Background.

Accountability for violations of IHL and international human rights law is critical not only to ensure justice for the victims, but also to contribute to building sustainable peace and preventing recurrence. Since March 2011, the continued, systematic, widespread and gross violations and abuses of human rights and ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and the lack of any meaningful path to address the crimes against humanity committed daily in Syria has led to a situation in which the sense of impunity has grown and more and more imbued within the social fabric of the country. This has deepened a general situation of insecurity and the “rule of the might” that disrupt all facets of life for the civilian population and dampen prospects to reach a political solution to the ongoing conflict in Syria.

There have been various initiatives by the international community to address the human rights violations and crimes under international law committed by all warring parties involved in the conflict and respond to calls for justice and accountability by Syrian citizens. The United Nations have established three main international mechanisms tasked to seek accountability and justice for Syria, namely: the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (CoI), the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) 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). These three mechanisms, with their different mandates and reporting procedures, represent critical elements for the establishment of possible transitional justice processes in Syria. They also relate and interact with civil societies organisations in different ways, according to their set goals and mandates.

At the same time, a large amount of information about violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have been collected both by Syrian and international non-governmental organisations. Syrian civil society plays a key role in fostering accountability and justice for all Syrian citizens, also through their valuable work in documenting and collecting data on past and ongoing violations of human rights and IHL, and is a key player for social reconstruction and to accompany and monitor the political transition.

Over the course of the years, like in other countries where international justice institutions and other accountability mechanisms were established to address periods of massive political violence or conflict, hopes, expectations, concerns, misunderstandings and misconceptions have developed among Syrian civil society on the effectiveness and work of the international efforts to bring justice and accountability to Syria. Various fora for dialogue have been set up to address these issues and
facilitate synergies and coordination of international efforts with the work conducted on the field by local organisations. The “Civil society and international mechanisms synergies to seek justice and accountability for Syria” workshop will be an opportunity for Syrian civil society organisations and the international community to come together and reflect more broadly on how common efforts and shared objectives can contribute to achieve justice and accountability for the Syrian citizen and how the efforts to document, investigate and prosecute the continued, systematic, widespread and gross violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria can contribute to foster nonviolent and inclusive political dynamics to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

The “Civil society and international mechanisms synergies to seek justice and accountability for Syria” workshop.

In the framework of its Syria Program, No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) is organising a workshop on “Civil society and international mechanisms synergies to seek justice and accountability for Syria”, which will be held in Gaziantep, Turkey, from 13 to 14 November 2017. By bringing together representatives of Syrian civil society organisations with the three international mechanisms tasked to seek accountability and justice for Syria, namely: the CoI, the JIM and the IIIM, the meeting aims at offering an opportunity to Syrian human rights activists and civil society leaders to engage actively with and contribute to the work of international accountability options and promote a fair, effective and independent transitional justice system. It also aims to increase and strengthen civil society technical capacity and skills to allow human rights activists and democracy advocates to contribute more effectively to the design of transitional justice measures and to their implementation, whether as partners or monitors or both. The meeting will also aim at fostering mutual recognition and coordination between local civil society and international accountability mechanisms and bolstering a strong and shared political vision of human rights campaigners, as a necessary foundation for citizens to demand accountability and justice. Finally, the meeting will also aim at developing leadership skills among Syrian civil society actors and ensure that the international community can hear the priorities and strategies that best would be adapted to the specific situation on the ground directly from those working on the field.

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