

# Victims voices for justice

Annual report 2020

impunity  watch

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# ● Introduction

2020 has been an unusual and unexpected year on many levels. The world woke up to the global COVID-19 pandemic and found itself struggling to accept it, to accommodate itself with it, and to survive it. The global shrinking space for human rights witnessed new challenges as the pandemic allowed governments to enforce total or partial lockdowns, limit people's mobility, set curfews, and on many occasions, to resort to violence to oppress dissidents. The pandemic further expanded the gap between developed and developing countries, exposing vulnerable and marginalised communities to increased levels of poverty, inequality, and human rights abuses.

Like many civil society organisations, Impunity Watch made great efforts to face the challenges imposed on our work as a result of the pandemic. In 2020, we adjusted many of our activities to ensure first and foremost that our local partners and the grassroots movements we work with in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Syria, Tunisia, Iraq, and Guatemala are safe. Where possible we shifted to online ways of working, but above all we have endeavoured to stay close to our partners on the ground; supporting them in their fight for justice while also attending to the humanitarian and political impact this pandemic has on their lives.

The consequences of the pandemic have negatively affected victim organisations' capacity to organise and mobilise around a joint agenda. At the same time, more than ever, it highlighted the importance for us –as civil society– to invest in real partnerships, trust and solidarity and in movement



Marlies Stappers

Executive Director, Impunity Watch

Victims' needs and their experiences are at the heart of what we do. In all our efforts we seek to tap into the knowledge and activism of grassroots movements in order to build processes that better respond to victims' priorities and that have the capacity to bring about long term change.



building in spite of the practical challenges. In 2020, we therefore reinforced our efforts in support of victim movement building and to strengthen leadership within such movements, with a particular focus on young (indigenous) women.

Together with our partners, we have also taken time to reflect on the broader lessons we can learn from the current crisis. We are using these lessons to improve our strategies in fighting impunity and to raise international awareness about the new threats that have emerged. Instead of striving to go back to pre-COVID 'normality', we see an opportunity to start doing things differently. Together. We have therefore increased efforts to engage other stakeholders in a dialogue about the root causes of (global) injustice and inequality and we have stressed the importance of listening to the voices of victims and grassroots human rights defenders, which are often missing in policy processes at the international level. As the pandemic shows, without taking into account grassroots knowledge and needs, (justice) processes will fail to respond to complex realities on the ground, which undermines their potential to contribute to greater equality and social justice. This is the reason why victims' needs and their experiences are at the heart of what Impunity Watch does. In all our efforts we seek to tap into the knowledge and activism of grassroots movements in order to build processes that better respond to victims' priorities and that have the capacity to bring about long term change.

To uproot impunity and achieve social justice it is essential to adopt a gender lens. As such, our work on gender was, is and will remain to be a key priority. Throughout 2020, we continued to promote understanding

about the importance of gender transformative (transitional) justice processes and what victims consider to be the key priorities in this regard. Victims identify militarised masculinities as one of the main obstacles to gender transformative transitional justice. Through our work in Burundi, Guatemala, Iraq, and the Western Balkans we have sought to shed light on and raise awareness about the workings and impact of militarised masculinities, which you will read more about in this report.

One particular highlight of our activities in 2020, is our work in Burundi, where we supported a number of Burundian women in the framework of the 2020 elections to increase their skills to represent their communities and to open space for their advocacy with decision-makers. Several of the women we worked with were elected following the local elections, and are now important local leaders. We also played a key role in building an international movement of victims.

Another highlight is the establishment of the International Network of Victims and Survivors of Serious Human Rights Violations with our support in 2020. Led by victims and survivors, they strive for victims and survivors of serious human rights abuses to attain justice on their own terms so that their dignity is recognised and patriarchal systems of impunity are uprooted. As we look forward, we are more determined than ever to ensure that victims' voices are heard in the fight against impunity and that their needs are met in justice processes. We will continue to support and strengthen victim organisations so that they become more effective and resilient, enabling victims to articulate relevant policy demands that will lead to stronger, more just societies in the long run. After all, it is this bottom-up and victim-centred approach that our DNA is made of.

# ● About Us

Impunity Watch is a non-profit human rights organisation dedicated to ending impunity for severe violations of human rights, especially in countries emerging from a violent past. We analyse, advocate and partner to help local communities seek accountability for gross human rights abuses and for systemic injustice. In our work, we adopt a bottom-up, participatory, and context-informed approach, and support victims and survivors in exercising their rights. Our work is legal, social, and political. Impunity Watch began its work in 2004 in response to calls from Guatemalan human rights groups for greater support in their struggle for redress after the internal armed conflict of 1960-1996. It was registered as an independent foundation in 2008 in the Netherlands. Today, Impunity Watch works in a wide range of countries and has offices in Burundi, Guatemala, and The Netherlands.

## Vision

We envisage a world in which states and societies respond effectively to serious crimes and gross violations of human rights with redress and recognition - where cultures of human rights and rule of law prevail, and where people no longer accept impunity as “the norm.”

## Mission

We research the root causes of impunity as well as obstacles to its reduction. We seek to directly engage affected individuals and communities in justice processes. We encourage the active involvement of local actors in transformations after violence. We support informal initiatives that complement formal transitional justice mechanisms.

This annual report provides snapshots of what Impunity Watch does and is not a full account of the work we embarked upon and accomplished in 2020.

For more information, please visit our website:

[www.impunitywatch.org](http://www.impunitywatch.org)

Or contact us at: [info@impunitywatch.org](mailto:info@impunitywatch.org)



## Our work

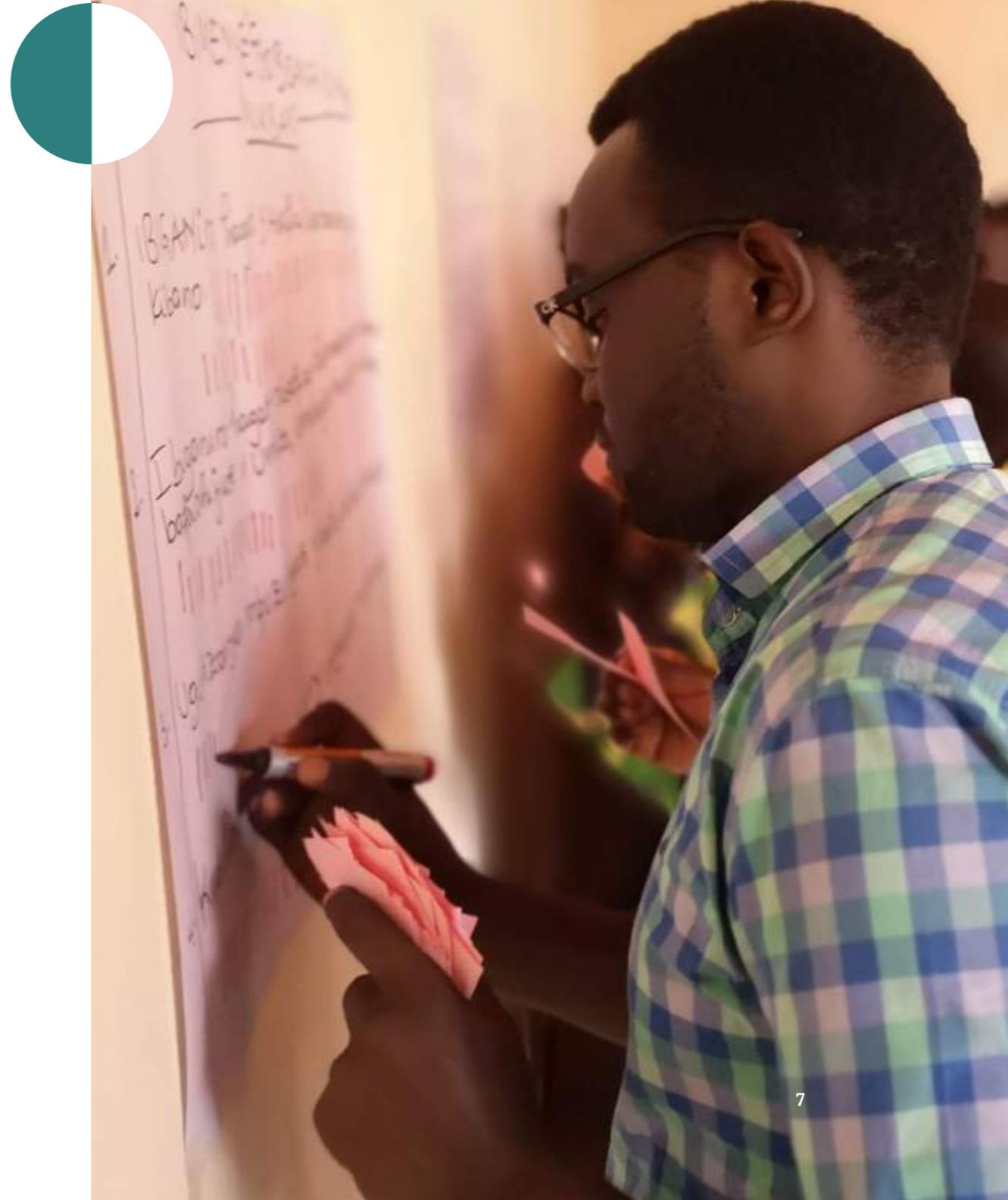
“We are aware that supporting movement building and bringing victims together without empowering them to affect policies is not enough. Their voice must be heard amongst policy-makers locally and internationally.”

Impunity Watch

## ● International work

We believe in movement building of victims in order to address the complex issues of transitional justice and ending impunity. It is crucial to amplify the voices of victims and grassroots human rights defenders, which are often missing at the international level. Local knowledge is essential to make for better processes that respond to the realities on the ground, that respond to victims' priorities and thus have the potential to make meaningful change.

Impunity Watch played a key role in building an international movement of victims. With our support, the International Network of Victims and Survivors of Serious Human Rights Violations (INOVAS) was established in 2020, bringing together a core group of victims from Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, Morocco, Nepal, South Africa, Syria, and Tunisia. INOVAS is an important platform that strengthens victims' agenda for justice on the international level. The vision of INOVAS is to strive for a world in which victims and survivors of serious human rights abuses can attain substantive justice on their own terms so that their dignity is recognised and systems of impunity are uprooted. Led by victims and survivors, INOVAS links organisations, groups, and individuals from across the world and provides them with a platform to allow their voices as claim-making agents to be heard worldwide.



We are aware that supporting movement building and bringing victims together without empowering them to affect policies is not enough. Their voice must be heard amongst policy-makers locally and internationally. We therefore focused our work on connecting them to international policymakers. Such an example is the high level event which we co-organised and facilitated with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and AJAR on reparations last December. Participants included UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet and Special Advisor of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide Alice Wairimu Nderitu. Among the speakers were also victims who directly participated and shared their experiences with the UN Special Representative and High Commissioner which was an unique opportunity. As a result of this event, the OHCHR invited Impunity Watch to collaborate in 2021 to include victim participation in reparations more firmly on the international agenda.

As part of our awareness-raising efforts internationally, we partnered with the Master programme in Transitional Justice, Human Rights and Rule of Law at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights and produced a podcast on militarised masculinities and its impact on peace. The podcast was launched as part of the online programme of the Geneva Peace week in November 2020.

Another highlight of 2020 was the outcome of our comparative research project with REDRESS, focusing on victim participation in Guatemala and Uganda. In the research report, we highlighted the shortcomings of transitional justice in Uganda and the significant pushback against victims in Guatemala. Our recommendations include a shift in policy toward meaningful victim participation rather than a technical “top-down” and “ticking the box” approach. We will continue to share these recommendations in 2021 with mainly diplomats and policymakers at the international level including the European Union (EU), African Union (AU), and the United Nations (UN).

Another research project we worked on focused on the dynamics of survivor and victim participation in informal spaces before, during, and in the absence of transitional justice processes. We partnered with research teams in five countries, in Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, Guatemala, Indonesia, and Tunisia – to create a participatory and survivor-led research model. The research findings and recommendations will be used in 2021 to guide policymakers and practitioners to better support the meaningful inclusion and leadership of survivors and victims in transitional justice processes.



## ● Burundi

Burundians went to the polls in 2020 for the first time since the 2015 crisis. Evariste Ndayishimiye was elected as the country's new president following elections marred by evidence of violence and claims of fraud. Hopes that his ascension to power would mark a positive step towards more democratic governance have so far not been realised.

Throughout 2020, Impunity Watch and Association Dushirehamwe worked with Burundian women to increase their skills as local leaders, creating space for them to advocate with decision-makers. Several of the women were elected to administrative posts following the local elections and are now important community pillars. Simultaneously, we worked with men to tackle issues of gender roles, violent masculinities, and women's political participation. The impact of our work was showcased in a public event in Bujumbura to mark the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Victims continue to seek and demand justice in Burundi following the end of the civil war in 2005. Burundi's Truth and Reconciliation Commission suffers from a lack of widespread support, in part due to concerns over its independence, and so victims are turning to civil society and international non-governmental organisations when seeking redress for decades-long impunity. In this context, a crucial part of our work in 2020 was supporting victims to constructively deal with the psychosocial legacies of violence. Working on a dedicated trauma-healing strategy with our partner, THARS, we provided more than 3,000 people with tailored



individual psychosocial support and organised group therapy sessions in over 100 communities. We raised awareness on the role of trauma-healing for dealing with the past, reaching more than 100,000 Burundians. Our psychosocial support work has been credited with helping victims to reintegrate back into communities, having a restorative effect on community social cohesion.

Through our work on informal justice initiatives, victims across ethnic and political divides came together to design and implement their own community-based memory initiatives. These initiatives increase victim participation and community agency, and promote the non-recurrence

of violence at a time when the past is still instrumentalised for political goals. Among the memory initiatives is a 'memory book' compiling the community histories of 70 communities, researched and written by 140 young people. The book will serve as a memorial and as a central resource in our upcoming programming to encourage truth-telling in communities and to work with young people on tackling the conditions that still pose a risk to further violence in Burundi. Our work has gained prominence among diplomats and was cited at the UN Peacebuilding Commission for its impact on alleviating intergenerational traumas and for its contribution to reducing ethnic and political tensions among youth during the 2020 elections.



## Victim voices

# The story of Léonce

Léonce has faced many hardships in his life. He is one of the many victims of Burundi's civil war. His father was murdered when he was only 17 years old. Fearing the same fate, he was forced to flee his home. He enlisted in the Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD) rebel group in 1997 to avenge his family killed by his neighbours, but later joined the National Force of Liberation (FNL) rebel group. He was caught and imprisoned between 2006–2009.

When he returned to his village, he was stigmatised by the community due to his membership of the rebel movements. Léonce: "My heart was bruised, my neighbours did not greet me, I did not talk to anyone. I was very lonely." During this difficult time, he was invited by our partner Dushirehamwe to participate in community dialogues focusing on dealing with the past. This was a safe space for him to share his emotions, to talk to his community and to heal. After some time following the dialogues, Léonce was able to approach Jean, the son of the man who had murdered his father. He confided in Jean: "I wanted

**"I wanted to kill you because your father murdered mine."**

to kill you because your father murdered mine." Léonce shared with him that through the programme he followed, he is able to let go of his desire for vengeance and live peacefully alongside the children of his father's killer. Today, Léonce is a valued and trusted member of his community, offering his services as a technician and exalting the importance of peace for Burundian communities.

“I’ve changed a lot through the training. I first forgave those to whom I had a grudge. It was also necessary to change my behaviour and point of view. For example, I no longer take a person’s flaws and put them on the whole ethnicity. We (monitors) changed first, and the others (families, communities) followed our example. And they’ve changed. One day I heard people say that they are no longer going to be deceived. When the community is united, war cannot take place.”

Anne Marie Nyandwi,  
monitor, mother and previously secretary  
of the Directeur Communal de l’Enseignement





Victim voices

## The story of Caritas

1997 is an unforgettable year for Caritas. During the crisis that ravaged her country, Burundi, she lost her parents and fled her home, hiding for days without eating or drinking. Forced to drink river water contaminated by corpses, her baby died from infection. Her husband was murdered before her eyes in the same year.

Faced with this painful past, Caritas was deeply affected and traumatised. She was terrified of soldiers, when she saw them, she would flee. She suffered from nightmares of the killings she had witnessed. Fortunately, Caritas participated in a psychosocial support awareness-raising session organised by THARS, one of Impunity Watch's trusted partners. Through this session, she learned about the 120 psychosocial assistants working to provide community-based

## Her husband was murdered before her eyes in the same year.

trauma-healing to victims. Caritas reached out to one of the assistants in her colline in Cibitoke province and through healing sessions she has been able to share her experiences. Remarkably, she now helps to further raise awareness of the programme to support other victims just like her to heal and to focus on their future.

## ● Democratic Republic of Congo

The recent history of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been characterised by multiple violent conflicts and bad governance. Despite the end of what has been called the second Congo war, violence, rape, and killings are still common place in the DRC. The weak justice system hampers the fight against the prevailing impunity. Victims still wait for truth, justice, reparations, and reconciliation to continue with their lives.

Our work in the DRC focuses primarily on pushing forward the transitional justice advocacy agendas of civil society and victims, which we continued to do throughout 2020, together with our partners. As part of our strategy, we bring key actors, including victims, together around the table to enable them to participate in policy discussions and the setting of priorities. Specifically, we brought together civil society, government officials, and influential actors such as Dr. Denis Mukwege in various policy forums in Kinshasa, Goma, and Bukavu. We also coordinated efforts around two draft bills for a Truth Commission and for a criminal justice mechanism. We helped some victims of extreme violence in the North and South Kivu provinces to organise into victim groups and to develop an agenda around their own key justice priorities targeting their local and provincial authorities. Moreover, we shared knowledge on transitional justice with selected journalists and other media actors working in the South Kivu province in order to ensure better reporting and awareness raising around key transitional justice topics and developments everyone in DRC should know about. We will continue to further support and expand our work with civil society, media, and victims in 2021.





“The training gives me courage and hope for the future because the possibility of seeing the perpetrators of the crime I suffered being brought to justice becomes more real to me. From now on I will prepare myself to seek justice and request the support of Impunity Watch and its partners in Goma. I will also mobilise other victims who are in my neighborhood so that we can be many and become strong as a group.”

Female victim who participated in one of the capacity building workshops on transitional justice and victim participation, organised by our local partners in Goma/North Kivu province in September 2020.

## ● Guatemala

Between 1960–1996, Guatemala experienced one of the most violent and horrific armed conflicts in Latin American history. The scale of the violence and brutality, with thousands of human rights violations committed, has left deep wounds on the victims and survivors, as well as on Guatemalan society as a whole. Redress for these crimes is lacking and impunity persists. The developments in 2020 provide little hope. In 2020, the newly elected President Giammattei, conservative-leaning and pro-military, closed the Secretariat of the Peace in charge of implementing the Peace Accords as well as the Presidential Human Rights Commission.

Amidst these political developments, we stepped up our efforts to fight systemic impunity and to ensure victims' voices continued to be heard in the context of the pandemic. More specifically, we supported the National Platform of Victims, a coalition of more than forty victim organisations from across the country. We help them use virtual platforms to meet and communicate their demands, and we offered legal advice in the filing of two cases against the closing of peace institutions and the weakening of the National Reparations Program. We explain the impact of the closing of these institutions on victims in a [policy brief](#), that also analyses the future of democracy in Guatemala. We also present some recommendations to the Government and the international community. To advocate against these closures, we established a working group with the Human Rights Ombudsman, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and victim organisations to coordinate efforts and increase impact together.



“We are seeking justice because we want to set a precedent, so that the human rights violations we experienced years ago in the 1980s are not repeated.”

**Alicia Catlan,**  
survivor of the armed conflict



As ending impunity is our core focus, we continued to monitor the process of electing new judges to the Supreme Court. The process was stalled for the entire year of 2020, due to the lack of political will in Congress. Yet, these elections are critical in guaranteeing access to justice for victims and upholding sentences from previous trials. We therefore advocated intensely together with our partners for the process of electing judges to resume as soon as possible. We published numerous monitoring reports and analyses about the process on the [Judicial Independence Observatory website](#). These reports proved to be a key tool to inform civil society, organisations of prosecutors and judges, and members of the diplomatic community in Guatemala.

As discrimination and gender inequality remain widespread in Guatemala, we invested great efforts to sharpen and step up our work on gender. To uproot impunity it is crucial to adopt a gender lens. Victims identified militarised masculinities as one of the main obstacles to gender transformative transitional justice. To raise more awareness on this particular topic, we participated in a [podcast episode](#) focusing on this issue during the Geneva Peace Week.

To mark the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325 in October 2020, we presented [our second monitoring report on the implementation of the resolution in Guatemala](#) and participated in [a series of webinars](#) as part

of our continued work on promoting gender transformative change. During the webinar, the main results of the report and the challenges facing women in Guatemala was discussed. Here, we connected victims with practitioners and policymakers. The panellists included the UN Women Country Representative in Guatemala Adriana Quiñones, Supreme Court Magistrate María Eugenia Morales, member of the Congress Andrea Villagrán, former director of the Secretary for Women Ana Leticia Aguilar, and anthropologist Aura Cumes.

We also continued our work in supporting women victims in 2020. Such an example is our work accompanying the case of sexual violence committed against Achi women during the armed conflict. After years of fighting for their justice, these women survivors' trial will start in 2021. This is very important not only for justice but also what the women represent. These women have become role models and leaders within their communities, despite the threats and intimidations they face. Their participation is not only transformative for them on an individual level, but they also seek change for their community more broadly and for future generations.

The other two cases we support in the access of justice for victims of crimes committed during the armed conflict in the 1980s, are: the case for enforced disappearance in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa and the case of crimes against humanity against the Kaqchikel population in Chimaltenango. The Santa Lucía case has been presented before the Inter American Human Rights Commission, and we presented three expert reports that will allow the Commission to understand the facts of the case and how it impacted the victims, so that the case can be transferred to the Inter American Court. With the Chimaltenango case



we supported the three victims organisations working on this case, CONAVIGUA, ASOQANIL and AJR. Supporting the preparation of these cases is key to ensure justice for the victims. The collection and presentation of the strongest evidence, including testimonies and expert reports are key for successful strategic litigation that address the specific needs of these affected communities.



Throughout the year we published four studies:

- [Peace at Risk](#)
- [The Impact of the Clarification Commission's Report for the Victims](#)
- [Monitoring Resolution 1325 in Guatemala](#)
- [The Right to Truth and Access to Archives from the Internal Armed Conflict in Guatemala.](#)



Victim voices

# Women creating hope

Women survivors from Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa, Escuintla in Guatemala and members of the Association Memory, Dignity and Hope (AMDE), continue to search for their loved ones, forcibly disappeared during Guatemala's armed conflict. Their fight for justice brings hope to the south coast.



[Women creating hope](#)

## Iraq

2020 saw little progress on accountability and redress for Iraq's legacies of past atrocities, and victims' voices and needs largely went unheard and unmet. 2020 witnessed further violations, as the anti-sectarian, pro-reform protest movement that emerged in 2019 continued to face brutality, assassinations and threats from paramilitary groups, the state and others with vested interests in maintaining the status quo. However, some progress was observed when the new government set early elections for 2021 and issued positive statements around accountability for violations against the protest movement, albeit unaccompanied by sufficient tangible action. Meanwhile, an economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic led to a spike in violence against women.

Our work in 2020, focused on addressing these challenges. To expose and address the structural causes of violence against women, we published a [report](#), mapping the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Iraq and organised a series of [virtual roundtable discussions](#) on the 20th anniversary of the UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Participants included the representatives of Iraqi government, civil society organisations, international organisations and experts, reflecting on the findings and recommendations. In an effort to break the 'culture of silence' and destigmatise victims, Impunity Watch and Iraqi Al-Amal Association created an [illustration booklet](#) and several animation videos of survivors' stories to highlight persistent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

**“This project contributed to the victims' healing process,”** said Inas

Jabbar, one of the activists who participated.

**“I now have a mission to raise awareness about SGBV in Iraq.”**

**“I have become more thoughtful of other people's suffering and I am determined to defend them, speak on their behalf and convey their experiences in order to improve their real situation. We have acquired the skill of storytelling and we are more capable of telling human stories and thus becoming leaders in our societies.”**

Fadia, an Iraqi woman activist who participated in the SGBV storytelling training.



Victim voices

# Breaking the culture of silence

How did a group of Iraqi women activists from Kirkuk, Baghdad, Salah Ad-Din, & Basra help some survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence tell their stories? Meet Doha, Inas, Iman and Zeina. These activists were trained on interviewing SGBV survivors. Following the training, they helped survivors break their silence. They are agents of change within their communities and are creating hope for a better future! Watch to learn more.



[We listened to victims of sexual violence in Iraq](#)

We also continued our work to ensure victims of human rights violations and affected communities have an active role in the fight against impunity and in accountability mechanisms. We worked with ten Iraqi organisations to advocate for the establishment of a dialogue mechanism with the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD). We also assisted members of the Iraqi protest movement to have their demands for accountability heard at the international level via a series of online events and a joint policy brief. This resulted in the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the EU delegation requesting meetings with the signatory organisations to hear their demands. We supported our Iraqi partners in some of their media outreach activities during which victims of human rights violations talked about their experiences and voiced their demands for justice, and facilitated access to protection services for victim activists threatened for speaking out for their rights.

## Syria

Although the intensity of the conflict has decreased in many parts of Syria throughout 2020, compared to previous years, crimes against humanity such as enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and killing under torture have remained commonplace as a means of warfare and political coercion. Despite the lack of tangible results to reveal the fate of the missing and the release of detainees, 2020 witnessed a key accountability development. To seek justice for Syrian victims, the Dutch government took an unprecedented step in September 2020, invoking the UN Convention against Torture to hold the Syrian regime responsible for torture and other gross human rights violations in a process that could ultimately lead to a case being brought before the International Court of Justice.

Our engagement with and support to victim and survivor groups continue to bear fruit. With our advice and support to access resources and policymakers, five Syrian associations of survivors and of families of victims are now operational and autonomous in their activism and advocacy efforts. These include the Association of Detainees and Missing in Sednaya Prison (ADMSP), the Ta'afi initiative, Families for Freedom, the Caesar Families Association (CFA) and the Coalition of the Families of those Kidnapped by ISIS.

The victim organisations that we support are key players in the Syrian and international efforts for justice and accountability. Through their engagement with a range of institutions and policymakers including

“The most important element of our partnership with Impunity Watch is that it genuinely supports victim organisations to be autonomous and pursue justice by putting all of its resources, including networking and experience, at the service of victim organisations and making sure that their voices are at the forefront.”

**Ahmad Helmi,**

co-founder of the Ta'afi Initiative – our partner.

the Syria Commission of Inquiry; the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism; the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria; the Brussels Conference; and the EU, these victim organisations have succeeded in ensuring that the issue of the detainees and the disappeared is on top of the agenda of policymakers and justice mechanisms. Another highlight is the significant progress in the coordination and the development of a common vision and joint demands for justice in Syria by our partner organisations. These five associations, recently launched finalised a joint *Truth and Justice Charter*. We have facilitated this process since October 2019. The Charter represents the victims' independent voices and their own initiative, presenting a common vision and framework on the question of enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention in Syria.



# The Truth and Justice Charter Syria

The victims and their families must be at the centre of a true process of justice, truth, and accountability in order to uphold their rights and lay the groundwork for a Syria that respects the dignity of its citizens.



[What is the Truth and Justice Charter for Syria?](#)

Together with [PAX](#) and eleven Syrian NGOs and experts, we released a [policy brief](#) in March 2020 to address the widespread violations of housing, land and property' (HLP) rights in Syria. The policy brief assesses the current state of violations of HLP rights in Syria; outlines ongoing efforts by civil society, the UN, and other international actors working on this issue; and presents actor-specific recommendations that were crafted in consultation with Syrian and international experts and directly-affected communities. We organised together with PAX, the Syrian Legal Development Programme (SLDP), Women Now for Development, and the Ta'afi Initiative, a virtual public event in October to raise awareness on the urgency and importance of HLP rights and the need to include this issue in the agenda of the UN, Member States, and the international donor community.

## ● Tunisia

Following the Tunisian revolution of 2011, the Truth and Dignity Commission (TDC) was established in 2013. The TDC's goal is to investigate gross human rights violations committed by the Tunisian state since 1955 and to provide compensation and rehabilitation to victims. The Tunisian government has long delayed the official publication of the Commission's final report. Under pressure from civil society, the government finally published it in June 2020 in the National Gazette more than a year later than the report published on the official website of the TDC. The report has had little or no impact on transitional justice in Tunisia, with most other mechanisms struggling to get off the ground.

In 2020, Impunity Watch and two partners, including a victim group, finalised a long collective and multidisciplinary review of the TDC report. This work was particularly important because it was the first time organisations undertook a detailed and scientific review of the content of the report. We also worked with a number of victim groups and provided them with technical assistance to better understand the TDC report as well as to define their advocacy priorities and coalition building strategies around it. We presented our review in an event held in June attended by civil society organisations, journalists and Tunisian politicians. The debate was very rich and helped to further enhance the report, which was presented to the public in its final version in March, during a workshop organised by Impunity Watch to present two studies on the recommendations of the TDC report.



## Western Balkans

The political space to engage in addressing the legacy of the past in the Western Balkans has been shrinking dramatically. While there are contextual differences, the legacy of the past is stirred by ethno-nationalists across the former Yugoslavia, as well as in Albania. With this comes the prevalence of glorification of war criminals, denial of atrocities, the spreading of fear against the “other” groups, manipulation and polarisation around narratives of the past, and suppression of opposition. This undermines efforts around transitional justice as an approach that promotes reconciliation, accountability and prevention. It also bears substantial risks for peace and security in the region.

Civil society in the region is generally weak and often side-lined in politics. From the perspective of civilian victims of the conflicts in the 1990s, there are many gaps regarding transitional justice in the region. In addition, the latest trends show a general decline in transitional justice processes. War crimes prosecutions are declining; reparations and assistance for victims have remained fragmented and piecemeal; official truth-seeking has come to a complete halt.

While transitional justice seemingly remains a priority for many actors in the international community, there is little advocacy and programming ongoing that has the potential to stem the negative structural trends regarding transitional justice in the region. Challenging and changing this situation is what the work of Impunity

Watch has been focused on. We particularly focused on advocacy with the EU. EU integration is an important incentive in the region for reforming institutions. While the broader political process of accession is stalled, we influenced small programmatic changes that directly support victims on the ground. At the programmatic level, the European Commission has taken first steps by focusing a small part of its transitional justice support on the grassroots level. A policy shift to the grassroots level has been a standard call in our advocacy work in the last years. It is too early to understand whether this renewed engagement by the EU at the grassroots level will make a difference in addressing the structural and systematic challenges mentioned before. Impunity Watch will continue to advocate for this in 2021.

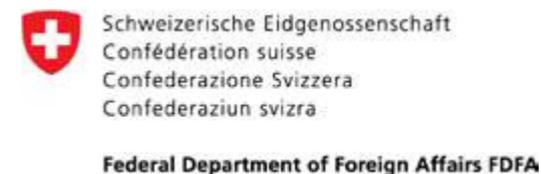
## ● New ways of working

With the COVID-19 pandemic forcing everyone to find new ways of working, we joined the worldwide trend of embracing technology and switching to virtual internal and external meetings, webinars, live-broadcasting on social media, podcasts, and op-eds. We continued our work online and maintained in-person activities whenever the health situation and measures allowed; particularly in Burundi, the DRC, and Guatemala.

The advantage of online meetings and webinars is being able to accommodate a much larger and diverse number of participants from around the world (sometimes up to 300 participants) at a minimal cost. In 2021, we will review our approach to digitalisation, and we will try to find a balance between physical and online activities and events taking into consideration all challenges pertaining to digital security, our partner's security, inclusion of all victims, including those without access to digital tools, and most importantly, the need to keep closely in touch with developments and challenges on the ground that our work needs to respond to.

### Donors

We are very grateful for the support of the Oak Foundation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Switzerland, Solidaridad and the European Union.



## ● Partnerships and alliances

Civil society organisations continue to operate in challenging contexts. The global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic deepened these challenges on all levels, having an impact on the economy, on health, and human rights. During these times, it is more important than ever to invest in real and meaningful partnerships. Trust and solidarity are key, not only with the partners we work with, but also with other civil society organisations, with international policymakers and donors. We also see the pandemic as a moment to reflect and seize it as an opportunity to start doing things differently, in exploring alternative ways of working in the field of ending impunity and justice, so that together we can contribute to making a real change.

Here, we reiterate that we can learn much from the civil society experience; particularly by looking at the bottom-up and holistic responses to complex challenges. If we do not listen to the grassroots voices and learn from their knowledge and solidarity to develop truly transformative and meaningful approaches, we would be robbing humanity from its strongest and most effective cure - the ability to be inclusive and to overcome challenges together. Working with grassroots organisations is imperative for us.

Impunity Watch is funded through a combination of multi-annual funding and project support from different donors. In 2020, we piloted a fundraising initiative, where we reached out to individuals in the Netherlands, asking for their solidarity with the victims and survivors of Guatemala's Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa case. This campaign of individual giving, proved to be successful not only because of the amount of € 31.115 fundraised, but it also led to the public's solidarity with the victims and the interest in the fight against impunity. We also introduced an online donation option on our website. Visitors now can choose to donate to support our cause and can determine the amount and the frequency of their donation. In total we were able to raise € 790. We are very grateful to our individual donors and supporters.

In 2021, Impunity Watch also received the good news that the [Dutch Postcode Lottery](#) will support our work on victim participation and movement building in the upcoming years, which we are very grateful and excited about. We look forward to further developing our relationship with the Dutch Postcode Lottery as well as our own work.

## Income and expenditure statement 2020

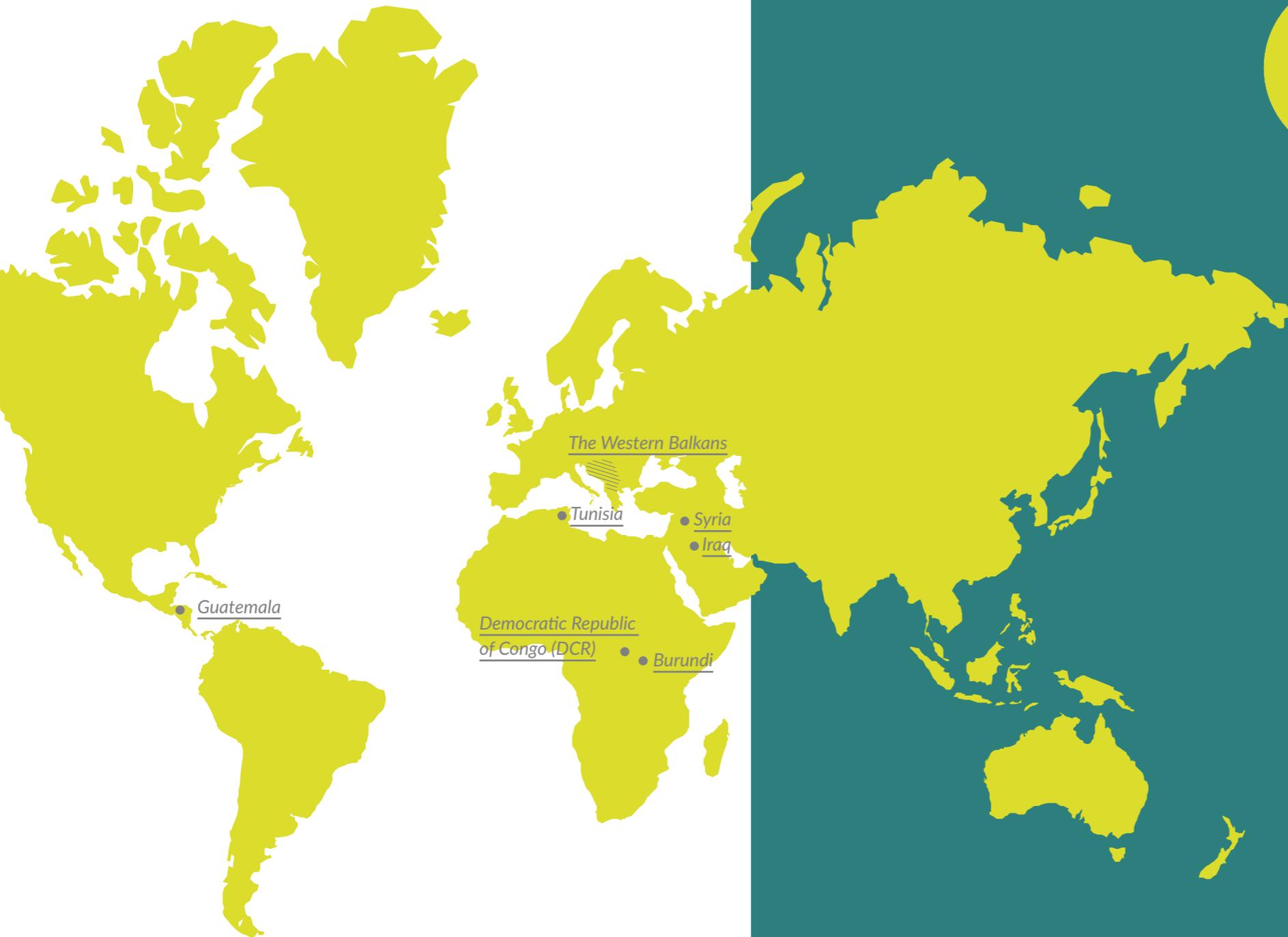
(in euros)	Actual 2020	Budget 2020	Actual 2019
<b>INCOME</b>			
Grants	3,005,309	4,817,000	3,382,612
Others	97,336	1,500	25,311
	<b>3,102,645</b>	<b>4,818,500</b>	<b>3,407,923</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			
General management and fundraising	229,874	416,000	189,699
Guatemala programme	370,203	400,000	439,943
Burundi programme	1,089,409	1,544,000	832,363
Intervention 1: Research	388,129	504,000	179,564
Intervention 2: Knowledge sharing	658,082	1,362,500	1,470,891
Intervention 3: Lobby	273,068	592,000	285,376
	<b>3,008,765</b>	<b>4,818,500</b>	<b>3,397,836</b>
<b>Result for the year</b>	<b>93,880</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>10,087</b>
<b>Appropriation of the result</b>			
General reserve	12,052	-	10,087
Designated reserve	81,828	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>93,880</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>10,087</b>

The net result of €12,052 has been added to our general reserves.

In 2020, Impunity Watch received a total amount of € 81,828 as donations which was obtained from organisations and individuals to support the Santa Lucia case. This amount will be spent in 2021 and therefore earmarked as designated reserve.

For more detailed information, an audited financial report 2020 is available on our [website](#).

## ● Where we work



## Contact

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