

New evidence access brings accountability closer for Syria, says UN Investigator

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The United Nations' International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) has announced that the possibility of accessing critical evidence related to human rights violations in Syria has brought accountability "closer than ever." Robert Petit, the head of the IIIM, stated that the current political situation in Syria presents "new opportunities" for uncovering evidence of regime and allied crimes.

Petit emphasized that the access to crime scenes across Syria offers a chance to gather high-level evidence and potentially uncover the fate of thousands of Syrians who were unlawfully detained and subjected to years of abuse in prison. Established in 2016 by the UN General Assembly, the IIIM

has collected 283 terabytes of data, responding to over 400 requests from 16 jurisdictions investigating war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide since 2011.

Despite the progress, Petit expressed concern over the destruction of vital evidence amid ongoing conflict. He noted reports of computers, hard drives, and documents being destroyed or abandoned in the chaos. Petit emphasized the need for coordinated efforts to preserve such evidence, which could be crucial for future legal proceedings.

Although the former Syrian government never recognized the IIIM's legitimacy, the shift in the political landscape offers renewed hope. Petit stated that the IIIM has been in communication with transitional Syrian authorities and UN representatives to explore deployment opportunities to help preserve evidence and ensure justice is served.

However, the situation remains fragile, with parts of Syria still affected by armed conflict. The developments offer cautious optimism, but the need to safeguard evidence remains urgent