

SYRIA: SETF applauds Spanish Court's admittance of first criminal case based on Caesar file and welcomes as key step toward Syrian accountability

Syrian Emergency Task Force (27.03.2017) – The Syrian Emergency Task Force applauds today's decision by the Spanish National Court to admit the first criminal complaint against Syrian security forces for crimes documented in the Caesar photos, and welcomes the move as the first tangible step by the international community toward holding Syrian war criminals to account.

The decision, issued by Judge Eloy Velasco of the Spanish Central Court of Instruction, grants Spanish courts jurisdiction to prosecute 9 senior members of the Syrian Security and Intelligence Forces for their responsibility in the commission of the crime of state terrorism. These charges, investigated by the nonprofit Guernica 37, with support from former U.S. Ambassador Stephen J. Rapp, will be presented as part of a case filed on January 31 on behalf of a dual Spanish-Syrian citizen identified in the war crimes photos Caesar smuggled from Syria in 2013.

“Today's unprecedented decision by the Spanish National Court dispels the notion that regime officials can continue to perpetrate mass war crimes with impunity,” said Mouaz Moustafa, Executive Director of the Syrian Emergency Task Force and representative of the Caesar Team. “This step toward justice would not be possible without the enormous sacrifices made by Caesar and his family and without the partnership of Guernica 37, the Commission for International Justice and

Accountability, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Their continued support will prove imperative in developing the element of justice in our time.”

The announcement caps the end of Caesar’s week-long visit to the United States to speak with policymakers about his experience in regime prisons, the prospects for justice, and the greater need to include protection from regime bombardment as a key part of U.S. policy to end the conflict in Syria. His visit this week marked his first semi-public appearance since he came to the United States to testify before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 2014.

In public statements during his visit, Caesar lamented the previous administration’s failure to advance international accountability, but he expressed his hope that the current U.S. administration would prioritize justice and accountability mechanisms as part of a negotiated peace agreement for Syria.

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