

SIDE EVENT REPORT

STRENGTHENING COORDINATION, SURVIVOR-CENTRED ACCOUNTABILITY AND PREVENTION IN LIGHT OF THE IIM-A'S OPERATIONALIZATION

A hybrid side event at the margins of the 62nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Thursday 18 June 2026| 14:00-15:00 CET| Palais Des Nations, Room Concordia 1 Geneva

The discussion aims to bring together relevant stakeholders to examine the operationalization of the IIM-A, its role in advancing accountability, Prevention, and long-term transformation efforts in Afghanistan. As well as its effective coordination with existing international human rights mechanisms, UN entities, and civil society actors.

SPEAKERS:



MR. RICHARD BENNETT

SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON
THE SITUATION OF HUMAN
RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN



MR. SERGIO POLIFRONI BENEDETTI

HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER,
HUMAN RIGHTS INQUIRIES
BRANCH, OHCHR



MRS. ANTONIA MULVEY

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR OF LEGAL ACTION
WORLDWIDE (LAW)



MS. ATEFA TAYEB

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST,
PHD CANDIDATE



**MODERATOR:
MR. SAYED ANOSH**

EXECUTIVE LEAD HRD+



MS. LINDA BARTOLOZZI

CANDIDATES FOR THE MASTER IN INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES (MINT)



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MS. SERA CHOUDHARY

APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

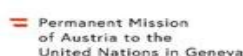
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1. Executive Summary

The side event ¹ examined how to operationalize the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan and how to strengthen coordination, survivor-centred accountability and prevention during the 62nd United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. Speakers emphasized that the establishment of the mechanism is an important institutional step, but that its effectiveness will depend on timely operationalization, adequate resources, strong leadership, coordination with existing accountability actors, and meaningful participation by Afghan civil society and survivors.

A central theme was that survivors—particularly Afghan women and girls—should not be treated only as sources of evidence. Speakers stressed their role as rights holders, documenters, advocates and participants in shaping accountability priorities and strategies. The discussion also highlighted the importance of Afghan ownership, especially through women-led and locally rooted organizations.

The event further underlined the need to connect documentation with concrete accountability pathways. The mechanism was discussed as part of a wider ecosystem that includes the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, UN entities, national courts exercising universal jurisdiction, and civil society organizations.

Finally, speakers linked accountability with prevention and longer-term justice. They argued that violations should be examined in their broader structural context, that evidence should be preserved for future judicial and transitional justice processes, and that sustained political, financial and technical support from states will be necessary.

Central message

The discussion consistently framed operationalization as more than establishing an institution: it requires resources, leadership, survivor participation, Afghan ownership, coordination and a clear connection between evidence, accountability and prevention.



¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jQITn7d-2E&t=5s>

2. Event Background and Purpose

The event focused on the operationalization of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan, established by the Human Rights Council. The moderator, Anosh, opened by situating accountability for Afghanistan within the broader funding and liquidity pressures affecting the United Nations and international justice and accountability efforts.

The discussion was designed to consider how the mechanism's mandate could be translated into effective practice, including through coordination, survivor-centred approaches, engagement with Afghan civil society, evidence preservation, adequate staffing and funding, and links with existing accountability processes.



Purpose of the discussion

- Consider the practical steps required to operate the investigative mechanism.
- Discuss how survivor-centred approaches can shape investigation, evidence collection and accountability.
- Explore the role of Afghan civil society and women-led organizations in the mechanism's work.
- Strengthening coordination between the mechanism and existing international and national accountability actors.
- Consider how investigation and documentation can contribute to prevention, transitional justice and future judicial processes.

3. Opening Perspectives

DR. NASIR AHMAD ANDISHA: FROM ESTABLISHMENT TO EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION



Ambassador Andisha described operationalization as a central challenge following the establishment of the mechanism. He highlighted Geneva's human rights institutions and research organizations as potential sources of expertise and emphasized the importance of ensuring that the mechanism is survivor-centred and gives victims a clear voice.

He also stressed the value of a unified coalition capable of coordinating political and financial resources. In his framing, accountability in Afghanistan must address both the accumulated legacy of decades of violence and impunity and current human rights concerns. He linked the mechanism to evidence-based transitional justice and, ultimately, to reconciliation.

4. Operationalization of the Mechanism

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND INDEPENDENCE

Sergio Polifroni Benedetti of the OHCHR Inquiry Branch provided an update on the preparatory work. He explained that the mechanism will operate independently once it formally commences its work, while OHCHR, the Office of Legal Affairs and other relevant Secretariat entities are currently carrying out preparatory functions.

The approved terms of reference provide an operational and strategic framework while preserving flexibility for the future leadership to determine investigative priorities, lines of inquiry, methodologies and partnerships. The terms of reference include gender- and age-sensitive approaches, a survivor-centred approach, engagement with civil society, secure reporting channels, confidentiality and data protection, protection measures for victims and witnesses, and coordination with the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan.

LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING

The discussion identified leadership as a key operational priority. Benedetti explained that the mechanism's staffing model was designed in phases, with a proposed total of 42 posts across 2026–2028. The 2026 budget approved 10 of the 14 posts requested for that year. Recruitment has also been affected by broader UN budgetary uncertainty and a Secretariat-wide hiring freeze, although exceptions can be requested.

The head of the mechanism was described as a priority appointment. The appointment is made by the Secretary-General, with the process managed by OHCHR and the Office of Legal Affairs. The preparatory approach seeks to preserve the future leadership's independence in making substantive decisions.

FUNDING AND OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

The speakers emphasized that operational independence requires predictable resources. Benedetti reported that approximately 60 percent of the mechanism's 2026 budget had been allocated at the time of the event and noted that a dedicated voluntary trust fund had been established. He also reported that, at that point, the trust fund had received a contribution of \$10,000, while several members had expressed an intention to provide support.

The funding discussion was connected to the wider UN liquidity and resource situation. Speakers repeatedly called for sustained political and financial support so that the mechanism can build the capacity required to fulfil its mandate.

5. Survivor-Centred and Afghan-Led Accountability

SURVIVORS AS RIGHTS HOLDERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Survivor-centred accountability emerged as the strongest cross-cutting theme. Speakers stressed that survivors should not be treated merely as sources of information or evidence. Their experiences should

inform accountability priorities, investigative strategies and the design of engagement with the mechanism.

The Graduate Institute student research team emphasized dignity, agency and meaningful participation. The team recommended inclusive outreach across regions, ethnicities, religions, languages, genders and rural or remote communities, as well as the meaningful inclusion of local expertise and affected communities in decision-making.

AFGHAN WOMEN AS CENTRAL ACTORS

Atefa Tayeb emphasized that Afghan women frequently occupy several roles simultaneously: survivors of violations, documenters, advocates and primary sources of evidence. She argued that the international community must consider not only what Afghan women are doing to document violations, but also how effectively the international system protects those who make accountability efforts possible. She further emphasized that Afghan women want to participate in decision-making about accountability and their country's future, rather than being included only in consultations.



LOCALLY ROOTED CIVIL SOCIETY

The student researchers and other speakers highlighted the importance of local networks for evidence gathering, outreach and trust-building. They called for sustained support for Afghan civil society, particularly women-led organizations, and for flexible funding that allows locally rooted actors to continue their work.

Principle highlighted by the student research team

Justice should be built “with us, not for us.” The phrase captured the broader emphasis on Afghan ownership, meaningful participation and survivor agency.

6. Coordination Across the Accountability Ecosystem

Speakers consistently described the investigative mechanism as part of a broader accountability ecosystem rather than a stand-alone institution. Existing actors and pathways discussed included the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, UNAMA, treaty bodies, OHCHR and national courts exercising universal jurisdiction.

COORDINATION WITH THE SPECIAL RAPPOREUR

Richard, the Special Rapporteur on Afghanistan, welcomed the mechanism as a complement to existing accountability tools. He highlighted the value of the Special Rapporteur's existing analysis, documentation and networks, including connections with Afghan women and survivors. He stressed that the two mandates should work in a complementary manner and that coordination should be built into the overall accountability strategy.

COORDINATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY AND COURTS

Antonia Mulvey of Legal Action Worldwide described practical examples of civil society working with victims and survivors, UN mechanisms and states to pursue cases through universal jurisdiction and

international courts. Her intervention illustrated how evidence generated through investigative mechanisms can contribute to judicial processes when coordinated with civil society and relevant legal actors.

7. Evidence, Investigation and Future Judicial Pathways

The event placed significant emphasis on the preservation, management and future use of evidence. The student research team recommended preparing for multiple possible accountability pathways, including the ICC, ICJ, universal jurisdiction, extraterritorial jurisdiction and transitional justice processes.

Speakers also emphasized that Afghan survivors and civil society organizations already hold substantial knowledge and documentation. The challenge identified was to ensure that evidence is securely preserved, systematically assessed, and translated where appropriate into concrete accountability pathways.

Mulvey used experiences from Myanmar to illustrate how survivor testimony and evidence collected by an investigative mechanism can complement civil society litigation and contribute to proceedings in national and international courts. She stressed that coordination between these actors can increase the practical value of evidence.

8. Prevention, Transitional Justice and Transformative Approaches

The discussion extended beyond retrospective investigation. Ambassador Andisha linked accountability to transitional justice and reconciliation, while the student research team emphasized that the mechanism should contribute to prevention and transformation by examining structural conditions that enable violations.

Richard supported a transformative approach centred on victims and survivors and argued that ending impunity is part of breaking cycles of violence. He also stressed the importance of gender and sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity expertise and attention to intersecting forms of discrimination.

Atefa Tayeb argued that violations should not be viewed only as isolated incidents. She described a pattern in which one restriction can create conditions for further restrictions and emphasized the importance of connecting accountability with prevention and protection.

9. Resources, Staffing and Institutional Capacity

The resource discussion identified three related requirements: adequate staffing, predictable financial resources and sustained political support.

- Ensure the mechanism has sufficient substantive and investigative capacity in addition to administrative support.
- Prioritize leadership and recruit the approved staffing complement as rapidly as the budgetary and institutional framework permits.
- Maintain and expand voluntary contributions to the dedicated trust fund.
- Provide sustained financial, technical and diplomatic support from member states.
- Ensure adequate expertise in gender, child rights and inclusion, as highlighted by the Special Rapporteur.
- Maintain resources for existing documentation and investigative mandates during the transition to full operationalization.

10. Key Recommendations Emerging from the Discussion

The following recommendations consolidate proposals and priorities expressed by speakers. They are presented as themes emerging from the discussion rather than as independently assessed recommendations.

- **Operationalize the mechanism without unnecessary delay** Complete leadership appointment, recruitment and institutional preparations while preserving the mechanism's independent decision-making authority.
- **Place survivors at the centre** Treat survivors as rights holders and active participants whose experiences help shape priorities, evidence strategies and accountability approaches.
- **Ensure Afghan ownership** Establish systematic, meaningful engagement with Afghan civil society, especially women-led and locally rooted organizations, and include local expertise in decision-making.
- **Protect those supporting accountability** Strengthen secure reporting, confidentiality, data protection and protection measures for victims, witnesses, documenters, human rights defenders and civil society partners.
- **Strengthen coordination** Develop complementary working relationships among the investigative mechanism, Special Rapporteur, ICC, ICJ, UN entities, national jurisdictions and civil society.
- **Preserve and connect evidence** Invest in secure collection, analysis, preservation and information management so that evidence can support future judicial, transitional justice and other accountability pathways.
- **Support women-led organizations** Provide sustained and flexible resources to organizations that document violations, support survivors and advance accountability.
- **Link accountability to prevention** Examine patterns and structural conditions underlying violations and connect investigation with prevention, protection and longer-term transformation.
- **Provide sustained political and financial support** Ensure that the mechanism has sufficient resources and remains a sustained priority for states and the international community.

11. Conclusion

The side event concluded with broad emphasis on the need to move from the formal establishment of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Afghanistan to effective and adequately resourced operation. The speakers linked the mechanism's success to four mutually reinforcing elements: **survivor-centred practice, Afghan ownership, coordination across accountability institutions, and sustained political and financial support.**

The closing remarks from the Austrian mission emphasized **the mechanism's potential to bring tangible justice closer to people affected by abuses, preserve accountability pathways and connect human rights documentation with international criminal law.** The remarks **also stressed that the mechanism's effectiveness will depend on sustained support from states.**

The event therefore presented operationalization not simply as an administrative process, but as an opportunity to build a coordinated accountability architecture that can preserve evidence, support survivors, contribute to future judicial processes and strengthen prevention and longer-term justice efforts in Afghanistan.