

Annual Report 2025



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About

Impunity Watch is an international, non-profit organisation working with victims, survivors, and communities affected by serious human rights violations. Together, we challenge unaddressed historical abuses, promote justice and accountability, and deliver long-awaited redress.

For almost 20 years, we have walked side by side with victims' associations, local human rights defenders, and civil society actors. In our joint work, we ensure that their ideas of justice effectively shape political strategies after times of repression and conflict.

We ensure that the rights of victims, especially the most marginalised, are at the heart of all that we do.

We conduct research on the root causes of impunity, build strong partnerships and coalitions, and mobilise joint political action for change. In light of our evolving world, we have adapted our strategic vision ([‘Vision 2030’](#)) earlier than planned and have sharpened our focus to strengthen the fight for justice. We have made these changes while remaining true to our core values and mission.

Impunity Watch is committed to prioritising long-term engagements in our programming, operations and advocacy. We work at local, national, regional and international levels. All of this is made possible by the generous support of our donors, long-term relationships with our grassroots partners, and the activism and commitment of our dedicated global staff. We thank you all.

“ Together with victims and allies, we resist the normalisation of impunity—towards justice and accountability being the norm. _____”



Introduction

from our Executive Director

We are living in a world where impunity is becoming normalised. The global architecture of justice, accountability and human rights is deteriorating fast, as the post-war commitments to multilateralism, international law and human rights institutions are increasingly weakened. At the same time, conflicts are multiplying and becoming more complex and militarised, transcending borders, drawing in state and non-state actors, destabilising regions and fuelling geopolitical rivalry.

Too often, those most affected by conflict are excluded from peace negotiations, while short-term stability is prioritised over justice and structural reform. When victims are silenced, perpetrators go unpunished and root causes remain unaddressed, peace remains fragile and cycles of violence persist.

Yet the current political climate invites powerful opportunities for change. Despite worsening crises, we see victims' associations, youth and women-led movements, anti-racist and pro-democracy coalitions, and human rights defenders worldwide steadfastly challenging impunity in political arenas, courts, communities, and online.

Joining with these groups and their allies, our job is to fight against the normalisation of impunity. We are working towards a world where justice and accountability are the norm. Our core purpose is to increase pressure and resistance against those in power who are enabling impunity. We challenge the structures that stand in the way of justice and ensure the political cost of maintaining impunity becomes unacceptable.

This Annual Report 2025 highlights significant moments where we and our partners have stepped up as leading voices in the fight against impunity. It reflects the updated strategies outlined in our new strategic ‘Vision 2030’. We hope it will motivate and inspire you in the year ahead.

In solidarity, Marlies Stappers, Executive Director

The fight against impunity: What's at stake?

Impunity is the political choice to tolerate or enable serious human rights violations without fear of consequence.¹ It has many sources, including unequal power relations, historic abuse, and authoritarian form of governance.

The origins of current 'structures of impunity' are often found in unresolved historical injustices, leading to structural inequality and prolonged patterns of evading punishment for violence and wrongdoing. Impunity is also driven by organised crime and by corrupt and complicit elites, who capture the state for their own gain.

The international rules-based order has been compromised and largely fails to sufficiently address both past and present injustices. Double standards and transactional approaches are undermining the legitimacy of justice institutions from the United Nations (UN) to the International Criminal Court (ICC). At the same time, alarming shifts towards authoritarianism bank on deliberately undermining these very same rules-based orders. Defending these systems help bolster protections against democratic backsliding, but must be balanced with crucial reforms required to strengthen their role of protecting human rights as originally intended when they were first set up.

One concerning trend is that instead of serving as guarantors of accountability and prevention, **justice institutions are being captured and weaponised to increase persecution and erode democracy.** We're witnessing the criminalisation of human rights defenders while democratic

forms of governance are disintegrating. When so-called justice systems are co-opted and attack dissent, democracy erodes, structural violence persists, and impunity becomes normalised – shrinking the space for meaningful, victim-led justice before our very eyes.

The fight against impunity in the 21st century includes concerns around artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies. While they offer new tools for advancing victims' rights, rapid and unregulated advancements simultaneously pose serious risks for civil society and marginalised groups and threaten to undermine accountability. Addressing these requires greater oversight, context-sensitive innovation, and the meaningful participation of affected communities to strengthen justice efforts.

The consequences of normalising impunity are most severely felt by those most marginalised – women, young people, victims and communities affected by serious human rights violations. They face the pervasive effects of past injustices, plus the growing exposure to new violations, as political support for meaningful accountability shrinks. **Unless the structural realities and the normalisation of impunity are confronted, justice processes will not meaningfully uphold the rights of victims.**

After nearly 20 years of work in partnership with these communities, we have learnt that the only way to achieve sustainable justice is to dismantle the root causes of impunity and challenge the power dynamics that enable these drivers to persist. As an organisation, we focus on impunity in conflict, post-conflict and transitional justice contexts, marked by systemic human rights violations. It is here that we see the sharpest regression in human rights standards, particularly regarding victims' rights and the deliberate suppression of accountability. **We must act to reimagine just societies, built on the rule of law and human rights.** A reform agenda for the international, rules-based order is essential to dismantle structures of impunity for good. We play our part by investing in stronger analysis, mobilising to advance resistance, and redoubling efforts to amplify the power of advocacy to enact change.

¹ For the full definition, please refer to our 'Vision 2030': <https://www.impunitywatch.org/what-we-do/vision-2030/>

Justice must be politically-grounded, so that impunity becomes the exception and not the rule.

Youth as agents of change

Young people play a crucial role in resisting impunity. They champion the global commitment to ‘never again’: the principle that serious violations of human rights must never be repeated.

In many contexts where we work, youth mobilisation is both a form of justice and a strategy for preventing violence. When they fight for change, young people can successfully challenge established structures, increasing the political cost of injustice.

For example, the younger generation makes up 60 per cent of the African continent, representing immense potential as agents of change. Young people often remain sidelined when discussing policy and decision-making during transitional justice processes. Yet transitional justice – the systems that achieve accountability and foster reconciliation – is vital for their future, and for the generations to follow.

The African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) provides a comprehensive framework to address past injustices and promote sustainable peace in Africa. We are strengthening our collaboration with youth-led platforms and coalitions to influence policy and mobilise activism on global and regional levels. Across the continent, collective youth activism through platforms such as the African Youth for Transitional Justice (AY4TJ) have amplified national priorities towards a unified reform programme.

2025 has been an important year for us to shape this agenda together with powerful youth-networks and coalitions on the African continent. By speaking truth to power and calling out inherited legacies of injustice and inequality, we amplify youth advocacy and strengthen their effectiveness in promoting the AUTJP as a tool to address impunity to enact system change across the continent. Our goal is to expand our youth-centred work in other contexts, as part of our new strategy in the upcoming years.

“ This series has been a testament to the power of youth-led knowledge production and collaborative justice work. ”

ENYA ECHENG: Chairperson, AY4TJ

HIGHLIGHT

Youth-led analysis of historical atrocities in Africa

We collaborate on youth-centred efforts around justice and accountability along with youth platforms and the African Union (AU). In partnership with the AY4TJ, we developed five youth-led policy briefs titled the Legacy Series. It explores the enduring impacts of past atrocities and historical injustices, including slavery, colonialism, apartheid and systemic violence, on intergenerational harm and the lived realities of young people now. The

series looks at how these issues shape impunity today, in different African contexts.

The Legacy Series strives to ensure that justice in Africa is forward-looking and anchored in the voices, leadership and vision of its youth.



Learn more about the Legacy Series →

The Legacy Series offers recommendations, from dismantling the structural foundations of colonial legacies, to designing transformative reparations programmes, and reforming institutions so they are better equipped to guarantee human rights and the rule of law. This work is aligned with the AUTJP, and aimed at governments, transitional justice institutions and international organisations. These recommendations have been well received by AU officials, leading to plans to develop a continental youth reparations agenda.



Women as political leaders

Everywhere we work, we find that women are at the forefront of the fight for justice, both during and after conflict. We seek to make their role more visible and support women's leadership. One example is the Indigenous Maya Achi women in Guatemala. The courage and clarity they have shown in their decades-long mobilisation to seek justice and accountability for serious human rights violations has been indispensable in the broader fight against impunity, and towards ensuring peace and non-recurrence in their country. We were pleased to further contribute our expertise on strategic litigation for gender justice in the Maya Achi case at the Gender Justice in International Criminal Law Conference in The Hague, in October 2025.

“It is important to continue supporting the Maya Achi women’s journey of healing and redress, not only for them but their children, families and communities, so this will never happen again. —”

PRAMILA PATTEN: UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflicts (June 2025)

Furthermore, we launched a [report](#) produced by our partners Women Now for Development, on the crime of chemical weapons attacks and its ongoing impacts on survivors. This is a powerful example of using survivor-led knowledge and intersectional feminist research. The report was highlighted as supporting evidence in the landmark universal jurisdiction case into the use of chemical weapons in Syria, by the Criminal Court in Paris.

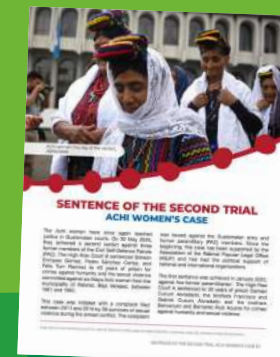
 **Explore the report →**

HIGHLIGHT

Maya Achi women’s fight for justice in Guatemala

On 30th May 2025, a top specialised court in Guatemala convicted three former members of the government-established paramilitaries, the Civil Self-Defence Patrols (PAC), to 40 years imprisonment. They were charged with crimes against humanity and sexual violence, committed during the 1981-1983 internal armed conflict against 36 Maya Achi women from Rabinal, Baja Verapaz. This was the second trial, building on the historic January 2022 verdict for the Maya Achi women, achieved after decades of seeking justice. It strengthens the precedent of condemning sexual violence as

a weapon of war – with political implications beyond Guatemala – and reinforces Indigenous women’s rights and long-awaited community reparations. We continued our legal, financial and technical support for the trial proceedings, supporting the indigenous women lawyers representing the survivors in the case, and strengthening the concept of justice grounded in local culture.



 **Read our bulletin →**



ESPE RANZA



On International Women's Day, 7th March 2026, we unveiled the [repainting of a mural in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz](#), which was one of the many reparations measures granted in the case. The original had been erased in July 2025. Lucia Xiloj, one of the indigenous women lawyers, handed out the second ruling during the launch event to representatives of state institutions, and appealed for the state to implement the other reparations measures, which are still being delayed. One of the survivors, Paulina Ixpatá, expressed the importance of reinstalling the mural and its significance in representing their story and their voice, and in remembering what happened during the armed conflict, to ensure that such violence is never repeated.

Victims' voices at the centre

Our work remains deeply rooted in solidarity with victims, survivors, and the communities most affected by widespread human rights violations, especially the most marginalised. Justice and accountability for them is always our starting point and ultimate goal. We seek to partner with them as equals, contributing analyses, expertise, and political access. This strengthened approach is based on lessons learnt from nearly two decades of joint work with victims and survivors.

In November 2025, we produced and released a visual booklet, [Transitional Justice in Action](#), in partnership with Civil Rights Defenders, a consortium member of the Global Initiative against Impunity (GIAI). The booklet commemorates the 10th anniversary of the EU's transitional justice policy, celebrating progress with powerful stories and statements from victims and survivors who are leading movements worldwide. Our [joint statement](#) highlights the systemic challenges that persist in our collective fight against impunity and puts forward key recommendations for the EU and Member States.

HIGHLIGHT

Transitional justice in action

This visual booklet is designed for community groups, civil society, justice practitioners and policymakers – bridging the gap between grassroots action and global advocacy. It shows that transitional justice can be a political tool to uproot structures of impunity, forming the basis for accountability and non-recurrence.

The booklet showcases impact stories from grassroots organisations in their geographic contexts, including

Guatemala, Syria, Democratic Republic of The Congo (DRC), Sri Lanka, Ukraine and more. The campaign collects lived experiences of victims and survivors, emphasising that transitional justice is possible even amid protracted conflict. It documents how local actors are resisting impunity across regions. Their stories demonstrate the value and relevance of transitional justice initiatives in a world facing new and worsening crises.



Check out the visual booklet →



Explore the GIAI's impact →



Context-specific approaches to justice

Fighting the challenges brought by impunity in different contexts requires tailored approaches. In some countries, political elites capture state institutions, rendering them ineffective – and thus require continuous pressure to counter their co-optation. In countries where a functioning rule of law system is absent, community-driven approaches to justice are inherently political resistance and the starting point for mobilising for change and building up institutions.

In Burundi, there has been little accountability for decades of cyclical violence, resulting in widespread impunity and leaving deep divisions inside communities. Many ex-combatants have not been adequately supported by the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes, and continue to perpetrate violence while struggling with trauma, isolation and stigma. Around election periods, tensions often escalate, making the risk of turning political mobilisation into recurring cycles of violence particularly acute.



HIGHLIGHT

Transformation in Burundi: trauma healing and positive masculinity

Our approach to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in Burundi combines trauma-focused interventions with community-based strategies to address different dimensions of impunity. Through trauma-healing and training on positive masculinities, conducted with partners such as Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services (THARS), ex-combatants report a significant improvement in their mental health. Their families and communities confirm positive changes in their relationships, with fewer acts of aggression and gender-based violence.

The process has created space for informal accountability and justice, which is essential in contexts where impunity is structural and the scale

of violence is too great for official criminal accountability. Community-based initiatives strengthen resilience and contribute to sustainable and lasting transformation that prioritises healing from the past, accountability for past atrocities, resisting prevailing impunity, and addressing the root causes of violence.



“Before, I was an irritable and violent man towards my wife, my children, and those around me. The training on positive masculinities opened my eyes... Violence no longer has a place in my life, neither at home nor at work.”

EX-COMBATANT: Muyinga province, Burundi

Meanwhile, 14 years after Tunisia's revolution, the country's transitional justice process has stagnated. Preserving and communicating collective memory is central to breaking the cycle of impunity, offering a powerful means for victims to document their experiences publicly and contribute to the building of collective resilience. This is crucial when warning against repeating injustices in the future.

“Dealing with memory in a responsible manner is a moral and political necessity to build a society capable of coexistence and justice.”

KARIM ABDEL SALAM: Tunisian human rights activist



ILLUSTRATION: Othman Selmi

HIGHLIGHT

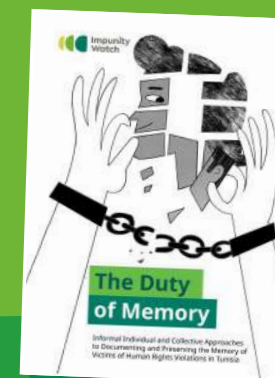
Preserving memory across generations in Tunisia

In the absence of state-led initiatives and a shrinking political space, civil society must play a central role in documenting and promoting the experiences of those who have been silenced. We believe it is vital to preserve the memory of Tunisia's marginalised communities, who have historically borne the brunt of repression and continue to be excluded from the country's dominant narratives. Collective memory can then be passed on to future generations and is an essential step for victims' recognition.

We launched a [report that deals with preserving memory of those with prison experience](#), to protect collective memories. Other aims were to counter state-imposed silence on human rights violations and preserve collective and inclusive narratives of history. Supporting victims of violations in

these initiatives is essential for healing, to ensure that torture and other violations will never happen again, and so the Tunisian state and civil society can rebuild trust.

The report is a launching pad for dialogue with university students to engage with their history, and interact directly with victims and survivors, such as political prisoners, to build their activism. Maintaining their mobilisation around truth and accountability and maintaining the call for transitional justice and ending impunity, is an important achievement in an increasingly repressive and authoritarian context.



Explore the report →

In the Western Balkans, a UN resolution to [commemorate the 1995 Srebrenica genocide](#) ignited old tensions, with [Serbian leaders](#) openly campaigning against its adoption. In many of the contexts where we work, powerful actors suppress calls for accountability through hate speech, division, persecution, [denialism and revisionism](#) – which is at an all-time high.

Strategies that support memorialisation, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and multi-generational exchange, are important avenues where grassroots resistance begins developing a reform agenda and calling for change.



PHOTO CREDIT: Post-Conflict Research Centre (PCRC)

HIGHLIGHT

Dealing with the past in the Balkans

Authoritarian regimes and populists use their power to repress memories of those who have suffered in society for their own means. Initiatives to help recall events and atrocities are shut down, to undo or prevent progress. From our experience, supporting locally led memorialisation efforts can only strengthen meaningful change towards peace and stability.

We supported the commemorative programme of the historic 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. This included a high-level international conference; and the Srebrenica Youth School which engaged 40 young people from 20 countries in workshops, site visits, and dialogue sessions focused on transitional justice, memory, and genocide prevention.

We also supported a powerful commemorative art exhibition and installation in honour of the Mothers of Srebrenica, whose loved ones were killed in the genocide, and who have bravely led the fight for justice, memory and dignity. Speaking up against denial and revisionism is essential for the fight against impunity today in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



“ Together we honoured the memory of the victims, amplified the voices of survivors, and created space for reflection, learning, and dialogue—especially among the younger generations. (The partnership with Impunity Watch) made this possible... by standing in solidarity with our mission to confront denial, preserve truth, and foster long-term peace. ”

The Post-Conflict Research Centre

Building ecosystems of resistance

This year we have invested in formal and informal approaches to break cycles of violence and impunity, working towards the prevention of violence, while strengthening our impact through creating alliances and building coalitions at multiple levels. This balance has enabled us to act on entry points as they emerge, advance our influence, and plant seeds for change.

For example, our long-term grassroots partnerships in Syria, with victim and survivor groups, family associations and civil society organisations contributed to the creation of the [United Nations Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic \(IIMP\)](#). Meanwhile, building victims' coalitions of the marginalised communities most impacted by violence in the DRC enabled us to influence the draft [national transitional justice policy](#) and incorporate their priorities within it.

2025 marked a significant step forward for building inclusive victim and family-led coalitions in Iraq, where we played an important brokering role in bringing diverse groups together with policymakers. This helped us all to pursue a shared advocacy agenda on enforced disappearance, and continued impunity within the country. We elevate local mobilisation to national and international advocacy towards accountability, building on years of concentrated efforts.

Such long-term partnerships enable us to seize opportunities and act swiftly as necessary – something that will become even more important in the coming years. Increasingly, we need to build and strengthen a resistance agenda against impunity. We will redouble our efforts to connect these efforts to ecosystems of resistance, and to raise the cost for keeping impunity in place.

HIGHLIGHT

Building inclusive coalitions in Iraq

Up to one million people have disappeared in Iraq to date. This enforced disappearance is one of the country's key unresolved issues, affecting millions of relatives from all ethnic and religious groups. There is an urgent need to address the issue, both politically and by improving the country's legal framework.

In 2025, we brought together families from different religious backgrounds around the International Day of the Disappeared, on 30th August. This created a space to discuss the impact of enforced disappearances on families and communities. The process helped participants to see commonalities; recognising that demands for justice are universal, not sectarian; and seeing each other as potential allies to build a broad-based coalition for justice.

The Tishreen protests also remain a highly sensitive subject, as Iraqi authorities and others continue to target activists and protesters advocating for the rights of victims, and instrumentalise the legal system against them. From its beginnings as a group of student protesters, we have backed the October Martyrs Association

(OMA) who, since 2021, have demanded accountability for the killings of and violence against activists during these protests.

In October 2025, the association's growing strength translated into concrete collective achievements, such as the official launch of the October Victims Association in Najaf, in the presence of dozens of victims, families, activists and civil society representatives; and the renaming of two streets in Baghdad and Najaf to commemorate the October 2019 protests. Formalising a victims' association is a pivotal achievement in moving compensation cases forward and represents meaningful resistance to the ongoing normalisation of impunity.



“For the first time we were able to sit with decision-makers and explain what justice means for our families. This process gave us a voice and a path forward.” Family member of a victim

HIGHLIGHT

Connecting Congolese communities to European courts

On 15th December 2025, the Paris Assize Court sentenced Roger Lumbala Tshitenga to 30 years in prison. This was for complicity in crimes against humanity committed during the 2002 'Effacer le tableau' or 'Erase the Board' military operation in north-eastern DRC. It was a historic verdict; the first universal jurisdiction trial related to events in the DRC. The trial was especially significant for minority communities targeted during the military operation, and for the female survivors of rape and sexual violence whose testimonies broke decades of silence.

Together with GIAI Consortium Member TRIAL International, we supported media coverage of the trial in Paris, with the goal of improving access to information for Congolese communities and victims directly affected by the crimes. The journalists who attended and reported on the

trial subsequently held discussions with direct and indirect victims in the DRC, to understand the perspectives of those receiving justice first-hand.

Our op-ed provides an analysis of the trial's impact on communities and recommendations of key lessons for future universal jurisdiction proceedings, including challenges to achieving justice and meaningful victim participation. Our bulletin on the duality of formal and informal approaches undertaken in this case further highlights how structures of accountability must be strengthened to improve the way justice is delivered to marginalised communities.



Available in English and French

Explore the bulletin →

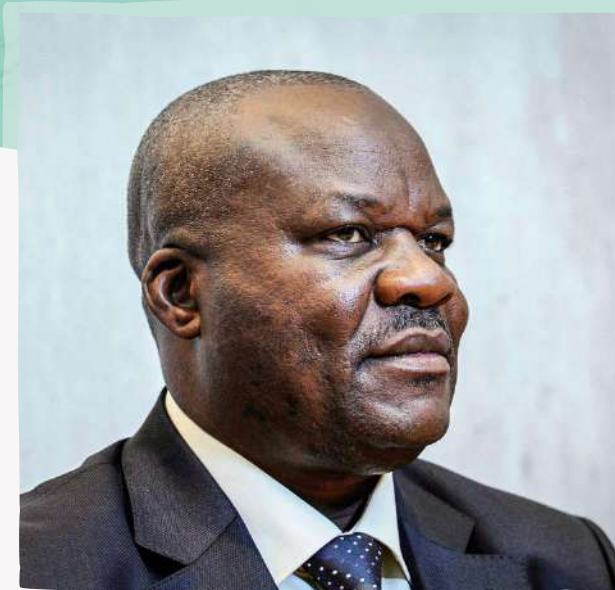
Read our op-ed →

“The announcement of the trial’s outcome has given us hope that we, the direct and indirect victims, can have our rights restored.”

Community leader

“This should not remain an isolated case. There are many other warlords who are free and continue to commit atrocities.”

Victim from Beni



Our strategies for fighting impunity

Our strategies in making a unique contribution to the fight against impunity centre around three mutually reinforcing pillars:

- Undertaking rigorous research to understand the causes and consequences of impunity to guide our actions
- Helping build and being part of strong coalitions for justice to grow ecosystems of resistance
- Backing action and advocating for change, so that institutions are reformed to be fit for purpose.

These pillars are not new to our work, but we are sharpening our proven track record within each one, and scaling our efforts to strengthen our impact. In times where impunity is the norm, our organisation is increasingly mobilising for change.

Action-oriented research

Our research is designed to support those advocating for justice and help them mobilise. Research topics and priorities are a direct response to the current normalisation of impunity as described in our Vision 2030. They include strengthening coordination and cohesion among our thematic and country priorities. Our research builds on our already existing strong body of knowledge, such as in the areas of militarised masculinities and the importance of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in transitional justice processes. Research will also cover new topics we have helped establish over the past years, such as resisting criminalisation of human rights defenders and the justice institutions, the impact of new technologies on transitional justice, and the importance of youth activism.

We are stepping up efforts to produce rigorous, action-oriented research, grounded in grassroots knowledge. We are focusing on mapping power structures, looking at the root causes of impunity, and exploring entry points for resistance. This will help us trace concrete pathways towards justice, accountability and reform. It will include analysis of impunity dynamics, help us generate evidence, and identify institutional entry points. It will also involve research with victims, concerned communities and civil society; research at global and continental levels; and strategic communications to raise public awareness, engage the media, and to disseminate findings to national, regional, and international actors. We seek to strengthen collective action and bolster policy responses and agendas.

Our report ['Interdependent justice: Collaborative leadership in a fragmented global landscape'](#) argues that sustaining justice now depends on building a resilient, interdependent ecosystem; one that redistributes power, centres survivor leadership, and treats solidarity as infrastructure. Furthermore, our research ['From solidarity to participation'](#) with the Berghof Foundation highlights the influence that victim participation can have on transitional justice mechanisms.



Building strong coalitions

Building coalitions and mobilising support are the ways research findings are translated into sustained political pressure. We work on this through:

- Expert networks that enhance our capacity to develop reform agendas
- Alliances that can position issues on relevant policy agendas
- Victims' and grassroots' activist movements that raise public awareness and organise political pressure for reform.

We are prioritising amplifying the work of victim, survivor and youth organisations as they understand, engage with, and respond to the opportunities and risks associated with new and emerging technologies in transitional justice and accountability processes.

We are building coalitions and networks at national, regional, and global levels; organising regional and international engagement, including training, exchanges, and policy forums, and research and knowledge production in support of mobilisation.

Strong coalitions are needed more than ever to push back against impunity. In our strategic engagements with alliances and movements, we provide important connections to grassroots actors. We operate as equal partners on roadmaps for resistance.

Our goal is to ensure that victims and marginalised groups are central actors in making justice work.



“For Syrian society to have confidence in the Transitional Justice process, we need to be able to own it. _____”

AHMAD HELMI: Ta'afi Syria, co-founder of INOVAS

HIGHLIGHT

Strengthening Syrian-led justice with regional and international allies

Syria faces a huge legacy of large-scale and systemic violations from war crimes and crimes against humanity committed since 2011. This followed a prior backdrop of decades of repression. For nine years, we have played a significant role in ensuring that victims are represented in efforts to address decades of torture, enforced disappearances and other human rights abuses under the Assad regime.

This work includes institutionalising civil society participation in the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), that assists in investigating and prosecuting people for the most serious crimes under international law through the Lausanne Process. The fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 has brought about a narrow window of opportunity to shift the system into one grounded in rights and accountability, including rebuilding justice and rule of law institutions to break cycles of impunity for good.

On 16th October 2025, we held a high-level panel in Brussels, titled 'Transitional Justice and Accountability in Syria – The Role of the EU', with partners from the Global Initiative against Impunity (GIAI) – TRIAL International, REDRESS, the

European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, and local Syrian-led organisations, Ta'afi Syria and Women Now for Development. The event focused on how the European Union can support transitional justice processes in Syria following the political shifts of December 2024, bringing together Syrian civil society, survivors, EU decision-makers and practitioners. It provided a strategic platform for elevating Syrian voices, mapping accountability pathways, and generating momentum for EU policy commitments towards truth-seeking, reparations and structural reform.

By positioning Syria's transitional justice agenda within the EU policy framework, the event helped link local survivor demands and global justice mechanisms. It underscored that transitional justice is still viable even at times of protracted conflict.



Explore summary
of the event →

“Victim participation is vital for all pillars of transitional justice. Victims are owed more robust support to ensure they are participating as equals, not symbolic figures.”

BERNARD DUHAIME: UN Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice and Reparation

Advocating for political change

Advocacy and political action can bring evidence from research and political pressure from mobilisation to have a direct impact on decision-makers and institutions at all levels. Our advocacy is grounded in victims' rights and grassroots action, and operates across multiple levels simultaneously, ensuring that domestic pressure is reinforced by continental and international incentives, and vice versa.

We engage with multilateral institutions including UN bodies and actors such as the Human Rights Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteurs, EU institutions, the European External Action Service, as well as other regional bodies and bilateral actors. This includes working with the African Union around its transitional justice policy. It also includes targeted national and institutional advocacy in each country context; advocacy for protection mechanisms for criminalised justice actors and human rights defenders, including within the Inter-American System for Human Rights (IAHRS); advocacy for rights-based AI governance frameworks, engaging processes at the Council of Europe, the EU, the UN, UNESCO, the ICRC, and the Justice Action Coalition; and comparative learning and disseminating information across contexts, including communications strategies to raise awareness and to contribute to the power of public storytelling.

We will continue to expand and refine our strategies to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose. We are intensifying our international advocacy and seeking entry points into multilateral and regional institutions including the UN, the African Union, the IAHRS and the European Union. We are also deepening connections with broader civil society movements to create a new momentum towards justice and accountability. One example is our

collaboration with the International Network of Victims and Survivors of Serious Human Rights Abuses (INOVAS) to elevate their 'Guidelines for Victim Participation' to a higher level at the UN.

HIGHLIGHT

Guidelines for victim participation at the UN

In September 2025, we launched the 'Guidelines for Victim Participation in Justice Processes' at a side-event at the 60th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva. We were joined by the Office of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) for Syria, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 11 Member States, UN Special Procedures, and others.

Key international actors emphasised the urgency of centring victims' perspectives at all levels. This is at the heart of the guidelines – that victims must be central in political and justice processes. These guidelines, developed by the International Network of Victims and Survivors

of Serious Human Rights Abuses (INOVAS), outline nine principles for the work of any national, international or UN institution concerned with transitional justice.

We remain committed to the wide adoption of the INOVAS guidelines by institutions around the world.



Yasmen Almashan

“Your presence here reflects your belief in our role as victims and what we can achieve, regardless of what we have endured. See us not as passive individuals, but active agents of change. Therefore, what I ask of you is to adopt these guiding principles. Use the victim-centred approach as a tool to reshape your projects and plans.”

YASMEN ALMASHAN: Caesar Families Association

Our thematic priorities

Our work is focused and grounded in real-world contemporary challenges in the fight against impunity.

We have identified four thematic priorities that address the systemic, cultural, and institutional drivers of impunity: strengthening institutions, challenging increased militarisation, mobilising youth, and harnessing new technologies.

Resisting capture of the justice system: strengthening and reforming institutions

We seek to reclaim, reinforce, and transform justice institutions so they can effectively fulfil their mandates to promote and protect human rights, and address serious and systemic injustices. Entry points include working with reform-minded actors to challenge state capture and the criminalisation of people who resist. In other contexts, we have found success through working with national and international actors to elevate community-based research into advocacy at institutional levels.

For example, we presented reports on the DRC at a side-event to the 60th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and to the UN Special Rapporteur on Transitional Justice, to support victims being central to a comprehensive national transitional justice policy. We indicated the urgency of institutional reforms in the security and justice sectors so impunity and violence are not repeated.



HIGHLIGHT

Working with reform-minded actors on enforced disappearance in Iraq

The UN Committee on Enforced Disappearance (CED) visited Iraq and published a report with clear recommendations for the Iraqi government in 2023. Based on the needs of the families of the victims and the recommendations of the CED, we collaborated on reforms aimed at supporting families and to find out the truth about the whereabouts of their missing loved ones.

We convened a study visit of Iraqi MPs to Bosnia, where important lessons can be drawn in dealing with the issues of enforced disappearance and missing persons. Thanks to a concentrated effort from strong institutions and cooperation with international actors and mobilised

victims, 75 per cent of missing people have been identified in Bosnia. The study visit gave Iraqi MPs the opportunity to learn from this experience and understand the necessary frameworks and legal instruments for guiding this work. The visit facilitated an open, strategic discussion on the reforms and steps needed to be taken in Iraq.

This collaboration strengthened our engagement with the Human Rights Committee of the Iraqi Parliament, with a long-term goal of developing a law on enforced disappearances in line with the needs and priorities of our network of victims groups and civil society organisations.



HIGHLIGHT

Bridging Syrian transitional justice processes with international allies

In February 2026, we facilitated a visit of Syria's National Commission for Transitional Justice to The Hague, enabling direct engagement with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, international justice actors such as the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and Eurojust, and held a panel discussion with civil society and members of the diaspora.

Throughout the visit, we emphasised the general principles for justice, truth and remedy a collective call for action presented by 61 Syrian civil society organisations and victims' groups. We are developing and implementing

a systemic monitoring of the transitional justice process to assess its progress and whether it contributes to addressing institutionalised impunity. We will lobby and advocate for reform as necessary.



PHOTO CREDIT: Hanneke Vollbehr

Challenges remain. Human rights defenders and independent justice operators continue to be criminalised and persecuted for defending their rights, while justice systems use the law to suppress dissent and perpetuate impunity. Ensuring the independence of the judiciary remains vital for safeguarding democracy and human rights.

For example, we have closely monitored key judicial elections in Guatemala, mobilising resistance movements and engaging in advocacy that targets national, regional and international policy forums. We do this to counter attempts to corrupt processes that are vital for restoring democratic institutions. While the election of the country's new Attorney General provides hope, the coordinated strategy and alignment among international community, civil society and independent justice operators are what made this possible. We also supported the Netherlands Human Rights Ambassador Wim Geerts' crucial visit to Guatemala in March 2026, where he met with government officials, civil society organisations, youth groups and independent judges, as well as the imprisoned Indigenous leaders Luis Pacheco and Héctor Chaclán and with lawyer and former legal representative of CICIG, Claudia González, sending a strong message that the world is watching over the independence of these crucial elections.

VIDEO

Why does an independent judiciary matter? →

Interview with
Claudia González



Luis Pacheco and Héctor Chaclán continue to continue to face criminal charges for fighting corruption in Guatemala. Our work is focused directly on supporting them through strategic litigation, advocacy and strategic communication to ensure their case is a priority on the international agenda and pressuring for the need for sanctions against corrupt actors. We organised a monitoring visit to Guatemala to raise awareness about the challenges ensuring a fair elections process, and advocated for greater international involvement, including from the EU. As a result, they were recently released into house arrest while their trial continues. Together, these efforts provide an opportunity to counter the criminalisation of justice, human rights actors and Indigenous authorities, which will be our key objectives to re-capture the justice system.

Challenging militarisation and breaking cycles of violence

We have strengthened our thought leadership and community-based approaches to transforming militarised and violent masculinities. These have been identified by many victims' groups as a structural driver of violence and impunity.

We are confronting the growing normalisation of violence and the expansion of militarised approaches that undermine human rights and shrink the space for dealing with [gender inequality](#) and other injustices, and weaken accountability.

Normalising violence decreases understanding of how militarised gender norms and power structures enable, justify and perpetuate human rights violations. It promotes the [urgent action required](#) at institutional levels.



HIGHLIGHT

Transforming militarised masculinities for a more peaceful world

Ahead of the NATO summit in The Hague, we co-hosted an event with the Dutch gender platform WO=MEN to unpack the concept of violent and militarised masculinities. In the process, we began a conversation about potential solutions that can contribute to systemic change and transformative justice.

We supported the publication of a working paper providing an overview of militarised masculinities, including how they are constructed, sustained, and manifested in conflict and post-conflict settings, and their links to patterns of violence and impunity. In the next phase, we offer

practical guidance for UN Human Rights Inquiries, with concrete recommendations for policymakers and practitioners on integrating this analysis into gathering evidence, engaging survivors, and investigating gender-sensitive approaches. Strengthening analysis into this crucial root cause of violence and impunity will directly impact the reform of institutions and enable them to live up to the promise of 'never again'.



 [Read the report →](#)

ILLUSTRATION: Studio Notyourchibi

“When systems reinforce violent masculinities, it becomes a breeding ground for impunity. It must be the global priority of institutions to break these cycles.”

PHILIPP SCHULZ: Lead author



Mobilising the next generation

We continue to strengthen youth-led movements and collective action to reinvigorate the fight against impunity. Our work in Africa, supporting two continental youth organisations, is testament to this, as is our commitment to meaningful youth engagement in policy spheres. Throughout 2025, we supported young people to participate in national, continental, and international forums, and secured space for the younger generation to take the lead in setting the agenda.



PHOTO CREDITS: YORJA

HIGHLIGHT

Youth-friendly resources boosts engagement in Africa

Many young people report that the AUTJP's heavy structure and technical language limits their understanding, participation, influence on, and ownership of transitional justice processes. This is especially concerning as it results in their lack of engagement in the AUTJP, dismissing their priorities in the fight against impunity, and diminishing the impact of their broader activism.

To bridge this gap, we co-produced a youth-friendly version of the AUTJP: an accessible, youth-led inclusive resource with the Youth Organisation for Research and Justice Advocacy (YORJA). We launched this resource to international diplomats,

member states, policymakers, and key stakeholders, to mobilise their support and improve youth-centred decision-making with the AUTJP. We subsequently held multiple trainings with civil society organisations on roll-out strategies. Collective discussions will aim to increase effective youth participation and activism in and surrounding transitional justice policy and practice.

This will strengthen continental networks for youth-led advocacy.



 Explore the resource →

Impunity Watch amplifies young people's important contributions to transitional justice processes; emphasising that the youth are not simply future beneficiaries, but key political actors today in resisting impunity. Through collaborative initiatives, such as the youth-friendly AUTJP resource, young people are better positioned to advocate for reforms that are meaningful for them, with some evidence of uptake in national transitional justice legislation. There's also evidence of the embedding of youth roles within peace and security structures.

In a context of shrinking civic space and growing authoritarianism, strengthening youth movements is a strategic investment in the resilience of accountability efforts.

The AI revolution and victims' rights

The global expansion of [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#) and [new technologies](#) are rapidly transforming the conditions under which justice and accountability are possible, for better and for worse. In transitional and post-conflict contexts, they offer new tools for documenting and analysing evidence, truth-seeking, and victim participation. At the same time, new risks are currently emerging without any checks and balances.

Rising digital inequality risks entrenching impunity and reshaping power dynamics. This makes it ever more difficult for victims and marginalised groups to be placed at the centre of justice processes. We are continuing our work to ensure that technology supports justice, protects human rights, and helps rebalance power towards affected communities.



In the past year, we have organised interdisciplinary policy hubs to understand the use of technologies in transitional justice. We have also covered the topics of reparations, memorialisation, and documenting serious human rights violations – all of which are particularly relevant from a victim perspective – and using this to inform future research. We published a first-of-its-kind [global mapping report](#) analysing more than forty initiatives across four continents. This pioneering work has helped to identify where the risks lie in using AI in transitional justice contexts. If left unregulated and un-checked, the consequences will clearly be a further increase of impunity. In the next phase of our work with this pioneering strategy, we will be engaging in mobilisation efforts and the development of a reform agenda to counter these risks.



“Engaging in these conversations has not only expanded my understanding of the complex factors that shape institutional decisions but has also stirred a deep sense of responsibility about what is at stake. It has made me reflect more intensely on both the transformative potential and the very real risks of emerging technologies in the sensitive work of documenting human rights violations, where memory, truth and dignity are always on the line.”

HUGO ROJAS: Professor of Transitional Justice at the Catholic University of Uruguay and Universidad Alberto Hurtado, and Nuestramemoria researcher.

We presented our work at an inter-agency retreat organised by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva and hosted a [side-event](#) at the 24th session of the Assembly of State Parties with the Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) at the International Criminal Court (ICC).

🔊 HIGHLIGHT

Side-event at the 24th Assembly of States Parties

On 4th December, on the margins of the 24th Assembly of States Parties at the ICC, the TFV and Impunity Watch brought together experts, practitioners and decision-makers to understand how AI is influencing how harm is documented, how voices are heard, and how responses to victims are designed. The impact of new technologies on reparations is essential. There are real risks for victims around data breaches, disinformation, and being re-traumatised. It is important to establish ethical and responsible

standards from the beginning, so that AI in reparations can address harms and not create new ones.



“ The feedback we have received highlights the strong interest (this event) has generated among civil society organisations, ICC staff, states parties and practitioners. Our joint collaboration (with Impunity Watch) was fundamental in making this possible and successful. The Trust Fund for Victims at the ICC. ”





Fundraising

In a fast-changing political landscape, securing sustainable funding for our work – and the international NGO field at large – is becoming increasingly challenging. We have endured budget cuts and funding insecurity from some institutional donors, with the suspension of funding from the United States at the beginning of 2025 being felt most deeply. Although this funding was later renewed, the lack of clarity around this as well as activity inside Syria meant that we took a risk-averse approach, which had an impact on our Syria programme and those of our partners.

Another important funder in the sector and for Impunity Watch, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, decided to wind down its operations. While the loss of this important donor is a major setback for human rights organisations, we were grateful for the final grant they provided. Wellspring's flexible, unrestricted funding has supported critical organisational costs that are increasingly difficult to cover using the more restricted budgets of other donors.

In a world with less appetite for justice and shrinking resources at the national and international level, we have stepped up efforts to diversify our programmatic funding focus and base. We are conducting targeted outreach to continue to build on our contacts with several key donors at the international level or through embassies and in-country representations. We are also seeking to maintain and expand our relationships with like-minded organisations, to collaborate strategically and in solidarity as funding becomes scarcer. Through these continued efforts, we aim to create sources of future funding.

Over the past year, we have continued to strengthen our partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a relationship we deeply value for its spirit of collaboration, shared commitment to political change, and effective use of our complementary roles.

In a time of growing global uncertainty and increasing pressure on civil society organisations, the Ministry's continued trust and support are especially meaningful. Their partnership is a critical help in advancing our shared objectives and in enabling us to adapt and remain effective in a rapidly changing world.

We continued to strengthen our partnership with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, particularly for our programming related to Syria. In the coming year, our focus will be on strengthening relations with other institutional donors and foundations, and our coalitions and partnerships within the NGO and international NGO ecosystem.

Organisational development

We are working within a global context in which the gains of the past decade are under serious pressure. Impunity has been normalised, justice institutions are under threat, and there is a shrinking space for victims to claim their rights. In this situation, we have had to remain agile and flexible to dealing with external shocks, by rethinking our multi-annual strategy and how we organise ourselves.

Over the past year, we have undertaken a thorough strategic planning process, starting with developing our Vision 2030 with the guidance of country team consultations and the benefit of a strategic retreat. This process was backed by in-depth country and programme analyses and peer-to-peer exchange. The analyses highlighted key impunity trends, uncovered insights from different contexts, and explored ways to deal with crucial global challenges. This has enabled us to sharpen our focus and given us greater clarity.

This process included engaging in a two-day digital security training, helping us to develop a standard operating procedure. This will strengthen our digital protection, reduce cyber risks, safeguard sensitive data, ensure operational continuity, and protect partners, victims and staff. We continued to update our organisational integrity system, with a revised code of conduct and appropriate reporting mechanisms that will be integrated within our overall integrity policy.



We seek to build a stronger resistance ecosystem, consisting of diverse actors, coalitions and approaches with the common goal to safeguard spaces for accountability, meaningful justice and democratic rule of law institutions in order to uproot structural impunity. Our aim is to ensure that national and international stakeholders will be better equipped to expose, resist, and reform institutions, while increasing the political cost of maintaining impunity to the point where institutional actors – from justice systems, governments, regional bodies, and multilateral mechanisms – are pressured to change their behaviour.

We are further committed to an organisational culture of innovating our strategies and encouraging critical thinking. We continue to promote ongoing learning and reflection, test new ideas, and share lessons and analysis across all the different contexts we work in.



« HIGHLIGHT

Global cross-programme exchanges

Our Iraq and Syria teams conducted an exchange with partners to foster meaningful dialogue and mutual learning on shared experiences and overlapping challenges, particularly relating to the aftermath of crimes committed by ISIS. Victims in both countries have experienced similar forms of violence and its effects – including enforced disappearance, captivity, and ambiguous loss. The exchange provided space to reflect on the victims at the centre of transitional justice processes, and to analyse what works and doesn't to ensure that their rights, voices, and demands continue to guide our work. Together, they explored useful approaches and tools

to build capacity on similar themes and priorities.

Similarly, our Burundi and DRC teams organised an exchange in the framework of our EU-funded programme, *Menya Ukire* (Healing Through Understanding). It was an opportunity to refine our strategies on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and transitional justice and share lessons about programming in conflict-affected contexts. Reflecting the realities of our work, the exchange was organised in Kampala due to the ongoing security context in the Great Lakes region and the situation in Goma.

Civic space is shrinking, and interest in human rights is declining. It is vital that we remain flexible in our work to resist the normalisation of impunity and support efforts for justice. We must be able to adjust our strategies and ways of working as opportunities open up or political space closes. To this end we are moving towards a more flexible organisational set up, strengthening our programmatic, thematic and operational capacity across the organisation. We are putting structures in place to improve coordination, coherence and learning between programmes, and to strengthen our shared identity as an organisation. With all changes, we will remain focused on keeping victims and affected communities at the centre of our work.

Lessons to guide our political approach

The current moment demands an urgent rethinking of how we fight impunity collectively. This is why we have chosen to update our strategic priorities now, rather than wait until 2028 as originally planned. Key lessons that inform our approach in the next phase are:

- 1 Fighting impunity is political and change is not linear.** Our role must adapt constantly to the political context – sometimes through resistance, at other times by working together with institutions.
- 2 Transitional justice approaches must be meaningful on the ground.** This means that fighting for victim-centred justice continues to be a core goal. At the same time, the role of international organisations and international advocacy is increasingly key to sustaining the fight against impunity on all levels, given the trends normalising and sustaining impunity across contexts.
- 3 Fighting impunity requires mobilisation and inclusive coalition building.** Our role depends on the context, but never losing sight of the fact that fighting impunity requires constant attention, continuous accompaniment of victims and survivors, and long-term engagement.

Through our strategic interventions, we seek to contribute to a global civil society that is better equipped to resist the current backsliding on justice and accountability. Our interventions contribute to an institutional reform agenda to achieve justice for victims and respect for human rights.

*What drives us is the conviction that **without justice and accountability, neither lasting peace nor credible change is possible**. Together, our updated priorities and Vision 2030 align to form a comprehensive agenda for confronting impunity in the 21st century.*



Action-oriented research



Coalition building



Advocacy for change

Donors

In 2025, we are very grateful for the continued funding support from partners, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the US State Department, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, The Open Society Foundations, and the European Commission.

These partnerships signify recognition of our reputation and expertise on transitional justice and victim-centred approaches, which are particularly significant given the challenging contexts in which we operate. They are testament to the relevance and effectiveness of our work.



Impunity Watch's audited financial figures for 2025 – including income, expenditure and results – are available in our Financial Report 2025.



Thank you!

Where we work



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