

International crimes committed in Southwest Asia

The need for a stronger response by the EU and its member states

POLICY PAPER

OVERVIEW

Historic as well as recent patterns of violence amounting to international crimes in Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria have largely been met with impunity. The past years—decades even—have seen a massive increase in violence in and against the countries of what is commonly referred to as the Middle East or Southwest Asia region. While the scale and scope of these events are exceptionally severe, the underlying violence is not new. The recurring, interrelated patterns of abuse as seen in Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria must also be understood as a consequence of long-standing impunity, as the states and armed groups responsible for these serious violations have too often not been held to account. While this impunity contributes to recurrence and normalizing further violence, accountability would serve justice, truth, reparations and non-recurrence. In fact, much of this violence likely amounts to international crimes, an indication that activates obligations to investigate and prosecute and should mobilize a global ecosystem of international justice. Instead, these abuses continue to be met with pervasive inaction and an unwillingness to hold perpetrators accountable, as trust in the international criminal justice system continues to erode. This policy paper outlines the ongoing efforts to counter this vicious cycle of impunity by actors such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), national war crimes units, and civil society organizations. What emerges are urgent, actionable recommendations for the European Union (EU) and its member states to resolve these tremendous accountability gaps, hold perpetrators accountable and to abstain from contributing to such crimes.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support international mechanisms like the ICC and UN investigative bodies, and push for the activation of available protective measures, such as the EU blocking statute.
- Advocate for the “Convention against the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Humanity” and the reform of the ICC’s jurisdiction over the crime of aggression.
- Prevent trade and investments that enable or exacerbate international crimes, including by imposing arms embargos and prohibiting trade with illegal Israeli settlements.
- Support and resource efforts by civil society and national authorities to document, investigate and prosecute violations.

CORE INTERNATIONAL CRIMES BY STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS

Rampant patterns of abuse in Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and beyond can be attributed not only to the actions of state and non-state actors within these regions, but also directly or indirectly to citizens, companies and states from other parts of the world. The following section provides an overview of these abuses, demonstrating how they appear to meet the legal threshold of international crimes, ranging from crimes against humanity, war crimes, the crime of aggression, to the crime of genocide. While neither conclusive nor exhaustive, this assessment focuses on some of the most severe and ubiquitous crimes documented by UN investigative bodies and civil society organizations.

The four international core crimes, each enshrined in the International Criminal Court's (ICC) founding treaty, constitute the backbone of international criminal law. Genocide entails one of several prohibited acts, such as killing or causing serious harm, committed with the *specific intent* to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected national, ethnic, racial or religious group. In contrast, crimes against humanity consist of acts such as murder, torture, deportation or persecution when committed as part of a *widespread* or *systematic attack* against a civilian population and the perpetrator has knowledge of the attack. War crimes are *serious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL)* that entail the responsibility of individuals, such as commanders, which include attacks on civilians, torture, unlawful displacement and starvation as a method of warfare. The crime of aggression concerns the *planning, preparation, initiation or execution* by senior state leaders of an act of aggression that constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter due to its character, gravity and scale.

After the attacks by Hamas and other armed groups on 7 October 2023, Israel launched large-scale attacks on Gaza, causing a quickly rising civilian death toll, widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure and severe humanitarian consequences in **Palestine**. These patterns of conduct, including starvation as a method of warfare, are mentioned in the ICC arrest warrants for Israeli officials Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant issued in 2024. The Court's allegations consider that the Israeli military's widespread and systematic attack against Palestinians in Gaza may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Importantly, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry, as well as international, Israeli, and Palestinian human rights organizations, have found that the

violations in Gaza rise to the level of the crime of genocide due to an alleged intent to destroy, in whole or in part, Palestinians in Gaza as a protected national and/or ethnic group. ECCHR shares this assessment, based on its own independent research. These findings are based on the scale and pattern of the alleged prohibited acts, as well as statements by senior Israeli political and military officials.

Furthermore, **continuous attacks** by Israeli settlers on Palestinians in the West Bank, as well as administrative, legal and physical measures by the Israeli army, have resulted in large-scale mass displacement of civilians. Such violence can be categorized both as crimes against humanity and war crimes, as it is not only a form of a widespread and systematic attack against a civilian population but also inextricably linked to the armed conflict.

According to the ICC arrest warrants linked to three senior Hamas leaders, the **attack** on October 7 against **Israel**, which resulted in the death of more 1,200 people, also includes both allegations of crimes against humanity and war crimes. As Israel expanded **its offensive** towards Lebanon and Syria, Hezbollah responded with rocket and missile attacks on Israel. Their use of inaccurate or unguided weapons against populated areas in northern Israel as well as Tel Aviv raises serious concerns under IHL, as such **indiscriminate attacks** fail to distinguish between military and civilian objectives.

Importantly, crimes by non-state actors like Hamas or Hezbollah do not relieve responding states of their obligations under international law. Since 2023, Israel has launched **two ground offensives** into southern **Lebanon** and has conducted several **air strike campaigns** in Beirut. Indiscriminate attacks, including through mass explosions **targeting electronic devices** of Hezbollah members, may be qualified as crimes against humanity or war crimes due to their indiscriminate character. Civilians living in Lebanon have in addition been **forced to leave their homes** indefinitely, especially as Israel continues to systematically attack and occupy large parts of Lebanese territory, rendering the landscape uninhabitable for the long term, which gives rise to allegations of the war crime of unlawful displacement.

Syria has been entangled in both domestic as well as regional dynamics of violence for decades. Domestically, in the wake of the fall of the Assad regime, clashes in 2025 in **the coastal region** between the forces linked to the transitional authorities and groups related to the former Syrian regime included widespread killings and other abuses. Another armed conflict escalated in south Syria between the transitional authorities and Suwayda's local communities later in 2025, resulting in a high toll of civilians. In both events, the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) has found

indications of serious violations and possible war crimes. Certain patterns may also amount to crimes against humanity depending on the presence of evidence of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population. Syria's transitional authorities must also contend with the **large number of crimes** committed during the Assad era, going as far back as 1970 when Hafiz al-Assad seized power. These include **widespread and systematic practices** of arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killing, some of which may amount to crimes against humanity, as well as war crimes committed during the armed conflict that began in 2011.

Regionally, Israel launched **extensive strikes** against Syrian military infrastructure immediately after the collapse of the Assad regime. Since then, Israel has carried out frequent attacks on pivotal **air bases and defense installations**, diminishing Syria's military capabilities in the long term. Israel also significantly expanded **its unlawful occupation** into south Syria in 2024, parts of which have been under Israeli control since 1967. These air and ground operations raise serious questions under the prohibition of the use of force in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.

In **Iran**, state repression has intensified particularly since the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests began in September 2022, following the death in custody of Jina Mahsa Amini. These acts have been found likely to constitute the crime against humanity of persecution, targeted **against the Bahai** on religious grounds, **against women and LGBTQ+ persons** on gender grounds, as well as against protestors on political grounds.

On a regional level, the US and Israel conducted a large-scale attack on Iran in 2025, targeting primarily nuclear infrastructure and senior military commanders, alongside nuclear scientists. In the beginning of 2026, the US and Israel proceeded with a joint **military intervention** against Iran, attacking densely populated areas and causing severe **civilian harm**. Similar patterns of violations have been noted concerning previous attacks, going back to the US' attack on Iraq in 2003. The recent attack on Iran, while initially justified by the US as a defensive measure to counter violence against Iranian citizens, has served to perpetuate the Iranian regime and **exacerbate instability** and political repression in Iran. These acts are largely considered to be in violation of the UN Charter and may amount to **crimes of aggression**.

ONGOING EFFORTS TO OVERCOME IMPUNITY AND REMAINING GAPS—WHY ACCOUNTABILITY MATTERS

Any allegations of international crimes must be investigated, and if appropriate, prosecuted as such, no matter where and by whom they have been committed. It is for these reasons that the ICC was created and why the principle of universal jurisdiction authorizes the judicial system of any country in the world to respond to such crimes. Impunity must be answered with accountability.

The sharp increase in violations across the region of Southwest Asia, as well as decades of structural violence, has left deep scars and lasting trauma among affected communities. An effective response will require a holistic approach, encompassing judicial and non-judicial measures that can provide survivors with justice, truth, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence. Failure to address such violence risks normalizing it and creating conditions for further abuses and renewed cycles of conflict. Accountability for the acts outlined above is urgently needed to prevent further displacement, death and suffering of millions in the region, as well as the inevitable destruction of the national and ethnic identity of entire groups of people, in particular the Palestinian people.

Despite deeply entrenched impunity for international crimes committed in the region, steps towards accountability have been taken in recent years through domestic and universal jurisdiction cases, as well as through the ICC. Where judicial proceedings are otherwise unavailable, civil society actors have tirelessly aimed to fill the gaps via extensive documentation and advocacy. While the progress made to date highlights the significant extent to which individual international criminal accountability can be enabled by strategic litigation and advocacy, these efforts also illuminate the limitations of the available tools when they operate in the absence of, or even in outright contradiction to, political will.

Domestic proceedings

National judicial proceedings typically are the first and best mode of pursuing accountability for violations of international criminal law, where a state both exercises genuine willingness and has the institutional capacity to carry it forward. While there are some states in Southwest Asia that have taken steps to begin investigations and prosecutions against alleged perpetrators, they are mostly taken in judicial contexts marked by serious doubts concerning impartiality and fair trial guarantees. To date, examples of genuine domestic proceedings that contribute to overcoming atrocities are scarce.

In Syria, many were eager to see **the first trials against former Assad-regime officials** as a significant milestone for domestic accountability. In August 2026, Bashar al-Assad, his brother Maher al-Assad and several other high-ranking officials were convicted in absentia to **death**. In addition to the fact that capital punishment is in violation of international **human rights** law, these sentences are based on an Assad-era penal code and law enforcement system that still is need of significant reform, as well as a genuine integration into the national transitional justice process, before it can truly **deliver on calls** for justice and accountability.

Similarly, Israel has passed a problematic **law creating a military tribunal** to try hundreds of Palestinians accused of taking part in the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel, which has been **criticized** for failing to ensure fair trial guarantees. This step occurs within the context of **impunity** for crimes committed by Israeli settlers, as well as Israeli military and political leadership, and the lack of judicial independence, impartiality and transparency. The introduction of a new, discriminatory **death penalty law**, effectively applying only to Palestinians, heightens these concerns.

Civil society has contributed **extensive documentation and advocacy**, increasing the visibility of crimes in these regions and working to holistically combat them and encourage societal healing. Yet, meaningful accountability depends on a multiplicity of factors, such as an adequate legal framework, strong and independent judicial institutions, as well as appropriate investigative and prosecutive capacities to carry out relevant proceedings. Across the region, various elements of a functioning accountability **architecture** remain weakened or entirely absent. Additionally, the proliferation of conflict, alongside credible reports of domestic political corruption in Southwest Asia, still severely limit the capacity for domestic proceedings to offer meaningful legal accountability.

The International Criminal Court and UN mechanisms

The ICC is one of the most powerful and well-known tools of the international criminal justice system. It has jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the territory of a state that has joined the Court or accepted its jurisdiction, as well as for crimes committed by nationals of a State Party to the Court or in situations referred to the ICC Prosecutor by the UN Security Council. In such cases, the ICC can exercise jurisdiction where national legal systems are themselves unable or unwilling to genuinely carry out judicial proceedings. The ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression is subject to further limitations—and is currently being addressed by a

long-overdue **reform** initiative. In any case, accountability avenues through international courts like the ICC are also accompanied by unique obstacles.

In Southwest Asia, Palestine currently remains the only context over which the ICC is able to exercise **jurisdiction**. As Lebanon, Iran, Israel and Syria have not accepted the court's jurisdiction either by **acceding** to the Rome Statute or by issuing an **ad hoc declaration**, the ICC remains unable to initiate investigations or issue arrest warrants for crimes committed within these regions by nationals of a state not party to the Statute. This is unlikely to change without significant diplomatic efforts.

For crimes documented in Gaza, the ICC has issued **arrest warrants** for both Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant in November 2024, alongside warrants issued for high-ranking members of Hamas. Reportedly, the Court might have also issued additional, **secret warrants** in relation to crimes committed in Palestine. It would be important for these warrants to cover the entire documented range of acts that could credibly rise to the level of international crimes committed since and before October 7, including the many credible documented reports of **widespread sexual violence**.

In any case, the execution of the warrants relies on states' willingness to cooperate—willingness that has been brought into question in light of **incidents of non-compliance** with ICC arrest warrants and rising political pressure on the Court. Just as the Court is becoming ever more essential for accountability in Southwest Asia, it is forced to navigate a United States government campaign to **"dismantle"** the Court, including via increased sanctions, as well as Russian **arrest warrants** issued against ICC officials.

Other mechanisms, including UN Commissions of Inquiry, fact-finding missions and similar investigative mechanisms can also function as vital components of the international criminal justice ecosystem. They gather reports on violations, following strict methodological guidelines, and can inform legal proceedings, advocacy, as well as political decision-making by states and international organizations. Like other mechanisms, they are dependent on state and international cooperation, including allowing **investigators to enter regions to collect information**. The **International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)**, for instance, has been invaluable in collecting evidence of international crimes committed in Syria and making them available to national authorities in Europe. This has been particularly essential, given that the ICC does not have jurisdiction over the situation in Syria. In the context of Palestine, the **Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel** has documented alleged violations,

identified broader patterns of conduct and has assessed their implications under international law, which remains crucial despite the lack of access to and communication with Israeli authorities since 2023. If adequately funded and supported, UN mechanisms can therefore contribute to creating a global culture of accountability.

Extraterritorial efforts and universal jurisdiction

In the absence of the capacity of states in the region to pursue genuine prosecutions domestically, universal jurisdiction and other extraterritorial judicial proceedings are an important additional avenue for pursuing legal accountability.

Civil society actors, such as members and subcontracted partners of the **Global Initiative against Impunity**, have been frontrunners in submitting criminal complaints in a wide variety of domestic jurisdictions regarding crimes committed during the course of the conflict in Palestine, as well as filing cases to stop **arms transfers** by European states to the region. Although some domestic authorities have remained **reluctant or altogether unwilling** to exercise jurisdiction, even when it concerns alleged crimes by or against their own nationals, such complaints exert significant pressure against the obdurate shield of impunity.

The principle of universal jurisdiction has led to positive developments towards accountability in Syria, as exemplified by Germany's ongoing prosecution of five alleged members of pro-Assad militias for the starvation and **siege of Yarmouk**. This is a rare instance of investigations into the **deliberate starvation of civilians** as a prohibited method of warfare and could pave the way for other cases. It is accompanied by **several convictions** across Europe against former members of ISIS and persons affiliated with the Assad regime.

Despite many successes, foreign or international proceedings are limited in terms of states' political will and capacity to exercise jurisdiction and their practical capacity to meaningfully influence accountability domestically. What these cases do demonstrate is how steadfast advocacy can result in concrete outcomes for strategic litigation. They also underline the effectiveness of structural investigations that allow for the collection and sharing of evidence across Europe—a process facilitated by the **Genocide Prosecution Network**, hosted by Eurojust. Most notably, these efforts challenge long-standing, overarching impunity and underline the truly essential role that the EU, its member states, and civil society can play in ensuring that accountability remains possible.

Corporate accountability

Economic activities are often intricately linked to international crimes, enabling their commission and profiting from them. In the West Bank, for instance, companies active in Israeli settlements are an important factor contributing to their establishment, maintenance and expansion. **Recognized** by the EU as illegal and an obstacle to peace, settlements are also intricately linked to the commission of international crimes against Palestinians, such as the crime against humanity of deportation or forcible transfer of population.

Recent years have seen some progress toward accountability for corporate actors involved in the commission of international crimes. Perhaps the most notable recent step is the conviction of French cement manufacturer **Lafarge**, together with several former executives and intermediaries, for financing terrorism and violating a European embargo in Syria. Lafarge also remains under investigation for complicity in crimes against humanity.

This successful case and others like it are overwhelmingly instigated and pursued by civil society actors. Their work complements ongoing efforts by national authorities that are already in place and strengthens accountability efforts where national or international responses are lacking. Still, states are often reluctant and unwilling to do more, which necessarily limits the overall efficacy and scope of accountability for corporate actors, as corporate involvement in the commission of crimes in conflict-affected regions globally only continues to escalate. Addressing violations committed by corporate actors becomes even more challenging when these actors act beyond borders and the reach of domestic law. Action by the EU and member states can however substantially transform this deadlock and fill in the accountability gaps left by the limitations inherent in strategic litigation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidently, despite recurring systemic violations of international law in the region, efforts to genuinely address the accountability gap remain scarce. 2026 has proven that such impunity erodes trust and fuels further violence and instability. The EU and its member states must oppose this normalization of violations of international law and work towards the reinvigoration of the international criminal justice ecosystem. While all elements of transitional justice need to be addressed equally to achieve sustainable peace in the region, the following recommendations emphasize steps to implement legal measures.

EU MEMBER STATES

1

States should initiate structural investigations and rely on extraterritorial or universal jurisdiction to prosecute international crimes that have gone unaddressed

Structural investigations, which have been called for by civil society organizations across Europe, are a form of general investigation that allows for the examination of a context more broadly, aiming to analyze patterns of violence, secure evidence, as well as identify victims and witnesses and alleged perpetrators. They can prepare the ground for person-specific investigations and, ultimately, prosecutions. States should open such investigations, particularly in order to respond to violations that have so far gone unaddressed. These blind spots include conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, including reproductive violence, in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as systematic human rights violations including the brutal repression of protests, extrajudicial executions, and the structural discrimination and persecution of women and ethnic groups in Iran.

2

States should increase transnational cooperation on documentation and evidence preservation

In light of the scale of the alleged crimes and the volume of potentially relevant evidence, EU member states should strengthen their information-sharing and coordination to streamline their respective accountability efforts and avoid fragmentation of investigations. The “[Ljubljana-The Hague Convention](#)” represents an important step in this direction by establishing a comprehensive framework for mutual legal assistance, extradition and interstate coordination to investigate and prosecute international crimes. States that have not yet done so should ratify or accede to the Convention and adopt the domestic legal and institutional measures necessary for its effective implementation.

In parallel, EU member states should make greater and more systematic use of Eurojust’s [Core International Crimes Evidence Database \(CICED\)](#). Established in 2023, the database allows national authorities to securely submit and preserve evidence of core crimes. Its centralized structure enables the early identification of parallel investigations and avoids the duplication of witness interviews and the related risk of re-traumatization. Where several states are investigating overlapping allegations involving European nationals or suspects entering European territory, states should consider establishing [Joint Investigative Teams \(JIT\)](#) that can ensure the close alignment between prosecutors, police officers and investigative judges from different member states.

3

States should strengthen their cooperation with and support of the ICC

Since Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Iran are not States Parties to the Rome Statute, EU member states should invest their diplomatic efforts in encouraging accession to the Statute and the adoption of respective legislation for ratification. While there is currently little prospect for accession by Israel or Iran, Syria’s transitional authorities invited the [ICC prosecutor](#) to Damascus in 2025, signaling at least a degree of openness to cooperation and engagement with the Court. In light of the Syrian transitional authorities’ reluctance to accept jurisdiction that would not be limited to crimes committed by the former Assad regime, EU member states should emphasize in their diplomatic exchanges that genuine (transitional) justice will only grow when based on impartiality. Other states that are currently less likely to become parties to the ICC could be encouraged to at least accept the Court’s jurisdiction on an ad hoc basis by lodging a declaration under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute.

At a domestic level, EU member states should ensure that coherent legislation and procedures are in place to handle ICC arrest and surrender requests efficiently and promptly. Failures to arrest or surrender ICC suspects represent serious instances of non-compliance with obligations under the Rome Statute. Any further such instances must be prevented.

4

States should prevent and address corporate involvement in international crimes

Financial and economic actors often play a significant role in enabling, exacerbating and/or committing international crimes and human rights violations, including in Southwest Asia. States should adopt [preventive measures](#), such as due diligence legislation as well as bans on

trading with, operating in and providing services to illegal settlements. Stronger avenues for ensuring accountability for corporate involvement in international crimes are also needed, by expanding civil and criminal law frameworks and strengthening investigative capacities of relevant national authorities.

5 States should strengthen the institutional and legal framework

As access to Gaza remains severely restricted, the collection and preservation of evidence continue to present significant challenges. States should therefore provide political and financial support for the renewal and effective implementation of the mandates of relevant UN investigative bodies, particularly the **International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria**, the **Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel**, and the **Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran**, to ensure access to documentation and evidence, including official records, medical records, satellite imagery and other relevant material held by states or public authorities.

Negotiations concerning a **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Humanity** are another avenue for strengthening international justice. The UN process has progressed to formal treaty negotiations, with a first Preparatory Committee session held in January 2026 and **further preparations and negotiations** scheduled for 2027, 2028 and 2029. EU member states should advocate for a swift adoption of the **convention** to generate an international treaty obligation for its signatories to prevent crimes against humanity in the future.

Similarly, ongoing negotiations to reform the ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression, in a manner that would align it with the Court's jurisdiction over other international crimes, are a unique opportunity for states to close a glaring **accountability gap**. By advocating in favor of the reform of Article 15*bis* (4) and (5) of the Rome Statute, states can strengthen not only the legal framework but also the credibility of international justice institutions.

As an important non-judicial measure, states should impose extensive arms embargos on countries where there is a clear risk that the weapons could be used to commit serious violations of international law, as was done by Spain to Israel. This is necessary both to prevent international crimes and to avoid being complicit in their commission.

EUROPEAN UNION

1 Political measures

To ensure consistency between the different areas of EU external action and its founding principles, the EU should mainstream accountability across all relevant political resolutions, Council conclusions and external policy instruments.

- To maintain credibility, avoiding double standards is imperative. While crimes committed by the Iranian regime have received much criticism, the EU should equally condemn any acts by the US, Israel or other countries that violate the UN Charter or international law.
- Council conclusions should expressly support investigations, prosecutions, evidence preservation, and cooperation with international and national accountability mechanisms and encourage the establishment of JITs and the use of Eurojust's **Core International Crimes Evidence Database**.
- The European Parliament and its members should also adopt resolutions supporting reform of the ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression, which to date is restricted by the very narrow jurisdictional **requirements** that allow investigations into that crime.
- Alternative platforms and initiatives that bypass the UN or weaken principles of international law should be subject to close scrutiny, and potential engagement with those should, at most, remain conditional. The EU seems to have **engaged**—albeit cautiously—with the US-led Board of Peace, a body actively **sidelining accountability**. The EU must counter this trend by championing justice, as well as Palestinian self-determination and their ownership of the process, across all meetings and negotiations.
- The EU must abide by EU and international law in all negotiations in which it engages. Initiatives by the Commission, such as a **draft police agreement with Israel** deemed contrary to EU and international law, should therefore be stopped.
- The EU should also consider the establishment of an international justice Special Representative, as has been **advocated for by several CSOs**. Such a mandate could improve the coordination across the EEAS, the Commission, and Council Working Groups in their justice efforts, such as evidence preservation, victim support and transitional justice initiatives. It could also monitor and respond to non-compliance by member states with their obligations under the Rome Statute, including withdrawals, failures to execute ICC arrest warrants or lack of cooperation with the Court.

- In general, EU institutions and member states should consider adopting coordinated legal, financial, diplomatic and technological measures to mitigate the direct and chilling effects of sanctions against the ICC and international justice actors, in line with the recommendations of the Coalition for the ICC report “**Criminalising Accountability**.” One urgent measure is the activation of the **Blocking Statute**, to send a strong signal of support and to prevent the extraterritorial application of sanctions against the Court and associated actors.

2

Economic measures

As set out in the **ICJ’s Advisory Opinion of July 2024**, all states are under an obligation not to recognize as lawful, or render aid or assistance in maintaining, the situation arising from Israel’s unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This entails the clear obligation to **prevent trade and investments** that assist in the maintenance of Israel’s unlawful occupation of the Palestinian territory, including the establishment, expansion and maintenance of illegal settlements. **Several** member states have responded with national import-bans on products from such settlements. Others should follow suit. Similarly, the European Commission and Foreign Affairs Council should devise options to bring to an end to **EU trade with Israeli settlements** in occupied territories, and ensure that its Common Commercial Policy is in line with international law. As pushed for by over 70 **Members of the European Parliament**, the Commission could and should introduce a legislative proposal to this effect. In the long term, a suspension of the EU-Israel association agreement should be considered, as long as serious breaches of international law by Israel—which are contrary to the stipulations of the agreement—persist. While a full suspension—which would require unanimity—seems difficult at the moment, the EU should use Association Council meetings, as well as other bilateral channels, to place accountability at the center of any cooperation.

Regarding Syria, and in line with demands of Syrian civil society, the EU should condition political engagement, reconstruction assistance and recovery funding on exhibiting measurable benchmarks concerning accountability, human rights, and an **inclusive transitional justice** process.

3

Supporting civil society and protecting individuals

In almost all contexts, civil society has played, and will continue to play, a central role in documenting international

crimes, preserving evidence, assisting victims and witnesses, and supporting affected communities. The EU should therefore ensure flexible and accessible funding for civil society organizations engaged in accountability work. As transnational repression by Iranian authorities increasingly expands, the EU and its member states should also strengthen protection of Iranian dissidents, human rights defenders, journalists and other members of diaspora communities.

ECCHR’S STRATEGY TOWARD MORE MEANINGFUL JUSTICE

ECCHR is an independent, non-profit organization founded in 2007 to enforce civil and human rights globally through legal action. ECCHR aims to end impunity for such crimes as torture, war crimes, gender-based violence and corporate exploitation. The organization litigates cases, supports victims and survivors of serious crimes when they appear in court, and collaborates with prosecutors, journalists, NGOs and lawyers in universal jurisdiction cases.

The **Global Initiative Against Impunity**, a four-year project that is co-funded by the EU, aims to enhance victim and civil society participation in accountability processes for serious human rights violations. This initiative focuses on a survivor-centered, trauma-informed and gender-transformative approach to justice and accountability.

GET IN TOUCH

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