, and migrant smuggling.

CIJA is apolitical and carries out its investigative activities independently of any government.

CIJA gathers evidence of crimes that are beyond the reach of international and national justice institutions, placing an emphasis on evidence linking specific perpetrators to these crimes.

Our model is built on four pillars:



CIJA began its work in the early stages of the Syrian conflict, adapting and successfully expanding its operations to Iraq in 2015 following the spread of the Islamic State. CIJA is active in additional conflict situations which may not be disclosed owing to security conditions inside these territories.



Letter from the Executive Director

It is once again my pleasure to present CIJA's annual report covering the twelve months from April 2020 to March 2021. Notwithstanding the global pandemic, CIJA collected substantial amounts of evidence, answered an unprecedented number of requests for assistance from national authorities, and made notable contributions to the fight against impunity for core international crimes.

CIJA now holds over 1,300,000 original pages of Syrian Regime documentation, along with immense quantities of Islamic State-generated materials. The fruits of CIJA's collection efforts continue to be shared with international bodies as well as national authorities in more than a dozen European and North American states. During the year, CIJA responded to national requests for assistance regarding 600 Syrian Regime and Islamic State (IS) suspects, thus providing evidentiary support to a number of ongoing investigations, arrests and prosecutions in various jurisdictions.

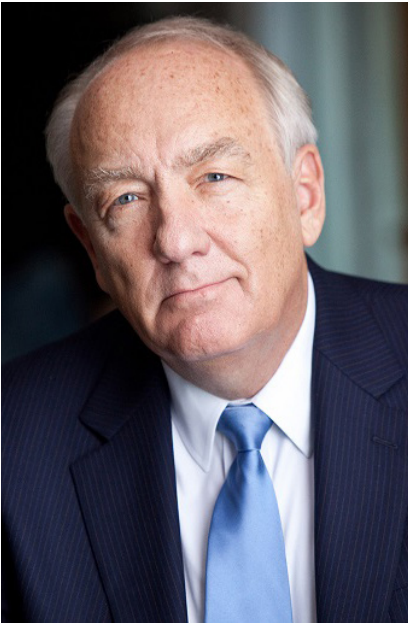
We are particularly proud of our assistance to the ongoing criminal proceedings in Koblenz, Germany, where in February 2021 the court convicted Eyad Al-Gharib for crimes against humanity. The symbolic importance of this judgement—the first against a former Syrian Regime official and establishing the widespread and systematic nature of Syrian Regime crimes against the civilian population—cannot be underestimated.

On 31 March 2021, CIJA completed its draw-down in Iraq after six years of evidence collection and case building addressing IS criminality. I am particularly proud that CIJA legal briefs over the years identified IS members responsible for a range of crimes including enslavement and crimes against minorities. These legal briefs, and the underlying evidence, were transferred to UNITAD, enabling CIJA to close down operations in the country and focus its efforts on other geographic situations.

CIJA's service in the fight for justice and accountability extended beyond criminal investigations to expose the wide-ranging disinformation networks that actively seek to undermine accountability and humanitarian efforts in Syria. With links to Moscow and Damascus, these networks have sought to discredit the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Syrian White Helmets, Bellingcat, CIJA and other institutions. Whilst CIJA was compelled by well-grounded security concerns to initiate an independent probe into the workings of this group, we ultimately went public with our findings in the interests of those individuals and institutions long targeted by campaigns of dissimulation and outright lies.

On behalf of CIJA's Board of Directors, I wish to express our gratitude to our colleagues, first and foremost CIJA's national investigators, as well as our donors for their commitment in realising CIJA's mission to secure accountability for vulnerable populations in the regions where CIJA is active.

Bill Wiley



Letter from the Chair of the Board of Commissioners

A decade after the beginning of the Syrian uprising, the citizens of Syria, who have been denied protection while suffering massive crimes, are finally seeing a measure of accountability in European courtrooms, due in large part to CIJA's years-long efforts to collect, preserve and analyse evidence of Syrian Regime criminality.

CIJA's expert testimony and detailed evidentiary assistance have been central to the historic trials of two Syrian Regime members before the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz, Germany, supporting the first conviction for crimes against humanity in the case of Eyad Al-Gharib and the ongoing proceedings against Anwar R—the highest-ranking Syrian Regime officers to be prosecuted to date.

These important steps toward accountability underscore the indispensable role that CIJA has played in collecting contemporaneously generated documentary material and establishing that the widespread enforced disappearances, systematic torture, and mass murder can be linked to specific individuals according to the highest standards of the criminal law. As prosecutors across Europe and North America continue their efforts to hold Syrian Regime and IS perpetrators to account, CIJA's work remains essential.

As with so many other conflicts, a rising tide of disinformation brought about by denialists and conspiracy theorists is now threatening the hard-fought but fragile progress in holding those responsible for serious crimes in Syria to account. CIJA's success in exposing the network of actors working to undermine the course of justice in Syria has been critical in ensuring that attacks on the work and reputation of accountability actors will not go unchallenged and that revisionism will not be tolerated.

As the Chair of CIJA's Board of Commissioners, I am exceedingly proud of CIJA's exceptional work during 2020-2021. My fellow Commissioners and I remain steadfast in our support for CIJA's continued efforts to further truth, justice and accountability in Syria and beyond.

Stephen J. Rapp

Advancing the fight against impunity in Syria and Iraq in a year of novel challenges

CIJA’s teams demonstrated their resilience and dedication to secure justice in the face of novel challenges that included an unprecedented global shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an escalation of the disinformation efforts targeting accountability actors, and shifting political and territorial realities. CIJA adapted operational and safety protocols to maintain, and eventually surpass, the targets and goals set for the year. Switching to secure virtual platforms, CIJA continued to provide high-level training and mentoring to 43 Syrian and Iraqi investigators, ensuring that their skills were enhanced to meet investigative priorities and operational realities. Ten years on from the start of the Syrian uprising, CIJA’s investigators continued their efforts in support of criminal justice accountability. As a consequence, our field teams were able to extract 900kg of Syrian Regime documents from safe locations in Syria to a newly established Field Scanning Unit, where they have already started to be processed, digitalised, archived and analysed.

“We hope to pursue justice that will heal wounds and relieve the pain of mothers, wives and children who have lost loved ones, due to the criminal machine of repression which has been adopted by the security institutions in Syria. Therefore, achieving that justice will be a victory for humanity and the world.”

CIJA Investigator, Syria (name withheld)

CIJA Achievements at a Glance: 2020-2021

National Capacity Development

43 Syrian and Iraqi investigators



Investigation

215,786 original documentary materials collected



528 records of interview collected



Evidence Preservation and Management

138,799 Syrian Regime documents processed



30,093 IS documents processed



CIJA continued to support the majority of publicly disclosed Syrian Regime and IS investigations and trials led by national authorities, which stand to offer a measure of accountability for victims of a broad range of crimes including war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, terrorism, and human trafficking. Of particular significance has been the first conviction of a former Syrian Regime member for crimes against humanity secured in Koblenz, Germany. The verdict in the case of Eyad Al-Gharib, which has been supported by CIJA documentary and witness evidence as well as expert testimony before the court, established that the crimes of the accused were committed as part of the Regime’s widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population.

Multi-disciplinary analysts responded to increasingly complex Requests for Assistance, providing information on 910 targets, including 600 suspects, to 37 law enforcement agencies, while dossiers of 11 suspects believed to be within European jurisdictions were prepared and submitted to three law enforcement agencies. In Northern Iraq, CIJA concluded its mandate, transferring a complete digital archive of IS evidence collected and analysis conducted over the six-year investigation to UNITAD.



“There are many examples in history of achieving justice after a long time, and this is what makes me continue to do what I am doing. I dream of seeing the criminals held accountable by the law through fair trials, so that the world can realise that no criminal can escape punishment and that there are knights of justice who pursue all criminals.”

CIJA Investigator, Syria (name withheld)

Assistance to 37 Justice Actors

154 requests for assistance answered



910 targets provided



Suspect Tracking

57 Syrian Regime and IS persons of interest identified



11 Suspect Dossiers submitted to law enforcement partners



Outreach

99 media appearances



28 events and briefings



CIJA concludes its Islamic State investigations in Iraq after six years


On 31 March 2021, CIJA concluded its flagship investigation into IS crimes in Iraq. Working with the support of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), CIJA was the first criminal investigative body on the ground in Iraq following Islamic State’s brutal ascendance in 2014. As the conflict raged for a further three years, CIJA remained the sole international actor recovering battlefield evidence in support of national investigations of IS crimes.


The success of the programme stands as a testament to the CIJA model. As members of the Da’esh Crimes Investigative Unit (DCIU), over twenty brave Iraqi men and women have been trained and mentored by CIJA’s international experts, becoming high-calibre investigators of international crimes. Their professionalism and tireless dedication ensured the collection of one of the most robust evidence holdings regarding IS, most of it secured in the midst of ongoing conflict whilst maintaining criminal justice standards. Evidence was extracted, scanned, archived and preserved to ensure ready access and use for investigations and prosecutions, while CIJA conducted rigorous analysis of its holdings to produce a range of analytical reports and legal briefs addressing Islamic State’s authority structure and criminality.


While the enduring value of these investigative products has been recognised in numerous judicial proceedings that continue to draw upon them, CIJA investigations have also had immediate


Evidence collected and transferred to UNITAD and the KRG

- 8TB** of documentary and digital evidence materials


- 12000 +** pages of documentary evidence


- 722** records of interview


- 7** legal briefs identifying IS command structure, organisation and criminality



impact during the course of the programme, in some cases saving lives. Shortly after its formation, the Da'esh Crimes Team uncovered evidence pointing to an imminent terrorist plot outside of the region, which CIJA was able to corroborate and promptly shared with the relevant national authorities. More recently, in May 2020, a thirteen-year-old Yazidi girl was rescued from Syria following nearly four years of captivity, in part due to the efforts of CIJA investigators in Syria and Iraq to positively identify the child and trigger a rescue operation by KRG authorities.

In late 2019—as UNITAD initiated its own evidence collection efforts—CIJA began planning for a controlled drawdown of its investigative presence in Iraq. This included the transfer of evidence and materials to UNITAD through a rigorous and ethical process, which concluded on 31 March 2021. Underscoring the value of investing early in criminal investigations and analysis, the findings set out in CIJA’s legal briefs—including those dating back as far as 2016—were recently echoed by UNITAD in its Sixth Report to the UN Security Council. Ultimately, the Commission leaves in place a network of partners and Iraqi nationals—a number of whom are providing their expertise in furtherance of UNITAD’s mandate—fully equipped to take ownership of Iraq’s pursuit of accountability. CIJA is confident that its partners in northern Iraq will carry these investments forward for many years to come.

CIJA Support for IS Accountability Measures (2016-2021)

Evidence, analysis, and briefings in support of investigations by national authorities in **13** countries



220 requests for assistance



2 convictions of IS members: **Zoher J**, Germany; **Akhlafa**, the Netherlands



Securing battlefield evidence of Syrian Regime and Islamic State violations in Syria

As the conflict in Syria approached its tenth anniversary, Regime forces continued to make inroads into rebel-held areas, while the Covid 19 pandemic exacerbated already strained living conditions. Despite these challenges, CIJA was able to maintain an active in-country presence, collecting crucial evidence, collecting more than 500 records of interview and extracting more than 900 kg of Syrian regime evidence and 11,000 pages of IS materials in support of a growing number of investigations. This was possible due to the resilience and adaptability of CIJA's investigators who, supported with expert guidance, have proven themselves highly adept at navigating the rapidly shifting landscape of Syria's conflict.

In contrast to the stark conditions in Syria, momentum for accountability continues to build through the exercise of extra-territorial jurisdiction in a number of European states, where CIJA supports a growing number of war crimes, crimes against humanity and terrorism investigations. To facilitate access to recently extracted evidence and to ensure the growing momentum of criminal justice initiatives, CIJA refined its evidence processing capacities. In late 2020, CIJA opened a Field Scanning Unit which, despite severe restrictions caused by the COVID pandemic, has already scanned, catalogued and made available tens of thousands of documents to CIJA's analysts—and by extension its operational partners. With large quantities of documents yet to be extracted from secure locations within Syria, these capabilities will be of critical importance over the coming investigative cycle.

"We have better evidence against Assad and his clique than [prosecutors] had against Milosevic in Yugoslavia ... [and] even better than we had against the Nazis at Nuremberg."

Stephen J. Rapp

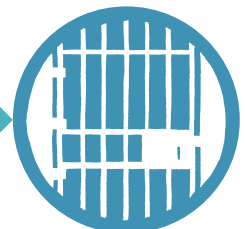
CBS 60 Minutes, 21 February 2021

First trials of Syrian Regime members draw on CIJA's long-standing assistance to German authorities

CIJA's long-standing investigative, evidentiary and analytical assistance to German authorities yielded extraordinary results in the long quest for justice and accountability for crimes committed by the Syrian Regime. In February 2021, the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz, Germany convicted former Syrian Regime member **Eyad Al-Gharib** of aiding and abetting 30 counts of crimes against humanity committed in the early months of the 2011 uprising, sentencing him to four years and six months in prison. The judgement is the first by a criminal court to establish that the Regime's violent response to popular protests in the country constituted a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population. CIJA supported the case through the provision of critical documentary evidence, witness interviews, and an extensive two-day expert testimony by CIJA's Director for Operations and Investigations. In parallel, CIJA continues to support the case against **Anwar R**, the second, higher-ranking former Syrian Regime member prosecuted for crimes against humanity before the court in Koblenz. CIJA has been assisting German authorities in the case since its investigative phase in 2017, continuing to do so through the suspects' arrest in 2019 and in their subsequent trial.

"We are becoming more and more insistent, after seeing the success of our efforts supporting cases against criminal suspects in Europe. This gives us more motivation to continue our investigations to achieve justice."

CIJA Investigator, Syria (name withheld)



CIJA also assisted the investigation which led in June 2020 to the arrest of **Alaa M**, a Syrian doctor accused by German authorities of particularly brutal conduct against detainees under his care in a Military Intelligence branch in Homs and military hospitals in Homs and Damascus. CIJA's evidentiary support in the pre-trial phase of the case, provided in response to nine separate requests for assistance, has helped lead to the expansion of the crimes against humanity charges against the accused to include one count of murder, the torture of a further 18 people, seven counts of seriously depriving people of their freedom, and one instance of attempting to deprive a victim of their reproductive capacity.

Growing number of investigations and trials of Syrian Regime and IS members supported through CIJA’s suspect tracking and judicial assistance programmes

CIJA’s wealth of evidence and expertise continued to serve as a critical resource for international and domestic justice bodies over the past year. CIJA received a total of 154 requests from 37 operational partners investigating Syrian Regime and IS suspects believed to reside in European and North American jurisdictions. In response, CIJA’s Requests for Assistance team provided evidentiary information on a record 910 targets, including 600 suspects, representing a nearly 25% increase from the previous 12-month period. Notwithstanding this significant growth and the necessity for a triaged approach for more urgent requests, CIJA analysts have maintained an average one-month turnaround for responses, an effort lauded by the investigative authorities of 13 countries that draw increasingly on CIJA’s evidentiary and analytical support.

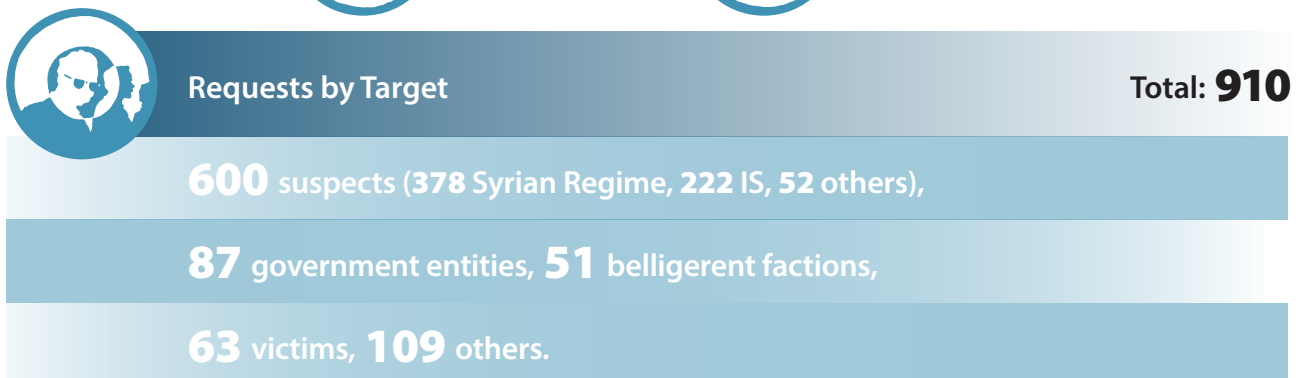
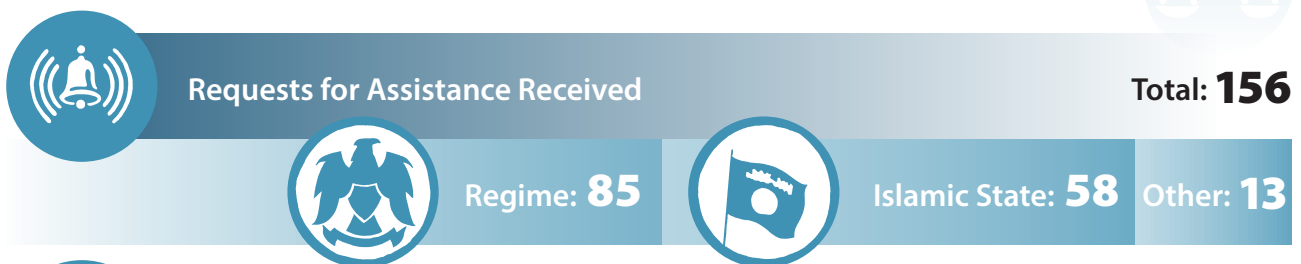
In parallel, CIJA scaled up its proactive Suspect Tracking programme, which was initiated in 2016. The programme works to identify and track suspects who have left Syria and Iraq and are currently residing within Europe, before preparing

“We are becoming more and more insistent, after seeing the success of our efforts in supporting cases against criminal suspects in Europe. This gives us more motivation to continue our investigations to achieve justice.”

CIJA Investigator, Syria (name withheld)



Assistance to Justice Actors

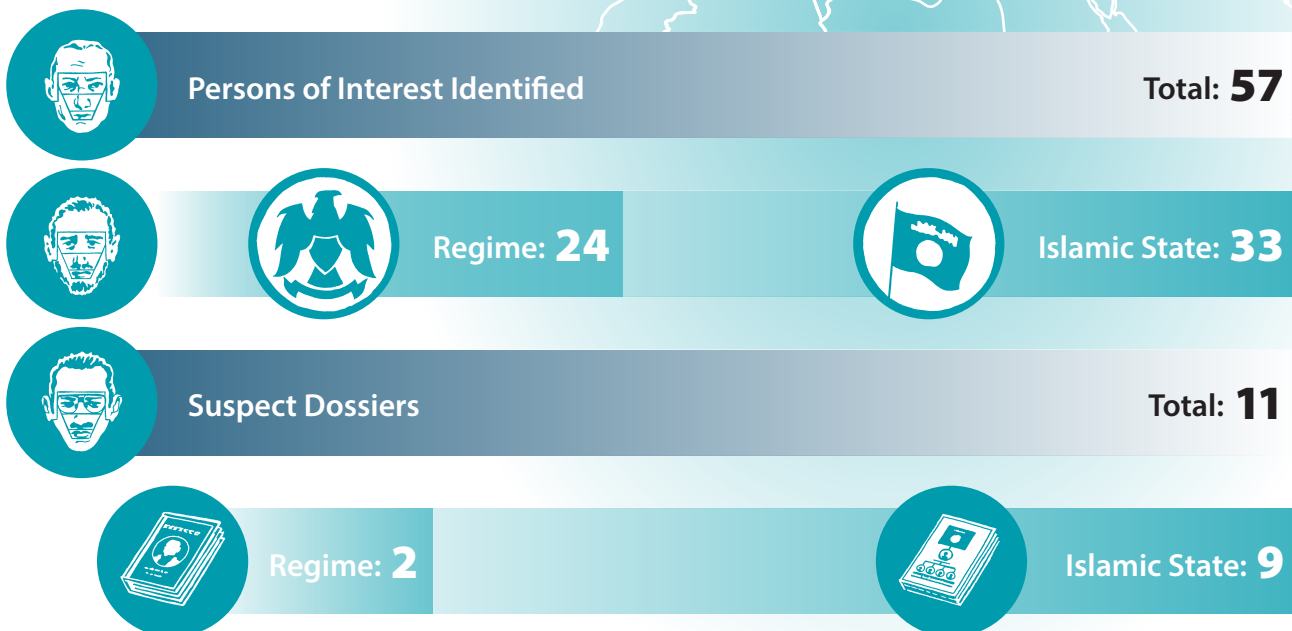


and submitting dossiers on the individuals to relevant authorities. Over the year, 57 persons of interest were identified, while dossiers of two Syrian Regime members and nine IS members were developed and submitted to national authorities, supporting the opening of new investigations. As demonstrated in the ongoing case against Anwar R, where litigation continues more than two years after his arrest, complex investigations of this nature require substantial time and resources. And despite overwhelming evidence, not all such investigations lead to an arrest. At the programme’s outset in 2016, CIJA shared with Austrian authorities a suspect dossier on Brigadier General Khaled Al-Halabi, former head of the General Intelligence Department in Raqqa and the highest-ranking Syrian regime official to remain at large in Europe today. As a series of leaks from Austrian authorities to national media agencies uncovered last year, institutional obstacles have continued to prevent his arrest more than five years later despite robust evidence gathered against him.

CIJA also continued to cooperate closely with international bodies, including the UN Commission of Inquiry (CoI), the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria (IIIM), the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and UNITAD in support of their investigative mandates in Syria and Iraq.

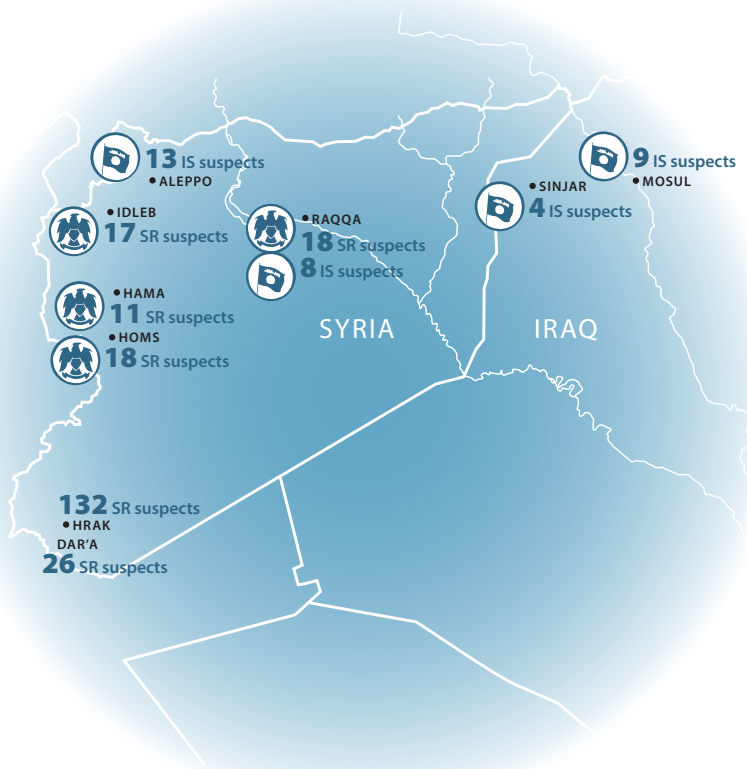


Suspect Tracking



CIJA Legal Briefs

Suspects identified in CIJA’s Geographic Briefs



Between 2015 and 2020, CIJA produced 18 in-depth legal briefs into specific incidents, thematic crimes and perpetrating structures of the Syrian Regime and Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, drawing upon the factual and legal analysis of the evidence collected by our investigators. The primary purpose of CIJA’s legal briefs was to effectively demonstrate the probity and weight of available evidence, and resemble a pre-trial brief of international criminal tribunals, including the use of the legal requirements of international crimes and liabilities for the legal analysis. They are living documents and are regularly updated to reflect newly available evidence. CIJA’s legal briefs are confidential documents: they are reviewed by CIJA’s Board of Commissioners and an independent Advisory Panel and have been shared with appropriate national authorities as well as UN investigative mechanisms to help guide potential requests for assistance to CIJA. Upon the successful completion of its operations in Iraq, CIJA is for the first time publicly sharing summaries of key legal briefs related to IS criminal conduct.

Suspects identified in CIJA’s Thematic Briefs



Perpetrating entities analysed in CIJA Legal Briefs



Syrian Regime

Senior Leadership

- Presidency
- Council of Ministers
- Baath Party
- Central Crisis Management Cell (CCMC)
- National Security Bureau (NSB)



Security Agencies

- Military Intelligence Department
- General Intelligence Directorate
- Political Security Department
- Air Force Intelligence Directorate



Ministry of Interior Sections

- Civilian Police • Criminal Security
- Riot Police • Civilian Prisons



Military and/or Security Committees

- Homs • Raqqa • Idleb
- Hama • Dar'a • Aleppo



Joint Investigation Committees

- Deir Ez-Zor • Idleb
- Hama • Homs • Raqqa



Governorate-level security branches

- Aleppo • Dar'a • Deir Ez-Zor • Hama
- Homs • Idleb • Raqqa



General Command of the Army and Armed Forces

ARMY

- Army Corps

INDEPENDENT UNITS

- Republican Guard • 1st Armoured Div.
- 3rd Armoured Div. • 4th Armoured Div.

ARMED FORCES

- Air Force and Air Defence Command
- Special Forces Command
- Naval Forces Command
- Border Guard Forces Command

REGIONAL COMMANDS

- Northern • Southern • Central • Eastern

MILITARY POLICE

MILITARY PRISONS

MILITARY JUSTICE SYSTEM

MILITARY HOSPITALS





Islamic State

Senior Leadership

- Caliph
- Top Deputies (Iraq and Syria Deputies)
- Shura Council
- Delegated Committee



Councils*

- Military Council
- Sharia Council
- Security (and Intelligence) Council
- Media Council

* Senior-level councils prior to declaration of the Caliphate



The Dawawin

- Diwan of Judgement and Grievances
- Islamic Courts
- Islamic Police
- Diwan of General Security
- Diwan al-Hisba
- Diwan of Soldiery
- Diwan of Media
- Diwan of Proselytization and Mosques
- Diwan of Treasury
- Diwan of Natural Resources
- Diwan of War Spoils
- Diwan of Education
- Diwan of Charity and Alms
- Diwan of Health
- Diwan of Agriculture
- Diwan of Services



Offices and Committes

- The Office for Research and Studies
- Hijra Committee
- Committee for the Affairs of Prisoners and Martyrs
- Administration of the Distant Wilayat
- Office for Public and Tribal Relations



Wilayat

- Wilayat Raqqa
- Wilayat Ninawa
- Wilayat Aleppo/Halab



TERMINOLOGY

- Emir (plural Emirs): *leader or commander; a position of authority given to members throughout ISIS's organizational structure*
- Wilaya (plural Wilayat): *state or province*
- Wali (plural Walis): *provincial governor; the highest authority of a Wilaya*
- Diwan (plural Dawawin): *department or administrative department.*

ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

Enslavement of Women and Children by Islamic State in Northern Iraq and Syria: August 2014 to May 2018 (completed: 2018; updated: 2019)



Islamic State operated a highly organised, well-regulated slave trade in which thousands of captured women and children were bought, sold, given, and traded among its members throughout IS-held territory from August 2014 until at least October 2017. The Enslavement Brief focuses primarily on the group's sexual enslavement operation conducted throughout Iraq and Syria, presenting copious evidence of acts amounting

to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, while identifying the slave traders of various nationalities who bear responsibility for them. The evidence presented includes original IS documents, witness testimony, expert evidence, pattern evidence, and digital materials, with 43 slave-traders and 169 slave owners being identified through the investigation.

The Criminal Responsibility of Islamic State Leadership for Crimes Committed in Syria and Iraq (completed: 2019)



As a criminal organisation with scant regard for national borders, the scale of Islamic State's criminal enterprise can only be fully grasped through an international lens. The IS Leadership Brief examines the cross-border nature of Islamic State's criminal network to provide a comprehensive analysis of the group's structure and criminality during its four-year reign. Enabled by CIJA's two-pronged investigation covering both Syria and Iraq, the Brief brings together copious evidence collected from both theatres and focuses on nine IS leaders, demonstrating how the group's overarching criminality was a direct result of core policies that were formulated and implemented by senior figures within the organisation. It shows how the group's leadership developed an intricate plan to

infiltrate, attack, and seize large swaths of territory throughout Syria and Iraq in order to impose their violent and authoritarian version of Sharia law and punishment on local populations. Mapping out in great detail the different phases of Islamic State's authority structure between 2013 and 2017, the Brief shows how wide-ranging crimes were committed in furtherance of these objectives. The most prevalent of these crimes included attacks on civilians during armed conflict, summary executions of civilians and persons hors de combat, persecution of women and religious minorities in areas that fell to IS control, brutal punishments performed in the name of IS's extreme version of Sharia law, and the destruction of cultural property associated with myriad religious and ethnic groups.

Summaries of all Syria and Iraq briefs will be available on the CIJA website soon.

ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ

Atrocity Crimes Committed by the Islamic State During Its Military Operation in the Sinjar District of Iraq: 3–15 August 2014 (completed: 2017)



On 3 August 2014, IS forces captured Northern Iraq's Sinjar District and its capital, the ancestral homeland of Iraq's Yazidi minority. The Sinjar brief identifies four senior and mid-level IS leaders most responsible for organising and participating in the 13-day military campaign across Sinjar and the egregious criminality that accompanied it. To establish their criminal conduct, the Brief maps the organisational structure of IS in detail before providing a thorough analysis of relevant IS policies which demonstrate the criminal intent of its members—from the most senior members of IS

to its footsoldiers—when participating in crimes. Extensive legal findings address the alleged crimes committed by IS forces against civilians, primarily Yazidis, during the military campaign, including genocide; crimes against humanity of murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation/forcible transfer, imprisonment, persecution, and other inhuman acts (forced conversion and inflicting extreme physical, mental, and/or emotional suffering); and war crimes of murder, cruel treatment, attacking civilians, attacking protected objects, pillage, and forced displacement.

Crimes Committed by the Islamic State During Its Occupation of Mosul, Iraq: June 2014 – July 2017 (completed: 2019)



In June 2014, IS fighters seized control of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, which they would continue to occupy for a further three years. The Mosul Brief details the brutal form of government imposed on the city's inhabitants throughout this period and wide-ranging crimes that accompanied it. Following a purge of Iraqi soldiers, police, and security forces from the city, Islamic State's campaign of persecution gradually expanded as Mosul's civilian population at large became the victim of its depraved ideology. As the scope of oppression grew, minority groups, women, homosexual men, and, particularly during the latter stages of the occupation, anyone suspected

of opposing the group, were targeted. The Brief analyses the most prevalent forms of criminal conduct perpetrated during the occupation, including attacks on dissidents, sexual and gender-based violence, persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, destruction of cultural property, and crimes against children. A detailed legal analysis of the group's conduct demonstrates that IS forces committed crimes against humanity of murder, extermination, torture, imprisonment, and enslavement, and war crimes of pillage, mutilations, attacks on protected objects, and conscription of child soldiers in Mosul and nearby areas.

Crimes Committed by the Islamic State Against the Christian Population in Northern Iraq: June 2014 – September 2014 (completed: 2020)



Islamic State forces systematically persecuted Iraq's minorities to various degrees and, during the summer of 2014, launched sustained attacks against Christian populations in Mosul and the Ninawa Plains, alongside the much larger scale of atrocities perpetrated against other minority groups in Iraq. The Crimes Against Christians Brief focuses on the most representative criminal conduct, considering

it to amount to crimes of forced displacement and pillage, forced conversion to Islam, and destruction of cultural property within Christian communities. The brief also provides a contextual overview of the armed conflict that was occurring in Iraq during the IS takeover of areas of Northern Iraq during this timeframe, including widespread attacks on civilian populations across the country.

Countering Syria Disinformation, Revisionism, and Denial

The past year witnessed escalating levels of politically driven disinformation spread to discredit groups gathering evidence of atrocities in Syria. Acting without regard for the suffering of victims, the networks behind these campaigns ultimately seek to rehabilitate the image of the Syrian Regime following a decade of well-documented criminality.

Over the past several years, they have targeted the OPCW and Syrian Civil Defence (White Helmets)—two groups collecting some of the most damning evidence of Syrian Regime atrocities. In December 2020, CIJA learned that it was to become the latest target of a disinformation campaign.

In response, CIJA launched an investigation into Syria’s disinformation networks. In the course of our inquiry, we identified the web of actors responsible for the campaigns against the OPCW, the White Helmets and their co-founder, the late James Le Mesurier, including academics from leading UK universities. CIJA established that these individuals coordinate with Russian diplomats and receive legal assistance on how to undermine OPCW’s investigations into chemical weapons attacks from prominent international lawyers working in The Hague. While the investigation was launched first and foremost to protect the safety of CIJA personnel, witnesses and evidence, CIJA understood the immense significance of its findings and resolved to make them public through outlets such as the BBC, The Times, and Der Spiegel, in order to expose and challenge the sources of disinformation and their tactics and to counter the lies that seek to whitewash the crimes inflicted upon the Syrian population.



Intrigue Mayday: The evidence gatherers

BBC • 6 APRIL 2021

“This wasn’t some kind of revenge operation. It was driven entirely by concerns for our security, and ultimately our findings justified those concerns.”

Bill Wiley, Executive Director

The Observer

The UK professor, a fake Russian spy and the undercover Syria sting

THE OBSERVER • 28 MARCH 2021

“What’s different is that it’s a level of disinformation not seen before. What’s worrying is that it’s tolerated. Even in mainstream academic circles this disinformation and denial is being misrepresented as freedom of expression and speech... We have a moral duty to stand up to revision and denial.”

Nerma Jelacic, Director Management and External Relations



Why Truth Matters?

Nerma Jelacic
Director – Management
and External Relations

*Excerpt from opinion piece for Index on
Censorship. Full text available [online](#).*

Thirty years separate the beginnings of conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where I come from, and Syria, where I work now. Bosnia and Syria are the bookends that encompass the three decades when we lived in a world where our collective conscience, eventually, recognised we had a responsibility to protect the innocent, to bring those responsible for war crimes to justice, and to fight against revisionism and denial. Whereas the Bosnian tragedy of the 1990s marked the (re)birth of these values, the Syrian carnage has all but put an end to them.

Nowhere is this sad fact more apparent than in the expansion of disinformation, revisionism and denial about the crimes perpetrated by the Syrian regime against its own people. As a result, disinformation campaigns have become increasingly vicious, targeting survivors, individuals and organisations working in conflict zones. Coddled by the ever-expanding parachute of academic freedom and freedom of expression, these unrelenting smear campaigns have ruined, endangered and taken lives. They have eroded trust in institutions, democratic processes and the media and sown division in fragmenting democratic societies. Their destabilising effect on democratic principles has already led to incitement to violence. Left unchecked, it can only get worse.

Earlier this year, CIJA flung itself into the eye of the Syria disinformation storm by exposing the nefarious nature of the Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media (WGSPM), an outfit comprising mainly UK academics and bloggers with a long record of spreading disinformation about organisations such as the White Helmets and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The modus operandi of disinformation in Syria is simple and borrows from how it was done in Bosnia: sow seeds of doubt regarding two or three out of myriad atrocities committed by the Syrian regime in order to put a question mark over the whole opus of criminal acts overseen by Assad over the past decade.

Disinformatonists are not people who present “diversity” of opinions or ideological or political alignments. Ultimately, these people, instead of being challenged for their lies and the harm they cause to survivors and others, are being given the space to trickle their pseudoscientific revisionism into the mainstream. It is time to stop giving them a platform. And it is time to challenge them with all lawful means.

Truth-seeking is supposed to be at the core of universities’ existence, but revisionism and denial do not constitute truth-seeking. Academic freedom should allow for robust debate and challenge the conventional wisdom. But it should not allow for incitement of hatred or slandering of victims, survivors, journalists and others.

Truth matters because disinformation destroys lives, as history has taught us. Disinformation exposes those such as the White Helmets or CIJA working in conflict situations to additional risk. The unrelenting advance of disinformation must be stopped before more harm is done.

Outreach and Media

Over the past year, CIJA significantly advanced its outreach programme with the launch of its official [website](#) and social media channels on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#). The Commission’s online presence serves to enhance organisational transparency, while providing the means for a robust response against targeted disinformation and enhanced visibility of outreach activities addressing CIJA’s work and achievements.

Media coverage of CIJA activities was dominated by major developments concerning CIJA’s assistance to European efforts to hold former Syrian Regime members to account and its work on IS enslavement practices, as well as its critical intervention in exposing the individuals and networks behind the Syria disinformation campaign. In the course of 2020/2021, CIJA’s work was featured in 99 media mentions, including 78 news articles, eight audio (radio and podcast) features, three television/online video appearances, four journal articles, four book chapters, a research project, and a handbook contribution. In parallel, CIJA’s expertise continued to be drawn upon by academic, diplomatic and justice actors, with senior CIJA personnel attending 28 external events and closed-door briefings.

Strategic outreach was also realised through CIJA’s engagement with the development of the Nuremberg Guidelines for Non-Public Investigative Bodies in the field of International Criminal and Humanitarian Law, University of Oxford’s Anchoring Accountability for Mass Atrocities project, a joint University of Oxford/Save the Children project on alternatives to the interviewing of victims when investigating crimes committed against children, including sexual violence, and remaining committed to field testing the International code of conduct for accountability-relevant documentation of conflict-related SGBV (the ‘Murad Code’).

Syrian Trial in Germany: The orders that came from the very top



JUSTICE INFO • 26 NOVEMBER 2020

“[CIJA-collected documents] may be able to prove, among other things, that the 4,000 cases of torture and 58 killings main defendant Anwar [R] is charged with, amount to crimes against humanity.”

Investigators build a case for IS crimes against Yazidis



AP • 21 MAY 2020

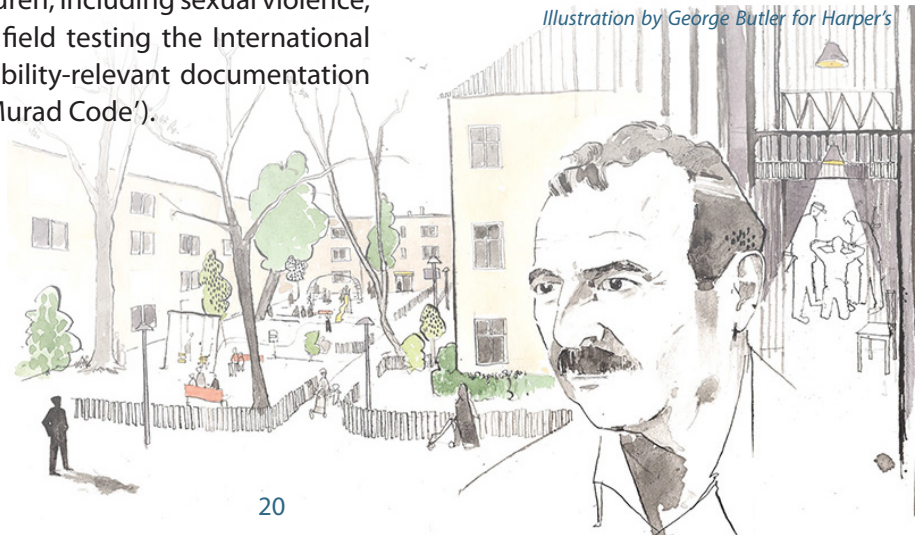
“Countries can prosecute militants for individual rapes or torture or for membership in a terrorist group. But to prove higher charges, they would need the contextual evidence that CIJA provides, showing the crimes were part of a greater structure.”

In Plain Sight: The Search for Syrian war criminals in Europe

HARPER’S MAGAZINE • AUGUST 2020

“CIJA receives requests for investigative support from law enforcement agencies that are looking into former regime officials and members of the Islamic State. Last year, the organization provided information about five hundred people.”

Illustration by George Butler for Harper’s



Governance and Finance

CIJA's governance structure is composed of a three-member Board of Directors and six-member Board of Commissioners. The directors manage day-to-day operations, regularly consulting with the Board of Commissioners on issues of strategic direction related to investigative objectives, operational planning, strategic partnerships, and organisational governance. They are further supported by an Advisory Panel composed of legal experts with extensive prosecutorial, analytical, and defence experience who are responsible for ensuring the quality of CIJA's analytical products.

All of CIJA's funding is project specific. The 2020-2021 investigative cycle in Syria and Iraq was funded by the UK, US, Germany, and Canada. Since its establishment CIJA has received sixty-five grants from eleven donors. Every year, CIJA's finances are thoroughly reviewed by external auditors including those appointed by donors. In sharp contrast to the disinformation about CIJA's financial operations, CIJA underwent and passed five audits conducted by external accountancy firms over the course of 2020-2021, and sixty-four audits since its inception. CIJA is proud of its record in handling the funds entrusted to it and grateful for its donors' continued support.

Statement of Activities

Revenues vs Operating Expenses	
Income from Project Grants	6 778 096
Other Income	0
Total Revenues	6 778 096
Total Operating Expenses	6 653 548
Total Financial Income and Expenses	129 280
Total Revenues Less Total Operating Expenses	- 4 732
Operating Expenses by Sub Unit	
Investigation, Evidence Collection and Analysis Costs	4 343 248
Operational Oversight, Management and Running Costs	956 543
Project Development and Visibility	377 439
Partner Costs	976 318
Total Operating Expenses	6 653 548

Statement of Financial Position

Assets	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	943 561
Grant and Contribution Receivables	833 173
Total Assets	1 776 734
Liabilities and Net Assets	
Accounts Payable (Deferred Income from Grants)	914 018
Other Payables	0
CIJA Contingency Reserve	862 716
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	1 776 734



“The vast majority of CIJA personnel are deployed in conflict zones: that is, in harm’s way. It is ultimately these individuals’ commitment to criminal justice, rooted in their immense reserves of moral and physical courage, which renders the CIJA investigative model the success which it is—and shall remain.”

Bill Wiley, Executive Director

For news on CIJA's work and achievements, follow us on:
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International Justice
and Accountability**

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