

**OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ADVISER**  
**مكتب المستشار الخاص**

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11 November 2020

Dear NGO Partners,

I wish to personally extend my sincere thanks for your participation in the first Thematic Roundtable of the UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum, “Empowering Community Members and Victims of ISIL”, on 28 October 2020. I appreciated the exchange of views as well as the strong commitment and willingness to work with UNITAD. As I mentioned during the meeting, NGOs are critical gateways and bridges to survivors and victims. Together, in close coordination and cooperation, we can achieve our collective objective of holding ISIL accountable for its crimes.

I am pleased to attach an initial summary note of the meeting, which includes the proposed recommendations that were put forward by several NGOs during the session. As noted during the meeting, UNITAD now wishes to give NGO partners the opportunity to provide written input on these recommendations in order to provide additional ideas of how partnerships between UNITAD and NGOs can be strengthened so as to empower communities to engage in accountability processes. I welcome any comments or additional suggestions your organization may have by 25 November 2020.

I also take this opportunity to invite your organization for the first Biannual Plenary Roundtable, which will take place on 14 December 2020 from 15:00hrs-18:00hrs (Baghdad Time). During the meeting, I will inform you of progress in implementing the finalized list of recommendations. My office will provide the substantive agenda and logistical details for the first Biannual Plenary Roundtable in the near future. The UNITAD-NGO Focal Points will also be in touch shortly regarding the dedicated working group for Iraqi NGOs.

NGO partners can contact the UNITAD-NGO Focal Points via the following email address for any enquiries or if you would like to suggest the participation of another NGO: [UNITAD-NGO@un.org](mailto:UNITAD-NGO@un.org)

I wish to again extend my thanks for your participation in the meeting. The Investigative Team looks forward to working with you further in support of our common objective of promoting justice and accountability for all victims of ISIL.

With Kindest Regards,



Karim A. A. Khan Q.C.  
Assistant Secretary-General  
Special Adviser and Head of the Investigative Team

**UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum: First Thematic Roundtable**  
*“Empowering Community Members and Victims of ISIL”*  
28 October 2020

Meeting Summary and Draft Recommendations

**I. Meeting Summary**

*Background / Purpose of Meeting*

The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for ISIL/Da'esh Crimes (UNITAD) Special Adviser and Head of the Investigative Team Karim Khan QC convened a thematic roundtable to discuss “Empowering Community Members and Victims of ISIL”. This meeting took place within the framework of the recently launched UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum, which aims to provide a platform for a continuous exchange of information between UNITAD and Iraqi and international NGOs in order to hold members of ISIL accountable for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide committed in Iraq through collecting, preserving, and storing evidence in line with international standards.

*Special Adviser and Head of UNITAD: Opening Statement*

More than 50 NGO participants attended the meeting with Special Adviser Khan and members of the investigative team. In his opening remarks, the Special Adviser highlighted that NGOs provide critical gateways and bridges to victims and affected communities. He welcomed the proactive support provided by NGOs to the Investigative Team, as well as their advice to refine the recently published UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum Statement of Principles and the action taken to implement concrete recommendations provided by some NGOs on how to enhance their cooperation. This includes the establishment of a working group for focused discussions between Iraqi NGOs and UNITAD; the development of a separate protocol for engagement; the creation of a dedicated UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum email; and a new multilingual web conferencing interface that allows for simultaneous interpretation.

The Special Adviser then welcomed further guidance from NGOs on how UNITAD can do better and improve its engagement with NGOs to enable survivors to come forward, particularly during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. In particular, he welcomed support from NGOs to roll out the *Shuhud* mobile application directly with survivor groups, urging NGOs to leverage their own networks, platforms, websites, social media and meetings with the community, so that the mobile application is more widely known and survivors and families can give relevant details in a confidential manner to UNITAD.

*Presentation of the UNITAD Shuhud App*

The *Shuhud* (‘witness’ in Arabic) App was developed by UNITAD in part to address the travel restrictions caused by COVID-19. The application was showcased to NGO partners at the roundtable by one of its developers and UNITAD field investigator, who provided an overview of its development and purposes. He noted that it would provide a way for individuals to come forward and share information with UNITAD from any location at any time. They will be able to provide names and

details securely, as well as the ability to upload photographs and other material. This will generate more potential investigative leads and enable UNITAD to cast a wider net to reach as many people as possible. UNITAD respectfully requested the support of NGOs in disseminating the *Shuhud* App by activating community connections and providing feedback.

There was a high level of support from NGO partners for the innovation, with a number of Iraqi NGOs noting that the *Shuhud* App will be a useful bridge between victims and UNITAD, with NGOs acting as a conduit given the trust they have built up with affected communities over many years. As such, some Iraqi NGO partners requested trainings by UNITAD for their organization on how to use the app so that they can inform affected communities and help victims to come forward. Other organizations requested information about data protection and cybersecurity risks. UNITAD emphasized that cybersecurity and confidentiality issues were integral in the development stage and discussions on the rollout of the application.

*Panel Discussion: Good Practices in Engaging Communities*

This was followed by a moderated panel discussion highlighting good collaborative practices between UNITAD's field investigation units and NGOs in pursuit of community engagement. The Head of the Field Investigation Unit focused on investigating crimes committed against the Christian community noted the importance of NGOs to his work. More specifically, he highlighted the partnership with Shlomo Organization for Documentation and with Hammurabi Human Rights Organization. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with each organization helps to guide the exchange of information between the parties. This has been strengthened by the designation of Points of Contact by each party which helps to build trust and a common understanding of the needs of the victims to ensure UNITAD abides by the "do no harm" policy. In his remarks, the head of Shlomo Organization for Documentation emphasized the importance of confidence, credibility, consent and transparency, as evident in the MoU with UNITAD and subsequent cooperation. He also urged more opportunities for dialogue with UNITAD, including regular meetings between UNITAD and survivors. In her remarks to the panel, the Chairwoman of Hammurabi further emphasized the importance of the MoU with UNITAD, which enabled increased cooperation and more exchanges of information. She stressed that there was little utility for NGOs to retain information from UNITAD, but noted the importance of building trust first.

The next set of NGO speakers were introduced by the Head of the Field Investigation Unit addressing investigations relating to the Yezidi community. She expressed her deep gratitude to Yazda and the Eyzidi Organization for Documentation, who have been critical for the work of her unit by sharing information and putting UNITAD into contact with victims. She noted the importance of NGOs in informing UNITAD on how to approach some of the survivors, and the importance of not re-traumatizing them. She commented that she wants to extend the positive relationship she has built with NGOs like Yazda and Eyzidi Organization for Documentation to other NGOs, and suggested extensive phone calls with Yezidi organizations every two weeks to exchange information. The representative of Eyzidi Organization for Documentation, highlighted the importance of maintaining a two-way relationship with UNITAD based on mutual cooperation. He noted that the bilateral MoU with UNITAD has led to increased cooperation, including access to survivors. He requested enhanced cooperation such as capacity building workshops for Iraqi NGOs by UNITAD to develop their fact-finding capacities. The representative of Yazda remarked that confidentiality, privacy of information and protection of witnesses were key to persuading individuals to trust Yazda. Given the difficulties in returning individuals to Iraq in order to provide testimony, he welcomed the development of the *Shuhud* App as a way to ensure that victims can engage from a distance. He recommended increased engagement with NGOs, who can play a coordination role between UNITAD and survivor groups,

highlighting the recent excavation of Solagh Institute as an example of good practices. He encouraged other Yezidi and Iraqi organizations to cooperate with UNITAD.

UNITAD's field investigation coordinator provided reflections on how civil society brought a level of understanding to UNITAD, the international community and the media, not only in terms of crimes, but also the context of the violations and what was happening in ISIL-controlled areas. However, she stressed that gathering information is important but not more important than the welfare of the survivors. UNITAD has a specific unit that carries out witness vulnerability assessments to mitigate against the risk of re-traumatization.

#### *Plenary Discussions*

During the plenary segment of the roundtable, NGOs provided recommendations on how UNITAD can enhance its engagement with NGOs to empower victims to come forward, as well as general comments on how UNITAD can strengthen its work. This list of proposed key recommendations to be adopted as outcomes of the meeting can be found in **Annex 1** and will be reviewed following any written feedback provided by Forum members up to 25 November 2020.

#### *Closing Remarks of the Special Adviser and Head of UNITAD*

In his closing remarks, the Special Adviser welcomed the useful recommendations and comments put forward by NGO representatives. He expressed his commitment to ensuring a multi-tiered and multi-faceted approach to UNITAD's engagement with NGOs, which includes regular meetings at the field level as well as the senior level meetings as part of the UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum. Despite the limited resources and length of time on the ground, the Special Adviser noted that the team has expanded its investigations and is now looking at crimes committed by ISIL against Yezidis, Christians, Shabak, Shia Turkmen and Sunnis. The Investigative Team is taking into consideration gender crimes as well as violations against children. UNITAD is using clinical psychologists, and has embedded them at the heart of its interactions to ensure that documentation is in the interests of the witness. The Special Adviser noted a forthcoming new publication by UNITAD and Stanford University about best practices for working with survivors of severe trauma, as well as trainings for Turkmen Rescue Foundation, Yazda and Free Yezidi Foundation. Noting the recent mass grave excavation at Solagh Institute, the Special Adviser thanked Yazda for their support and welcomed cooperation with other NGOs. Finally, the Special Adviser stressed the need to be uplifting in the midst of tragedy. "There will be people who are hoping for leadership in the belief that tomorrow will be better than today, and that the crimes of yesterday will not be repeated. It behoves us to have the same stamina as those survivors who have endured horrendous crimes but who continue to proceed with their lives and fight for justice."

**The next meeting will be the biannual plenary which will take place on 14 December 2020, from 15:00hrs-18:00hrs (Iraq).**

Annex: List of Proposed Recommendations

Plenary Recommendations / Outcomes

- 1. Increased engagement:** UNITAD will seek to ensure more frequent direct meetings and engagement with NGOs in addition to the scheduled UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum meetings, ensuring a sustained, regular exchange of information. This will happen at the local working-level with bi-weekly phone calls between relevant NGOs and UNITAD Field Investigation Units, focusing in particular on cooperation in the development of investigations into crimes committed against specific communities. Survivors will be included in future meetings of the UNITAD-NGO Dialogue Forum as well as focused discussions with the Special Adviser.
- 2. Awareness-raising campaigns:** UNITAD will look to organize awareness-raising campaigns with NGOs about its mandate and its independent role in supporting accountability and justice. Consideration could be given to doing so on a regional basis, particularly in areas in which the Team has traditionally had less presence.
- 3. *Shuhud* - Capacity-building workshops and Privacy / Security:** UNITAD will look to convene capacity-building workshops on how to use the *Shuhud* App as well as to develop their own fact-finding capacities in line with international standards of investigations. As part of that outreach, UNITAD will explain the measures in place to ensure that the information of those individuals submitting information will be held securely and in a manner that ensures their protection as a witness.
- 4. Ensuring a survivor-centred approach:** UNITAD will increase trainings for care providers working with victims, to prevent re-traumatization.
- 5. Memorandum of Understanding:** UNITAD will seek to support those Iraqi NGOs who would wish, or would consider themselves required to, sign bilateral Memorandums of Understanding prior to putting in place regular exchanges of information. UNITAD notes in this regard that from its perspective an MoU is not required in order to commence cooperation or to facilitate transfer of information to its Team. However UNITAD seeks to take a flexible and supportive approach to those NGOs that do wish to establish a more formal basis for cooperation.

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**UNITAD welcomes any written comments or proposed additions to the thematic recommendations / outcomes from the meeting. Forum members may propose new recommendations relevant to the meeting topic or provide comments on existing recommendations.**

**Comments should be sent to [UNITAD-NGO@UNITAD.ORG](mailto:UNITAD-NGO@UNITAD.ORG) and should be submitted by 25 November 2020.**