

Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Stef Blok, at the 'Accountability for atrocity crimes committed by Daesh' flagship event, at UN Headquarters, 27 September 2019.

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Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

A warm welcome to all of you at this early hour.

Thank you for coming here to discuss the complex issue of ensuring accountability for atrocity crimes committed by Daesh.

I am very pleased to have my esteemed colleague, friend and co-host Mr Mohamed Ali Alhakim, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, here too.

Also, I would like to thank Ms Amal Clooney, for her willingness to moderate this important event, and for all her hard work towards bringing the leaders of Daesh before an international court.

I know, Ms Clooney, that you have been painstakingly recording interviews with survivors yourself, which you have said were the 'most harrowing witness statements you've ever taken'.

I think we can all understand why.

It is highly likely that Daesh committed genocide.

And I would like the UN Security Council to establish that it did so, as the Netherlands repeatedly called for in 2018 when it was an elected member.

Members of Daesh enslaved people. Split families. Sold women.

They kidnapped. They raped. They executed.

And they used men, women and children as human shields.

To quote one of the survivors:

'The devil would be astounded by Daesh's methods of torture. It is beyond imagination'.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We need to send a strong signal to perpetrators.

That they will not be allowed to get away with the atrocities they have committed.

We need to achieve justice for the victims and their families.

Accountability in other words. That's what it's all about.

But how to get there?

A first step towards accountability, is evidence gathering.

Because without evidence, progress towards accountability will come to a grinding halt.

And impunity cannot be an option.

That is also why, last May, I urged the members of the Security Council to increase their support to the ‘International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism’, the IIIM.

Not only because this mechanism has so far accumulated over a million records relating to violations and crimes, but more importantly, because it has contributed to concrete cases and the issuing of arrest warrants within national jurisdictions in Europe. And that is exactly what we need.

The Netherlands therefore proudly supports the IIIM, and UNITAD, the investigative team for Iraq. With a total amount of 5,5 million euros.

So that the people working for these mechanisms can continue their important work.

Then comes the second step towards accountability: Prosecution.

For without prosecution, justice cannot be served.

For without prosecution, evidence gathering is nothing more than an empty shell.

Prosecutions can be brought about in several ways, such as through an agreement of a group of countries, or through hybrid or regional processes.

Ideally, of course, the ICC should have jurisdiction over Syria and Iraq, and be able to prosecute the high-level Daesh perpetrators.

Yet the Security Council – which has primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security – is hamstrung with regard to international prosecution.

But paralysis in the Security Council should not discourage us.

We should establish a coalition of countries that are willing to move forward, because any group of countries can come together to establish an ad hoc tribunal to prosecute high-level perpetrators: the leadership of Daesh.

We need to show political will to take the necessary steps towards international prosecution. The Netherlands has unique legal expertise in matters concerning international justice. And we are willing to share it with the international community.

Important as international prosecution is, it cannot and should not be our sole answer. Given the enormity of the crimes committed and number of perpetrators involved, national prosecution, in line with international human rights obligations, must occur simultaneously. And is already taking place. Mostly in Iraq.

Iraq is taking its responsibility in prosecuting the atrocities of Daesh.

So I am very grateful that Iraq is present here today and open to discussing this complex issue.

We all need to stand together with Iraq in shouldering this burden and help Iraq with further improvements on the implementation of these proceedings.

All around this table, there is consensus that the severe human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Daesh, should not go unpunished. And that we should act quickly. Because justice delayed, is justice denied.

At the same time I am not shying away from the fact that around this table we may differ on exactly how to proceed.

But legal differences should not deter us.

In 2014 we built a unique political and military coalition.

We were united and committed in our common endeavour to defeat Daesh. And we succeeded!

In that same spirit of unity we should proceed to the final stage. And bring justice to the victims.

Because if there is no accountability and no truth, there can be no prospect of lasting peace.

That is also why it is of crucial importance that we discuss this topic today, and find common answers to this challenge.

Only together can we end impunity.

Thank you.

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