I. Objective

Drawing on the experience of United Nations Investigative Team to promote accountability for crimes committed by ISIL / Da’esh (UNITAD) in the implementation of its mandate pursuant to Security Council resolution 2379 (2017), this meeting will consider how breakthrough approaches to the use of technology and innovations in the engagement of witnesses and survivors can enhance investigations of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide globally.

Members of the Security Council will be invited to focus their interventions on how the innovations demonstrated through the work of UNITAD as well as domestic authorities may be harnessed more broadly in efforts to ensure those responsible for grave human rights abuses are identified and prosecuted. Security Council members will also be invited to provide their views and share their experiences with respect to effectively supporting witnesses and survivors, particularly those that have experienced crimes of sexual and gender-based violence, during critical evidence collection processes.

II. Background

In a landmark response to the calls for justice for the victims of ISIL crimes, in 2017 the United Nations Security Council, at the request of the Government of Iraq, called unanimously for the establishment of the United Nations Investigative Team to promote accountability for crimes committed by ISIL / Da’esh (UNITAD), in order to support domestic accountability efforts through the collection of evidence of ISIL crimes in Iraq in line with international standards.

In calling for the establishment of the Team, the Council underlined the importance of evidence being collected “in line with the highest possible standards”, recognising the central
importance of evidence-collection practices aligned with international best practice as a basis for prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

In parallel with this increased recognition of the need for advanced tools in criminal investigations, significant breakthroughs have been made to allow investigators to effectively harness digital, documentary and forensic evidence. Artificial intelligence has opened new avenues to process mass data collected from battlefield evidence including hard drives, computers and other assets seized from perpetrators. Through the use of these tools, including machine learning, machine translation and facial recognition, video and audio evidence can be rapidly analysed and perpetrators identified.

Beyond technological innovation, recent developments in approaches to the engagement of witnesses and survivors in accountability processes have strengthened the ability of those most impacted by serious crimes to come forward with their accounts. By adopting a trauma-informed approach and ensuring the provision of specialised psycho-social support, investigators are able to engage with witnesses and survivors in a manner sensitive to the trauma they may have suffered. Mainstreaming a trauma-informed approach and psycho-social capacity in the collection of testimonial evidence has been a central priority of UNITAD in working with survivors of ISIL crimes.

Together, these innovations provide an unprecedented opportunity to close the accountability gap globally and ensure those who commit the gravest of crimes are held responsible in accordance with the rule of law.

III. Guiding questions

- How can innovative uses of cutting-edge technology help to overcome challenges faced by investigators in the collection and analysis of evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide?

- How can we improve practices with respect to the provision of psycho-social support to victims and witnesses so as to empower those who are most vulnerable to participate in accountability processes? How can we address the specific needs of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in this context?

- Can partnerships between national authorities, United Nations entities, survivor groups and others be further strengthened in pursuit of accountability?

- What can be learned from the activities of UNITAD in these areas, building on the mandate provided by the Security Council resolution 2379 (2017) and its three years of work in Iraq?

IV. Briefers

- Ms. Nadia Murad, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate
- Ms. Amal Clooney, Doughty Street Chambers, Counsel for ISIL victims
Dr. Daryn Reicherter, Director, Human Rights in Trauma Mental Health Program, Stanford University

Justin Spelhaug, Vice-President of Tech for Social Impact Group, Microsoft Corporation

V. Format

The United Kingdom will chair the meeting, which will take place in-person in the Trusteeship Council Chamber on 12 May from 3:00 to 6:00 PM EST (New York). We request delegations to attend as principal + 1. Observation will be possible virtually.

The meeting will hear opening remarks from co-hosts and co-sponsors, remarks from the briefers and interventions from Security Council members, and potentially other UN Member States (subject to meeting safety protocols).

We kindly request that participants limit their interventions to 2 to 3 minutes to allow time for the briefers to respond and answer any questions.

The meeting will take place in English with simultaneous Arabic interpretation. It will be broadcast via UN web TV (TBC). Further technical details will follow.

Please use the following e-mail address to get in contact with any questions and to submit the registration form: Mariea.Sekijima@fcdo.gov.uk