



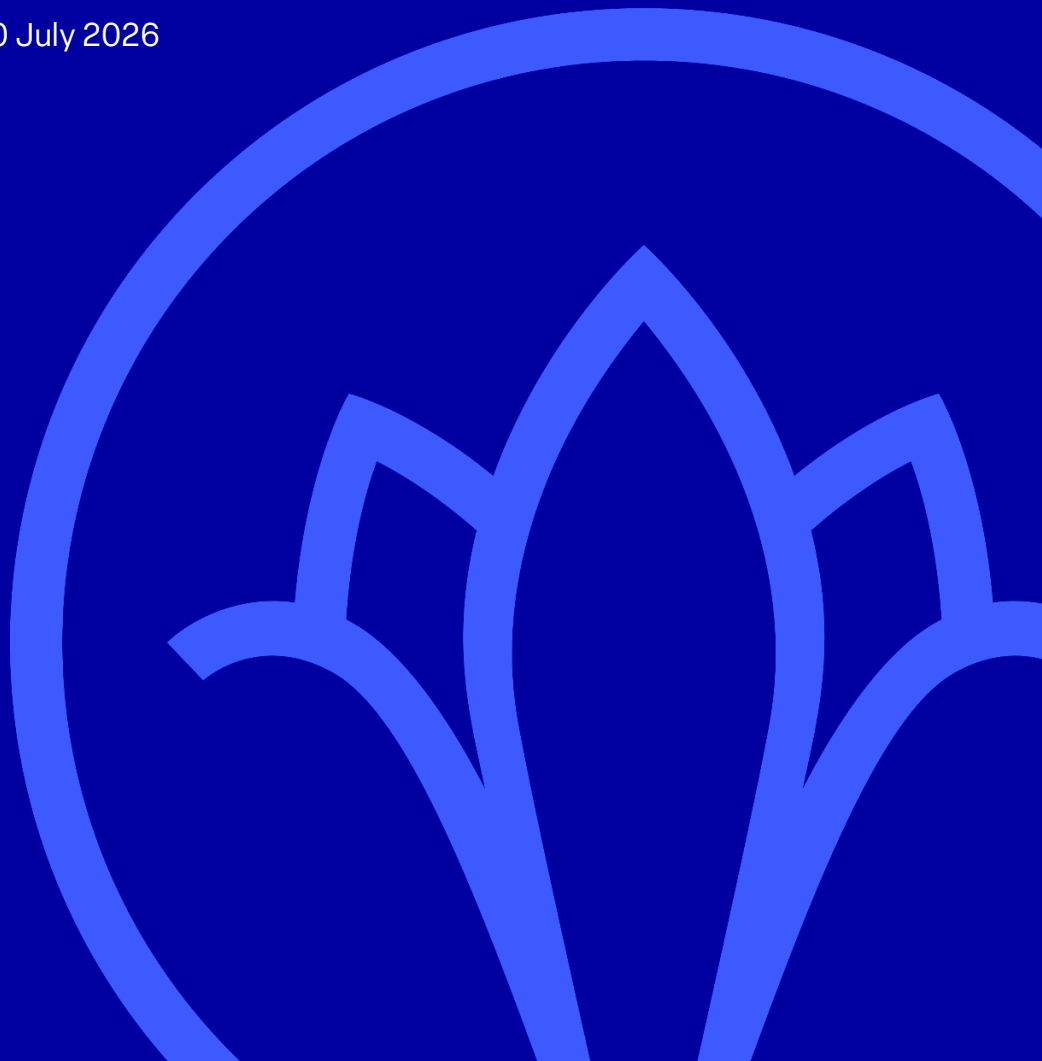
**Wilton
Park**

Transitional Justice in contemporary conflict resolution: from victors' justice to victims' justice

Wednesday 8 – Friday 10 July 2026

In association with

UK Foreign,
Commonwealth &
Development Office
(FCDO); International
Nuremberg Principles
Academy



In association with



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Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Dialogue Report

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Executive summary

In July 2026, eighty years since the International Military Tribunals at Nuremberg, Wilton Park and the International Nuremberg Principles Academy convened a diverse group of experts, officials, and advocates to address Transitional Justice (TJ) in contemporary conflict resolution. Around 50 participants from 18 countries came together to exchange perspectives and propose responses to the evolving foundations of TJ, the adaptations needed to deliver justice for today's conflicts, and the intersection between justice, mediation, and conflict resolution. Particular focus was given to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the role of faith in justice, accountability for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV), and incorporation of gender lenses into TJ frameworks. A three-day programme of plenary discussions, breakout sessions, and informal interactions made space for candid reflections on justice in a world in transition. It also generated practical proposals for action.

The overarching insight was that TJ itself is in a state of transition. It is still seen as key to preventing cycles of violence, because it focuses on 'the consequences of conflict long after the fighting has stopped.' However, the foundations that have sustained the growth of TJ over the last 40 years, including multilateralism, democracy, international law, and development assistance, are weakening as the international order evolves. In some places, trust in TJ is actually at an all-time low, perceived as serving the interests of the *victors* in conflict (as observed regarding the pioneering Nuremberg tribunals); it is also associated with a prescriptive, Global North approach that cannot discern or deliver what is required on the ground. This narrative endures despite TJ's origins in Civil Society movements in the Global South. It could be said that TJ is itself 'on trial' in the court of global opinion, with its relevance and ability to adapt in serious question. The challenge for policymakers and practitioners is not just where TJ fits within conflict resolution, but whether the term 'transitional justice' is still useful today.

Discussions also identified specific initiatives to reinforce and renew TJ approaches. For TJ to be effective, participants advocated for case-specific strategies, informed by ongoing engagement with a spectrum of local stakeholders, including victims and survivors, and international ones, including mediation and conflict-resolution actors. The event concluded that, despite many challenges, *victim-centric*¹ justice remains necessary for a world of proliferating conflict and geopolitical contestation.

¹ The term 'victim' is used here instead of 'survivor' due to its use in legal frameworks.

Transitional Justice in transition

An initial theme in discussions was that TJ today is in a state of transition, evolving far beyond its historic origins in democratic transitions. Participants recalled the initial emergence of TJ as a ‘bottom-up’, Civil Society-driven initiative. The historic role of victims, survivors and civil society organisations, such as the ‘Mothers of Plaza de Mayo’ in Argentina, were foundational to the ‘origin story’ of TJ. The TJ movement was then developed and consolidated in the 1980s and 1990s via the emergence of trials and truth-seeking initiatives following regime changes in Latin America and Eastern Europe, and mass human rights violations in the Former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and elsewhere. By the early 21st century, these practices led to normative consolidation and a system of UN-endorsed best practices for TJ, including the creation of an International Criminal Court in The Hague.

A senior independent expert affiliated to a multilateral organisation described how best practice for TJ included five pillars: Truth, Justice, Reparation, Prevention and Memorialisation. These pillars engage with reform on societal, institutional, and individual levels, while holistically combining judicial and non-judicial measures where possible. These complementary pillars provided a foundation for many contemporary TJ programmes.

Although participants referred to numerous TJ ‘success stories’, conversations also emphasised that, over the past decade, a rapidly changing international order had challenged and eroded TJ’s relevance. The legitimacy of associated norms emerged as a critical requirement for TJ, including multilateralism, democracy, international law, and development assistance programmes, all of which were now under threat. After the Cold War, democracy spread to a number of formerly authoritarian and military regimes, enshrining democratic norms as almost universal; the United States was seen in some quarters as ‘a shining city on the hill’. However, ‘cracks’ were exposed in this image over the perceived hypocrisy of Western democracies, alongside the self-interested and short-sighted nature of interventions in the Global South. As existing norms crumbled, countries who once led the push for TJ now disregarded memory cultures and human rights standards. One academic described the recent degradation of TJ as leading towards an ‘age of impunity’; justice in the future may therefore look like ‘different kinds of silence’.

This narrative was echoed by several participants, who noted that many countries had lost their trust in multilateralism and international law, despite an unprecedented

docket at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). For example, a TJ practitioner noted that ‘the feeling [in Syria] is that it would be good if the United Nations could just give money and go away’, leaving the implementation of TJ to those more trusted to prioritise local needs over geopolitical agendas. Others noted that financial assistance mechanisms were also in retreat, as former international donors to the TJ ‘project’ elevated domestic needs and securitisation over supporting justice in other contexts.

This erosion of norms has led TJ today to move away from any illusion of a ‘perfect’ justice. Participants highlighted that many people now misconstrue the term ‘transitional justice’, because they view it as lacking meaningful local impact, and chiefly associate it with providing perpetrators with amnesty. This pushback against TJ has exposed a fundamental question: is ‘transitional justice’ as a term still valid today?

A familiar criticism of international TJ is that it applies a one-size-fits-all model by imposing a Global North-driven agenda on mainly Global South contexts, ignoring cultural specificity. Discussions frequently referred to TJ as a loaded concept, often principally associated with criminal accountability, leading to some current practitioners avoiding utilising the term. For example, a senior mediator noted that Colombia describes its justice processes as a ‘victim-centred approach’ (rather than as TJ) to reframe its work in language that reflects local needs; a European justice practitioner noted that this reframing has also occurred in Ukraine, because the ‘transitional’ component of TJ is compromised by the ongoing conflict. Participants shared the view that alternate language such as ‘post-conflict justice’ or ‘contending with legacies of violence’ were at times more appreciated by victims and survivors, because TJ can be perceived as a politicised, ‘Western obsession’.

Nonetheless, participants also noted that victims and survivors of many conflicts still call for elements of TJ, such as reparations, criminal trials, and other forms of accountability, acknowledging that justice has an important inter-generational impact. In fact, a senior academic suggested that peace may not be truly sustainable without justice. TJ has also expanded into new spaces with potential for delivering justice to under-represented groups. Several participants discussed the growing push to interact with faith-based communities, explore gendered perspectives, and to study the effects of conflict on LGBTQ+ people. Participants also noted that TJ interrelates with other international projects like development and economic recovery, because those sectors have helped fill the funding gap left behind by shifts in donor priorities. Although TJ has perhaps ‘expanded its ambitions too far’, in the words of one academic expert, another perspective is that it has ‘resiliently found ways to proceed’

in an increasingly contested environment. Today's TJ is therefore an imperfect field, but still a meaningful and necessary one.

Case study: Transitional Justice in Syria

Syria presented an important case study for the current challenges that TJ faces, and the requirement for multi-level and multi-stakeholder engagement. It also gave rise to a number of potential initiatives to strengthen TJ, potentially with support from international partners.

The fall of the dictatorial and repressive Assad regime in 2024 came as a surprise, not only to the international community, but to Syrians as well. Syrians began to demand Transitional Justice 'from day one', leading to the creation of national Transitional Justice and Missing Persons Commissions, and programmes focusing on reparations and victim protections. The National Commission for Transitional Justice (NCTJ) is a Syrian- and survivor-led organisation, with a majority of the Commissioners also victims of the regime. The group heard how it has six priority areas: truth-seeking, justice and accountability, reparations, memorialisation, guarantees of non-recurrence, and reconciliation. This last priority of reconciliation has proved the most controversial, because many people do not want to just reconcile and forgive. NCTJ makes use of extensive documentation work conducted prior to the fall of the regime, and provides a space for civil society for different regions of Syria to speak out.

During a Syria-focused breakout session, participants raised three critical areas for TJ approaches in Syria to address: **evidence**, **jurisdiction**, and **resources**.

First, participants argued that it was difficult to organise the necessary **evidence** to hold perpetrators accountable. Much evidence is still inadmissible due to international concerns over Syria's use of the death penalty and the lack of international crimes in Syrian law. Meanwhile, on-the-ground efforts to gain other sources of evidence face several hurdles. Interviewing survivors again introduces the potential for re-traumatisation, which was likened to 'rape for a second time'. In addition, physical evidence is hard to find due to the former regime's use of mass graves. There are an estimated 600-800 mass graves in Syria, and these graves include victims from other countries, such as Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq. Bodies are also often burned, making retrieval and identification even harder. As a result of these difficulties, participants discussed how alternative sources of evidence were often admitted. For example, the

Commander of the Armed Forces in Syria was controversially spared prosecution because he had provided information on other perpetrators.

Second, Syrian TJ organisations also face a **jurisdiction** challenge. Many senior perpetrators are outside of Syria, requiring other countries to hold perpetrators accountable. A legal expert pointed out that this is difficult in countries such as the United Kingdom, where perpetrators of crimes in conflicts, like in Syria, cannot be tried if visiting the country for tourism or other short-term purposes. This is unlike countries such as Germany and Sweden where Universal Jurisdiction proceedings have been used to hold members of the Assad regime accountable for their crimes. Meanwhile, MENA experts raised issues with Syria's own ability to hold perpetrators accountable; Syria currently lacks the jurisdiction or institutional means to bring perpetrators back from other countries. In addition, perpetrators from multiple nations committed crimes in Syria during the war, leading to questions over how to offer reparations to victims of these external actors, such as amputees resulting from Russian and Counter-Daesh Coalition bombings.

Third, event participants emphasised how a dearth of **resources** posed a critical challenge to Syria's quest for TJ. Many areas of Syria are entirely destroyed. The NCTJ, for example, has at times struggled to find a building to host its regional offices because of the mass destruction of infrastructure. The collapsed economy and lack of access to basic necessities in areas complicates justice objectives, as the priority is still daily survival. This local resource difficulty is coupled with international funding often misaligning with the justice demands of Syrian communities. As TJ timelines stretch out into the future, many Syrians feel that TJ has already failed, and frequently criticise the work of the NCTJ for having not already brought about justice.

In response to the above challenges, participants proposed a selection of initiatives that could be actioned in the next 12-24 months. These included international support for multi-stakeholder engagement, including via a localised communications strategy, a tailored funding approach, and a comprehensive registration system for missing persons (see table below):

Strategies for Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in Syria	
(I) Develop a localised	(a) Acknowledging that official government communications are not perfect, a local communication strategy would provide the public with an understanding of what is happening with TJ

communication strategy	in Syria, the rationale behind decisions, and the limitations of current efforts, in order to manage expectations; this strategy should include faith leaders and make use of social media (b) The strategy would define key messages and tailor content for each local context, following surveys of local stakeholders and grassroots initiatives. These surveys would help to understand both local needs and potential challenges to communications (such as prior bias); this would help foster trust between the NCTJ and Syrian communities (c) It should utilise creative methods of delivering information, such as televised drama series and theatre performances that could be delivered in local community spaces.
(II) Missing Persons Registry	(a) Develop a public campaign for the registration of missing persons with the National Commission for Missing Persons (NCMP). This would disseminate knowledge of the registry currently being developed, and support local understanding of its relation to truth-seeking and TJ, drawing on the lessons from transitional contexts such as Guatemala and Argentina (b) Create a plan to improve accessibility to the registry for less-digitally-literate communities (c) Enable operations in a limited-funding environment, via the training of local staff, who could facilitate the campaign with sensitivity, and gather evidence of the registry's impact to seek funding from donors (d) Support articles about the legal status of laws related to missing persons (e) Push for data-sharing and compatibility between various registries (including those held by the Syrian government and those by the UN) and compile all datasets into one database on missing persons (f) Inculcate institutional partnerships with other post-conflict contexts that pioneer forensic DNA genealogy for missing persons.
(III) Tailored Funding Approach	(a) Identify key organisations providing project-specific funding; for example, arts funding for art therapy programmes for children

	(b) Identify private entities, including private firms and members of the diaspora, who can assist with small donations (c) Create a collective fund via small donations that can be strategically invested to finance itself (d) Bring visibility to projects to demonstrate impact and to engage donors, via traditional and social media platforms. Where possible, funding for communications initiatives needs support (e) Find creative means to operate in limited-funding environments.
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TJ, conflict resolution, and mediation

This dialogue also addressed interactions between justice, mediation, and conflict resolution, noting that, as armed conflict is becoming both more widespread and more violent, there is a growing need to provide justice for victims and survivors.

Engagement throughout the conflict cycle was identified as important. A non-governmental mediator at the event described this interaction as relying on the shared goal between TJ and the mediation of ‘sustainable and just peace’. They argued that the incorporation of TJ throughout the mediation process (pre-negotiations, during negotiations, and in implementation) was imperative for advancing and strengthening conflict resolution outcomes. This was debated by some other participants, who suggested that TJ (particularly in the form of criminal accountability) is often too sensitive to address in practice. For instance, diplomats with experience of mediation admitted to raising justice and accountability with conflicting parties in private, rather than publicly, because such conversations could be escalatory and harmful to peace.

This led to broader debate about whether engagement between mediation and justice is sometimes under-recognised in practice, because it takes place behind closed doors; one experienced MENA diplomat said that they had rarely seen TJ specialists in the room during mediations (although this statement was refuted by an international TJ professional). Such contradictory narratives suggest that the relationship between TJ and mediation is an evolving area, and requires further examination.

Participants offered four recommendations for engagement between these fields:

- First, approaches to addressing TJ within mediation should be adapted **to local and context-specific realities**, as there is no single universal model for this integration.
- Second, TJ perspectives should be **integrated earlier** within the mediation processes, rather than as a solely post-conflict measure, to create more sustainable peace.
- Third, links between mediation and TJ practitioners should be strengthened via **more regular exchanges**, specifically including expanded engagement with mediation actors on justice and accountability issues.
- Fourth, **more evidence and practical guidance** should be developed for how accountability and mediation can be pursued in mutually reinforcing ways.

Participants at the event argued that these four mechanisms could enable appropriate stakeholder engagement within TJ across the conflict resolution landscape.

Opportunity and obstacles in diverse Transitional Justice: Faith and Gender

The dialogue also considered challenges in the application of TJ among diverse populations. Participants analysed the role of TJ in two specific contexts: faith-based communities and gender minorities. Across these contexts, a central theme emerged that victims and survivors are not a singular, cohesive group, and often have substantially different needs and objectives from one another. As an example, it was noted that the types of crimes experienced and the priorities for justice varied significantly even from region to region within Syria; for this reason, the NCTJ had opened regional offices and hired personnel to speak local languages, to develop a greater appreciation of the contextual and structural elements of the crimes committed, and to represent the interests of local survivors. Despite this, MENA-based practitioners concurred that context-specific TJ was still an area for growth within the international ecosystem. A senior diplomat from the MENA region highlighted the necessity of understanding local culture and conditions when attempting to resolve conflict.

Faith

Specialists from faith-based TJ initiatives noted that religious communities provide an important tool for tailoring TJ to contexts today. Conversations centred on how religion can both help and hinder TJ by positively bringing communities together, but

also by entrenching perspectives against excluded, marginalised populations. On a positive note, participants noted that certain initiatives have been able to leverage faith to the benefit of victim's justice. A local advocate described how the senior Yazidi religious leader in Iraq not only welcomed back women who had experienced CRSV but also placed them at a higher rank within society. This empowered Yazidi women to speak about their experiences and advocate for justice. Participants also raised numerous other examples: in Rwanda, religious institutions encouraged people to admit their mistakes and ask for forgiveness, rebuilding community trust and moving towards reconciliation; in South Sudan, a female-led council of churches played an instrumental role in justice engagement and ensured that women also received appropriate justice; in South Africa and Colombia, Truth Commissions were famously led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Reverend Francisco de Roux.

Gender

Discussions focused specifically on incorporating the perspectives of gender in TJ, underscoring an acute need to offset the shrinking support to grassroots organisations who frequently advocate for justice for CRSV. Participants recognised that addressing CRSV is a particularly important growing space for TJ, because conflicts have inherent gender dynamics that are vital to consider. As identified by a Ukrainian TJ specialist, interventions must be attempted as early as possible to provide a space for female survivors to discuss their experiences and to enable reparations for children affected by, or resulting from, sexual violence; this kind of justice could not afford to wait for a moment of 'transition'.

Many participants observed that conversations around CRSV are often limited and largely female-driven, with men uncomfortable discussing its incidence and associated need for justice. A Ukrainian specialist stressed that men can play an important role in confronting CRSV, not only in empowering women survivors, but also as potential victims themselves. A dedicated breakout session suggested a three-pronged approach to addressing problems in TJ efforts for CRSV, while acknowledging varying needs of diverse victims (see table below).

Identifying Problems and Solutions in Case-Specific TJ for CRSV	
(I) Addressing 'silences in the law' around CRSV	Problem: Participants noted the need to address gaps in international law regarding protections against CRSV. For example, the language in the Geneva Conventions is

	vague and the law has a tendency to prioritise sexual assault over other kinds of gendered violence. There is also a marked neglect around the gendered dimensions and harms emanating from the crime of aggression. Solution: Participants offered solutions related to fostering a better understanding of CRSV legally, with clearer definitions and protections in international law.
(II) Engaging CRSV in primary budgets	Problem: Current funding for CRSV is often excluded from core TJ budgets and is therefore amongst the first to be affected by budget cuts. Solution: Participants discussed creative funding efforts focused on collective funds, local governments, diaspora communities, and private sector actors.
(III) Leveraging male populations as potential allies and victims	Problem: Men play an important but underutilised role in TJ related to CRSV, both as potential allies and victims. Female victims of CRSV in Iraq who led calls for TJ were often those supported by male family members. Men were also victims of CRSV, yet often removed from associated narratives. Solution: Participants discussed the need to engage men in CRSV, with a timely and significant requirement to better involve men and men's networks. It is important to distinguish modes of engagement when dealing with civilian and military men.

The problems and solutions identified by participants critique the practice of 'copying and pasting' approaches from one context to another. Instead, participants agreed that difficulties in achieving justice for gender-based violence provides an emerging space for tailored TJ efforts to expand. CRSV advocates proposed adaptations to TJ tools and language to meet case-specific challenges. Conversations more broadly suggested that the rationale behind applying TJ to diverse contexts could offer novel perspectives to ensure that TJ meets the needs of victims and survivors. This can not only directly address their needs, but also how to amplify their agency. A victim-centric approach that considers diverse populations could enable TJ to engage across multiple stakeholders and improve outcomes.

The importance of multi-stakeholder engagement

Beyond these specific lenses, participants identified **multi-level** and **multi-sector stakeholder engagement** as the primary priority for applying TJ methods more effectively and sustainably. TJ needs to create strategies for how to support *victim-centric* justice. Participants discussed how appropriate engagement with local and global stakeholders across the conflict cycle is necessary for ensuring that efforts identify and respond to the correct set of needs. Local support for TJ processes ensures that the justice mechanisms are not only tailored to address the most grievous crimes, but are also understood and received positively by the communities they intend to serve. As noted by a senior human rights practitioner, the benefit of engaging those most affected was evident, for example, in the Special Court in Sierra Leone. Although the Court could only prosecute a handful of senior perpetrators, a Truth Commission – created first and foremost to create an impartial historical record – conducted thousands of meetings across Sierra Leone to explain the rationale behind the trials, and broadcast court cases to the public. As a result, 90% of the public was made aware of the trials, and many in Sierra Leone now say that the TJ process led to successful outcomes. Public engagement is thus a vital tool for gaining support for TJ efforts.

Within this local engagement context, participants stressed that inviting victims and survivors to become a part of TJ processes allows efforts to focus on what each community needs to move beyond past harms. As examples, MENA experts noted that some victims would rather receive reparations and support with rebuilding their livelihoods, whereas others prioritised holding perpetrators accountable for serious crimes. For TJ to reflect these varying objectives, the process must engage with victims and survivors throughout both the design and implementation stages. For example, the government of Iraq had passed a Yazidi Survivors Law, without proper consultation with the survivors of CRSV. Although the law provided Yazidi survivors with monthly payments as reparations, it failed to recognise what is most important to many of those affected: looking for the missing, exhuming mass graves, restoring residential areas, and criminal accountability. In fact, many survivors felt that these payments were ‘blood money’.

Following the passage of this law, the advocate in question had worked with Civil Society organisations to convince Iraqi lawmakers to speak directly with survivors; this led the lawmakers to incorporate Yazidi women’s experiences into the law and, as the

advocate notes, improved the ability of the law to address justice effectively. Local stakeholder engagement thus proved critical for augmenting TJ outcomes.

International stakeholder engagement

Beyond local perspectives, international stakeholder engagement also emerged as critical to ensuring effective TJ. One issue raised repeatedly was that the international community had in some cases failed to support criminal trials, because of illiberal practices in the relevant countries. For example, evidence of international crimes (such as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide) in Iraq was collected and stored by the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD). However, UNITAD refused to return the majority of evidence to affected countries (including Iraq), partly because evidence could be utilised in trials leading to the death penalty. This made it harder to hold perpetrators accountable and hindered domestic justice efforts. In Syria too, some evidence stored internationally was still unavailable because of diverging criminal justice practices.

In such cases, third parties that were the original supporters for the creation of international documentation missions (in UNITAD's case, the UK) could still advocate for these entities to share evidence with countries that experienced the human rights violations, via appropriate legal reforms. Furthermore, they could expand their own jurisdiction to hold perpetrators visiting these countries accountable; as noted by an advocate at the event, the only justice for international crimes committed against the Yazidis thus far had occurred outside of Iraq and Syria, via cases in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Kosovo, and Belgium. Many participants thus argued that third countries continued to play an important role in TJ, including in efforts to make it more victim-centric.

Discussants also raised how better global engagement could resolve issues with the provision of funding, which is currently often too short-term for effective TJ

- Often, international funding for TJ projects only lasts for two years, requiring projects to shut down just as they start to generate trust and impact. In addition, global funding is often seen as prioritising what the international community wants to address, rather than the interests of victims and survivors. Many participants thought that **long-term funding was preferable** even if the total monetary amounts were lower.

- Likewise, event participants agreed that funding for **justice at earlier stages** of a conflict (prior to an agreement or ‘transition’ to peace) was crucial, especially for documentation efforts to preserve evidence and to support identification of missing persons. Effective engagement with funding and evidence-holding bodies was therefore also identified as a requirement for successful TJ.

Participants also suggested that the TJ ecosystem needs to better incorporate traditionally under-acknowledged TJ actors, with greater agency provided to the Global South nations to mediate in conflicts within their region and beyond.

The group thus reached some consensus on the need for both **multi-level** and **multi-sector** stakeholder engagement. Participants emphasised that this engagement should ensure that governments and organisations appropriately represent the interests of victims and survivors. This means that TJ actors cannot afford, for example, to provide amnesty to perpetrators due to corruption or cronyism, as this could fracture the trust placed in them by victims and survivors. In addition, TJ needs to avoid becoming a ‘transactional justice’ that prevented accountability for those most affected because of its lack of understanding of relevant populations. A systemic commitment to multi-stakeholder engagement is needed for TJ to endure the current ‘trial’ and deliver justice for (and through) victims and survivors.

Conclusion

Although the foundations of TJ are changing, this event underscored how its mechanisms still serve as important tools for helping societies move forward after conflict. In a world of proliferating conflict and growing authoritarianism, many participants felt that the international community still bore a moral responsibility to defend human rights and support victims and survivors; this was reflected throughout conversations at the event.

This Wilton Park dialogue offered diverse, critical but constructive perspectives into the future of TJ. Although TJ may be in a state of transition, the event validated its relevance and its importance to providing victims with what they are asking for: truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence. To adapt to changes in the international order, participants concurred that TJ must adopt tailored strategies for diverse communities and multi-level stakeholder engagement. The event concluded by suggesting that ‘think-spaces’ like Wilton Park can play a critical role in reframing TJ

for the modern world, while also endowing participants with ‘renewed energy’. These conversations are imperative for international efforts to move from *victors’* justice to *victims’* justice.

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