



**Ceremony at the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council-
Handing Certificates of Completion of basic and advance courses in
International Criminal Law and International Humanitarian Law**

**Remarks by Mr. Christian Ritscher
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Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh / Islamic State in
Iraq and the Levant**

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Honourable Judge Dr. Faiq Zaidan, President of the Supreme Judicial Council,

Honorable members of the Iraqi Judiciary, participants in the basic and advanced courses in International Humanitarian Law and International Criminal law,

It is my pleasure to stand among you here today, to commend your work and dedication. I am grateful and delighted for your presence here, especially those of you who had to travel from the Kurdistan Region on a rather short notice, thank you for taking the time to be with us here, in your natural home; the esteemed Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council.

First, I would like also to congratulate you at the occasion of the Iraqi Judicial Day, which all of you celebrated not long ago.

I had the pleasure and honour to meet some of you in person, and see first-hand the brilliant work you are doing, some of which is done in cooperation with UNITAD. As I always say, the Iraqi Judiciary is UNITAD's natural partner in serving the ultimate goal of achieving accountability and ensuring justice for international crimes committed by ISIL.

I can confidently say that, while standing amongst this brilliant and dedicated group today, we are closer to reaching this goal more than ever.

As you know, I have arrived in Iraq after assuming my responsibilities as Special Adviser and Head of UNITAD, just slightly more than 3 months ago. I used this time to get the necessary understanding of my team's work and our operational environment. I focused on holding as many meetings as I could with Iraqi officials, including some of you, and of course with you, Judge Zaidan. I can, may be, summarize my main goals since I arrived in Iraq as follows:

1. To listen to the Iraqi side, both in the Judiciary and the Government, on how we can enhance our cooperation to better serve the purpose of implementing UNITAD's mandate,
2. To get a first-hand experience of my Team's work on the ground, a huge part of which is done in cooperation with Iraqi counterparts, in particular the judiciary, on a daily basis. I must say I was impressed by the amount of work done, and also by the level of professionalism and expertise in the Iraqi Judiciary.
3. To come up with a vision, working with my team, and in consultation with you, on how best to move forward with our work to serve the ultimate goal which I just mentioned: achieving accountability and ensuring justice for international crimes committed by ISIL.

As you know, I am no stranger to this ultimate goal myself, nor to this assembly I am standing among today. In my previous role as a Federal Public Prosecutor at the Federal Court of Justice in Germany and when I was the Head of the German War Crimes Unit S4, that goal was the core of my work for many years. And as I repeated in so many meetings over the past weeks and months, I am a prosecutor, not a historian. The purpose of UNITAD's work here is simply not to establish a record for ISIL crimes, but to hold members of ISIL, those who committed such heinous international crimes, accountable through evidence-based trials before competent courts. As you best know, our mandate deals with international crimes and not with terrorism. This distinction is key in terms of legal implications, as well as victims' participation and rights.

UNITAD is committed to working with Iraq to ensure that we are headed towards achieving this aim; towards seeing such evidence-based trials happen in Iraq. As I reiterated to all the Iraqi officials with whom I have met over the past weeks, Iraq is the main intended recipient of UNITAD's work, and what we want to see is Iraq playing its natural leading role in pursuing

accountability for ISIL international crimes, according to international standards and in line with UN policies and best practices. As I mentioned during my 1st briefing to the UN Security Council in December of last year, Iraq should be applauded for its global leadership for its request for the establishment of UNITAD and for its cooperation with the Team to date. This role is crucial in promoting global accountability for ISIL international crimes, and more importantly for serving justice to the victims and survivors, most of whom are from this country. And Iraq in this context means the Iraqi Judiciary; you. With your dedication, professionalism and expertise, I am confident that we will work together towards achieving this goal.

Our objective as UNITAD is to assist you in delivering justice for the crimes committed by ISIL against the communities of Iraq. In doing so, we hope to meet the expectations and needs of survivors, while providing a platform from which a historical and undeniable record of the crimes committed by ISIL, crimes against humanity, war crimes and in some cases genocide, can be shown to the world.

The way forward as I see it now, is for us to start working together on building cases about specific incidents, and specific individuals that can be tried for international crimes in Iraq. Naturally, this requires the adoption of an appropriate legal framework that allows for dealing with ISIL crimes as international crimes. We want to be prepared, so that such trials can start as soon as the required legal framework is in place. The adoption of such a legal framework must be an Iraq-lead initiative, and it is up to the elected representatives of Iraq to decide how to move forward with its adoption. At the same time, we at UNITAD stand ready to assist and provide technical support when requested.

I truly believe that we collectively stand at a moment of real opportunity to show that justice for international crimes can be delivered in Iraq, drawing on evidence to the highest possible standards. And I assure you that UNITAD will spare no effort to support you, including with further capacity building opportunities that we have been discussing with Judge Zaidan, to ensure that the Iraqi Judiciary is ready to deal with such cases of ISIL international crimes.

I would like to thank The Australian National University for partnering with us on accrediting this diploma course, and of course I should not forget to thank our former colleague at UNITAD, Mohamed Ibrahim, who played the leading role in designing and implementing the program for this course, and travelled especially from New York to be present with us today. And, of course I

would particularly like to thank Judge Zaidan and the Supreme Judicial Council for hosting this ceremony today.

Finally, I am confident that our work will continue to grow in the highest spirit of cooperation. Again, I thank you all for taking the time to be present here today, and I once more congratulate you on the completion of this important diploma course.