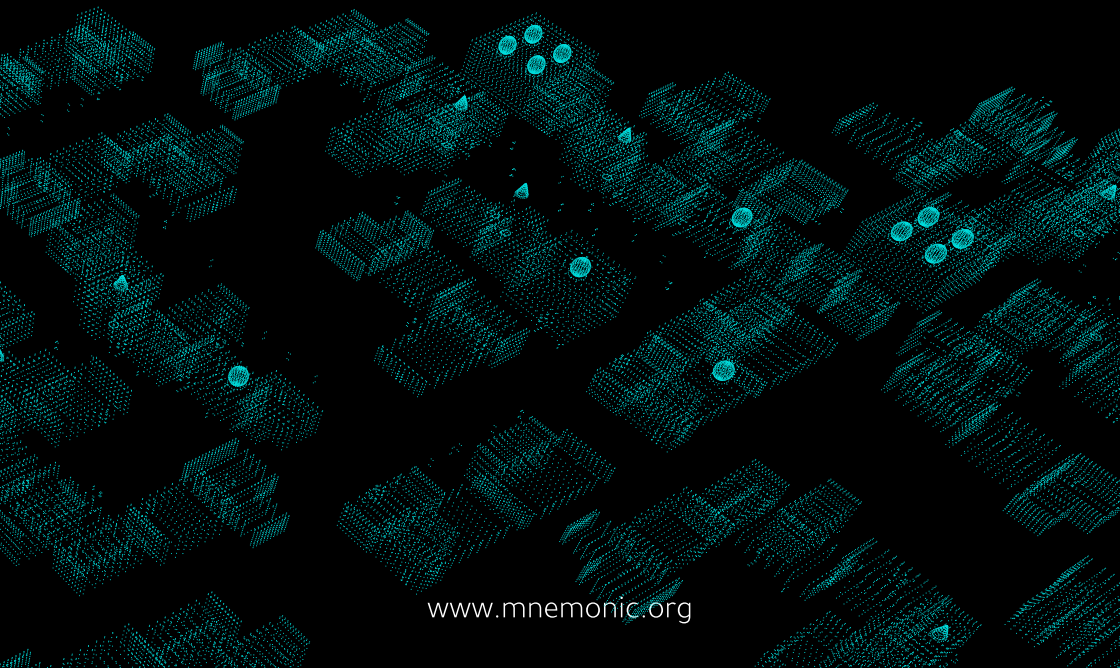


ANNUAL REPORT  
2023

M N E M O N I C



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# ABOUT MNEMONIC

Mnemonic guG supports human rights defenders in effectively using digital documentation of human rights violations and international crimes for advocacy, justice and accountability. We began our activities as Syrian Archive in 2014 and were formally incorporated as an organisation in Germany in 2018. In 2023, our team was composed of more than 50 people of many different nationalities, distributed across four continents. We are headquartered in Berlin, where 12 of us are based.

## WE AIM TO:

- Archive digital information to ensure that potential evidence is not lost and remains accessible and usable for accountability mechanisms, human rights and advocacy organisations.
- Share digital information with accountability mechanisms to advance investigations into international crimes, human rights violations and other grave injustices.
- Publish open source investigations into documented harms, advocating for further investigation of these.
- Train human rights defenders so that they can realise the full potential of digital information in their advocacy, memorialisation and litigation initiatives.
- Advocate for better policies on social media platforms with regard to content moderation and retention, ones that are less harmful, that respect human rights, and which also allow public interest research.
- Build and support the development of open source tools and methods to increase human rights defenders' capacity to use digital information to advance social justice.
- Work with impacted and survivor communities to contribute to the memorialisation of conflicts and atrocities.

# OUR ECOSYSTEM

1.

**AN EVENT TAKES PLACE AND INFORMATION ABOUT THE EVENT IS RECORDED AND PUBLISHED BY:**

- WITNESSES AND SURVIVORS
- JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA GROUPS
- HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS
- CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
- HUMANITARIAN GROUPS
- GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

2.

**MNEMONIC COLLECTS, VERIFIES AND CONSOLIDATES THE INFORMATION BY:**

- DEVELOPING TOOLS THAT CAPTURE AND SHARE SECURE ACCESS TO OPEN-SOURCE INFORMATION
- MONITORING INFORMATION ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL CRIMES
- CREATING CHAIN OF COMMAND STRUCTURES AND MAPS OF OPERATION AREAS
- COLLECTING AND FORENSICALLY ARCHIVING OPEN-SOURCE INFORMATION
- CONDUCTING OPEN-SOURCE INVESTIGATIONS
- VERIFYING INFORMATION
- TAGGING AND CURATING INFORMATION IN THEMATIC DATABASES

3.

**MNEMONIC PRODUCES EVIDENCE-BASED REPORTS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADVOCACY, INCLUDING:**

- INVESTIGATION REPORTS
- REPORTS IN SUPPORT OF LITIGATION
- VERIFICATION REPORTS
- THEMATIC DATASETS
- SEARCH RESULTS REPORTS (TAGS OR SEARCH TERMS)
- RESPONSES TO REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE FROM ACCOUNTABILITY BODIES
- EVIDENTIARY COPIES OF OPEN-SOURCE INFORMATION
- COMMAND STRUCTURE GRAPHS AND AREAS OF OPERATIONS MAPS
- CONTENT MODERATION CASE STUDIES, INCLUDING DOCUMENTED TAKEDOWNS BY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

4.

**MNEMONIC SHARES INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE-BASED REPORTS, WITH:**

- INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS
- DOMESTIC PROSECUTION AUTHORITIES
- HUMAN RIGHTS LITIGATION AND ADVOCACY ORGANISATIONS
- INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS
- SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS
- ACADEMIC AND MEMORIAL INSTITUTIONS
- POLICYMAKERS AND REGULATORY BODIES

# OUR 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

- Our Syrian Archive, Yemeni Archive, Ukrainian Archive, Sudanese Archive and Rapid Response programmes including Iranian Archive collectively preserved and archived **13,756,317 new digital records**, identified 9,154 new sources, and published **20 investigations**.
- Syrian Archive and Ukrainian Archive submitted **40 dossiers** of open source information and evidence to various accountability mechanisms, official investigators and public authorities.
- Syrian Archive became a civil party to the criminal investigation into the 21 August, 2013, sarin attack on East and West Ghouta, along with the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, the Open Society Justice Initiative and Civil Rights Defenders. Following the filing of evidence and a criminal complaint prepared by Syrian Archive and partners, France issued **arrest warrants** for Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, his brother Maher al-Assad, and two other senior Syrian officials, over the use of banned chemical weapons against civilians in Ghouta in August 2013. Issuing an arrest warrant for a sitting head of state was a historic decision and speaks to the strength of the evidence compiled for the case.
- Our Rapid Response team worked on establishing an [Iranian Archive](#) in collaboration with a coalition consisting of the Atlantic Council, the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, the Promise Institute for Human Rights at the UCLA School of Law, Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps, the Human Rights Center at the UC Berkeley School of Law, and the Azadi Archive, supported by Civil Rights Defenders, to collect and preserve open source content documenting human rights violations related to Iran for use in justice and accountability efforts.
- Following the new wave of violence in Sudan starting April 2023, Sudanese Archive shifted its focus from documenting violence against protestors to monitoring war. Following increased efforts to protect and preserve documentation which is at greater risk of being destroyed or lost, Sudanese Archive now has over **700,000 archived records**.
- Mnemonic trained over **140 individuals**, primarily journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders, on open source investigation techniques, how to use digital information as legal evidence and how to stay safe while doing research.
- Our Content Moderation Policy and Advocacy team engaged at international and EU levels with social media platforms, regulators and decision makers on the negative impact of contemporary content moderation policies. We co-launched the [#StopSilencingPalestine campaign](#) alongside 18 other civil society organisations, provided input to the [Oversight Board](#) and co-authored a [blog](#)

- [post](#) alongside 7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media on the real world impact of X (formerly Twitter) policies on human rights investigations in Syria and Palestine. We also contributed to the production of a [documentary](#) by the BBC about social media takedowns where we provided statistics on content removals on Syria, Sudan and Ukraine, aiming to raise awareness about this issue.
- Our work was cited by numerous prominent media outlets, with over **140 articles** featuring our achievements. For more, please see [Mnemonic Press](#), [Syrian Archive Press](#), [Ukrainian Archive Press](#), [Yemeni Archive Press](#) and [Sudanese Archive Press](#).
- Mnemonic launched its **Research Handbook** in both English and Arabic. This sets out clear practices, standards and policies for core research activities on an organisation-wide basis. The Handbook is accompanied by 30 annexes, including templates, handouts, worksheets and other resources to facilitate and coordinate researchers' work. This version of the Handbook has been reviewed topic-by-topic through nine internal workshops with the Mnemonic team and in full by 22 external partners. As part of this process, Mnemonic's legal and research team hosted a closed session review of the draft Handbook at the 12th Edition of RightsCon.
- Our Tech Team developed a roadmap for 2024-2025, performed a security audit on Elfehrest – Mnemonic's media annotation platform that facilitates access to the archives – and provided secure access to materials on Elfehrest for new external organisations, mainly from Ukraine and Yemen.
- Mnemonic established a collaboration with Relativity's [Justice for Change](#) programme to expand partnerships with experts, supporting our work in organising and cataloguing documents for legal accountability work on Syria.
- Ukrainian Archive and the Ukraine 5AM Coalition jointly convened a roundtable discussion, General Observation Tagging Schema and Documentation of International Crimes in Ukraine. The event provided an overview of Mnemonic's tagging schema and its role in supporting large-scale data analysis, focusing on its implementation and benefits in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine and beyond.
- Our staff participated in capacity-building activities in addition to specific training within each archival Programme. These included a cybersecurity training organised and led by internal team members; advocacy through International Human Rights Mechanisms organised by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; training on ammunition types, projectiles, and battle damage assessment led by external experts; forensic investigation led by the Argentine Forensic Anthropology team; training in interviewing skills by the Institute for International Criminal Investigation; training on principle of international law and documentation of crimes by the Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research; and research and journalism training by Danwatch.



# SYRIAN ARCHIVE



## ARCHIVING

Archived **1,007,822 new digital records**.



## VERIFICATION

Verified **3,500 records**.



## SOURCES

Collected and added **2,423 new sources** to its list of sources, which now totals 17,044.



## PODCASTS

Published a [podcast](#), in collaboration with Sowt, on chemical weapons attacks on Al Ghouta in 2013 detailing the dataset published and the methods of its development.



## DATABASES

Revamped its database on the use of chemical weapons in Syria, by adding a new subset to it: the [Al Ghouta Chemical Attack Dataset](#). For this subset, the team preserved, tagged and analysed **564 observations**, documenting the 21 August, 2013,

sarin gas attack on Al Ghouta. The dataset was made publicly available on the 10th anniversary of the attack (please see Page 12 for further details).



## OPEN SOURCE INVESTIGATIONS

Published **7 open source investigations** (please see Page 11 for the full list).

A standout investigation looked into attacks on six internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in the Idlib countryside and includes three open source investigations on four camps: [Wadi Khaled camp](#), [Mourin Camp and Baya'ba Camp](#) and [Water Station Camp in Kafr Ruhein](#) as well as [alleged Russian attacks on Hafsarja and Sahl al-Rouj in Idlib](#).



## LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY

As part of a casebuilding consortium, submitted a command structure analysis comparison for a faction of the Syrian Arab Army as well as visualisation materials and a detailed report in support of the sarin case filed in France. The submission is focused on the 2013 Eastern Ghouta sarin gas attacks. As a result, French authorities issued arrest warrants for Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, his brother Maher al-Assad, and two other senior Syrian officials.

Continued our collaboration with Security Force Monitor to expand our open source documentation of Syrian government-linked security forces that have been operating in the country since 2011. Please see Pages 9-10 for further highlights



## PARTNERSHIPS

Cultivated existing partnerships and established new ones including with the Syrian Center for Legal Research and Studies and Friedrich Alexander Universität, Erlangen Nürnberg.



## REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Received a total of **43 requests for information**: 21 legal requests from 7 different jurisdictions, 12 media requests, and 10 research requests.

Responded to **34 of these requests** during the calendar year. The information provided supported accountability initiatives, including the United Nations International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria and prosecutors at national level.



## CAPACITY BUILDING

Participated in various training sessions including on forensic investigations by the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, interviewing skills by the Institute for International Criminal Investigation, international law principles and crimes documentation by the Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research, research and journalism by Danwatch and advocacy through human rights mechanisms by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.



## OUTREACH AND PRESS

Featured in over **120** [media articles and productions](#).

Participated in various events (please see Page 13 for further information).

The [BBC has highlighted](#) Mnemonic's archival work, documenting our efforts in preserving over 15 million records.

Developed and published **5 infographics**: [An Armed Attack Kills Dozens of Truffle Hunters in the Syrian Desert](#), [Al Ghouta Chemical Attacks Dataset \(1, 2\)](#), [Open Source Information](#) and [Attacks on Medical Facilities Dataset \(1, 2, 3\)](#).

Published **2 videos**: On the [Jisr Alshughour investigation](#) and regarding investigations about [two young girls killed while sleeping in an attack on their home in Balyun](#).

Published **2 blog posts**: [Documenting and archiving: Their role in achieving justice and writing the narrative](#), and [On International Archiving Day...The archive as a nation's memory and witness to its events](#).

Published [quarterly newsletters](#).



## MEMORY

As part of the work to preserve, contextualise and re-humanise the collective digital memories of the Syrian uprising and conflict, Syrian Archive contributed to two articles: [The Syrian Archive Digital Memory Project: Archiving as Testimony, as Evidence, as Creative Practice](#), and [The Beginning of an Idea about an End: On Digital, Diasporic, Syrian Archives](#)

## PARTNER TESTIMONIAL



The combination of a rigorous methodology (sharpened by over a decade documenting the Syrian and other conflicts, and validated by the key players in the human rights/OS arena); painstaking work reviewing, authenticating and preserving vital documentation (and potential evidence) in relation to the conflict in Syria; the granularity of your staff's knowledge of the history of – and main players in – the Syrian war; and a unique capacity to retrieve, process and analyse large amounts of materials in multiple languages (including Arabic) makes the Syrian Archive and its contribution to our work (i.e. identifying the perpetrators of chemical attacks in Syria) absolutely unique, and unparalleled for quality and thoroughness



Your help (and the meticulous analysis the Syrian Archive team provided us with) allowed us to meet our standard of proof with greater confidence, and perfectly epitomised the first class work the Syrian Archive has invariably performed over the years

## LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY

In November 2023, investigating judges in France issued **arrest warrants** for Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, his brother Maher al-Assad, Ghassan Abbas, director of Branch 450 of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center, or SSRC, and General Bassam al-Hassan, presidential adviser for Strategic Affairs and liaison officer between the Presidential Palace and the SSRC.

The arrest warrants are a major and historic development for the Syrian Archive, particularly with regards to its strategic litigation project on criminal accountability for the Syrian government's use of sarin gas in Ghouta in August 2013. The Syrian Archive, Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression and the Open Society Justice Initiative instigated this investigation, thereby facilitating a 2021 criminal complaint filed by victims of the attack. The Syrian Archive's contribution to the case builds on our collaboration with the Security Force Monitor towards building open source "chain of command" datasets.





INVESTIGATIONS

## **French Magistrates Issue Arrest Warrants for Syria's President Al-Assad and Three Associates for Chemical Weapons Attacks**

This achievement draws on more than nine years of hard, groundbreaking work by the Syrian Archive in open source evidence, digital investigations, and in partnering with key local, national and international actors.

Press Release: [English](#), [Arabic](#)

# PUBLIC OPEN SOURCE INVESTIGATIONS

## AN ARMED ATTACK KILLS DOZENS OF TRUFFLE HUNTERS IN THE SYRIAN DESERT

ENGLISH, ARABIC  
AUGUST 14, 2023



## RUSSIAN AIRSTRIKE ON A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL AND A VEGETABLE MARKET IN JISR AL-SHUGHUR

ENGLISH, ARABIC  
NOVEMBER 2, 2023



## TWO GIRLS KILLED IN A DOUBLE TAP ATTACK ON A HOUSE IN BALYUN

ENGLISH, ARABIC  
DECEMBER 7, 2023



## WADI KHALED CAMP

ENGLISH, ARABIC  
DECEMBER 22, 2023



## ATTACKS ON SIX INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDP) CAMPS IN THE IDLIB COUNTRYSIDE

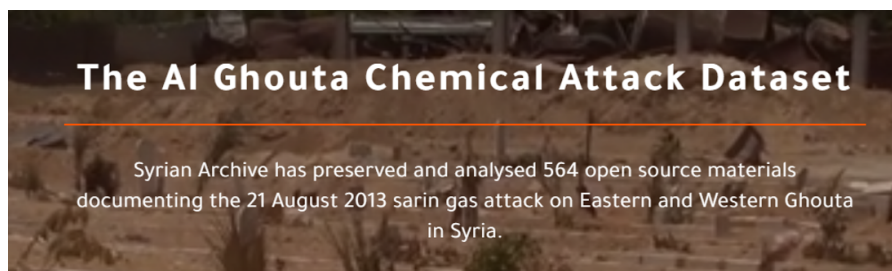
ENGLISH, ARABIC  
DECEMBER 22, 2023



## DATABASES

A main achievement this year is the Syrian Archive team's work on a revamped and updated chemical attacks dataset. Published on the **10th anniversary of the chemical attack on Al Ghouta**, the dataset highlighted again the severity of the attack while continuing to advocate for accountability.

Materials collected in this dataset have also been used in France, one of our contributions to the investigation that led to arrest warrants for Bashar al-Assad, his brother and other associates.



Symptom	Number of times observed in the dataset
Discoloured skin	176
Oxygen treatment	138
Convulsion	135
Foaming mouth	100
Washing skin, bodies, clothes	176
Breathing issues	87
Pinpoint pupils	41
Hallucination	19
Itching or burning skin	3

## OUTREACH

Syrian Archive team members participated in various international and European-based conferences and events. Some of the most notable include:

1. The 10th meeting of the Lausanne platform of the UN's International, Impartial, Independent Mechanism, or IIIM, in June 2023, which was held for Syrian civil society organisations. This meeting gave the team insights into the areas the IIIM is focusing on. As a result some of these have been integrated into the Syrian Archive's planning as well as into its legal strategies. The meeting also offered an opportunity to network with other civil society organisations leading to more direct cooperation.
2. A public hearing at the District Court of The Hague for a trial session against Mustafa A., a member of Liwa al-Quds. This trial was the first of its kind in the Netherlands, where a local court prosecuted crimes committed by pro-government forces in Syria.
3. The Syrian Civil Society on Chemical Weapons conference in The Hague in November, 2023. Participating helped advance coordination with other groups focusing on this issue and provided us with valuable insights into the broader demands of civil society for accountability concerning the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

## INTERNAL TEAM RETREAT

The Syrian Archive team met together for the first time in December 2023 in Berlin, after close to a decade of remote collaboration! The meeting brought together 20 participants from various locations (European countries, Jordan and the US) to participate in a week-long strategy meeting. For many, it was the first opportunity to meet in person and this further encouraged a collaborative environment as well as enhanced mutual understanding of others' roles.

The meeting helped the team better articulate Syrian Archive's vision and strategic priorities and benefit from insights from key donors and partners. In particular, it helped ensure that team members are aligned on the organisation's history, current status and anticipated future. It supported us in developing a vision that can be transformed into actionable plans over the next three years. Meeting face-to-face and dedicating an entire week to collective input significantly enhanced our productivity. The strategy document produced as a result of the meeting was a collaborative effort that reflected a consensus achieved through meaningful discussion and other activities.



# YEMENI ARCHIVE



## ARCHIVING

Archived **6,333,125 new digital records**.



## VERIFICATION

Verified **1,445 records**.



## SOURCES

Collected and added **997 new sources** to its list of sources, which now totals 9,071.



## OPEN SOURCE INVESTIGATIONS

Published **7 open source investigations** (please see Pages 16-17 for the full list).



## CAPACITY BUILDING

Trained **52 individuals** on open source investigations and digital security.

Initiated an advocacy and mentorship programme for **10 civil society organisations**: SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties, Musaala Organisation for Human Rights, Free Media, Al Amal Foundation, the Center of Strategic Studies to Support Women and Children, the Yemeni Coalition for Monitoring Human Rights Violations (Rasd), the Marib Dam Foundation for Social Development, Yemen Watch, the Studies & Economic Media Center and the Abductees' Mothers Association.

Extended access to Eلفهrest, Mnemonic's media annotation platform that facilitates access to the archive. Partners were provided comprehensive training on utilising the platform and data for their research.



## OUTREACH AND PRESS

Participated in advocacy events (please see Pages 18-19 for further information).

Featured in **17** [media articles and productions](#).

Published **5 advocacy videos** on its social media accounts covering: [The attack on a rural power station in Taiz](#), [the attack on Khaled Ibn Al Walid school in Hajjah](#), a [drone that fell onto a crowded street in Sanaa](#), and on [content moderation](#).

Developed and published **25 infographics** covering the following topics: International Women's Day ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)), [World Water Day](#), World Health Day ([1](#), [2](#)), World Press Freedom Day ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)), [World Refugee Day](#), [content moderation](#), [the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture](#), [the Yemen Declaration for Justice](#) and Reconciliation, the International Day Of The Disappeared ([1](#), [2](#)), and on the [Attacks on Media Database Update](#).

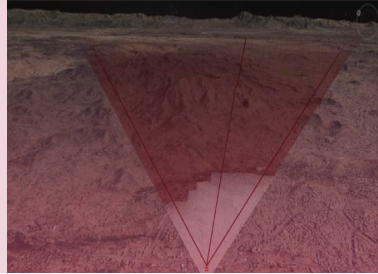
# PUBLIC OPEN SOURCE INVESTIGATIONS

## SHELLING THE RURAL POWER STATION IN TAIZ

Shelling the rural power station in Taiz.

**ENGLISH, ARABIC**

**FEBRUARY 15, 2023**



## BOMBING A WATER RIG IN SANA'A GOVERNORATE

A water rig in Arhab district, north of Sana'a, was hit allegedly by two air strikes, in what is known as a double tap.

**ENGLISH, ARABIC**

**FEBRUARY 16, 2023**



## BOMBING TWO FUEL STATIONS AND A GAS TANK IN YARIM, IBB GOVERNORATE

Bombing two fuel stations and a gas tank in Yarim, Ibb governorate.

**ENGLISH, ARABIC**

**FEBRUARY 15, 2023**



## SHELLING A MARKET IN TAIZ OLD CITY OF TAIZ GOVERNORATE

Shelling a market in Taiz Old City of Taiz governorate.

**ENGLISH, ARABIC**

**FEBRUARY 16, 2023**



## **BOMBING KHALED IBN AL WALID SCHOOL IN HAJJAH**

Khalid Ibn al Walid school in Hayran district of Hajjah governorate had been hit by missile strikes, in conjunction with military battles in the western districts of Hajjah.

**ENGLISH, ARABIC**

**JUNE 12, 2023**



## **A DRONE FELL ON A CROWDED CIVILIAN STREET IN SANA'A**

A drone reportedly fell onto a crowded commercial street in Amanat Al-Asimah Governorate.

**ENGLISH, ARABIC**

**AUGUST 18, 2023**



## **BOMBING A RESIDENTIAL HOUSE IN MAWZA DISTRICT DURING THE EID DAYS**

A missile hit a civilian's residential home in the western Taiz governorate.

**ENGLISH, ARABIC**

**OCTOBER 25, 2023**





## OUTREACH



The Yemeni Archive team participated in public outreach and advocacy events, where they highlighted the significance of using verifiable information to expose ongoing violations of human rights in Yemen.

The Yemeni Archive team co-sponsored a side event during the 52nd session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2023. The event, [Charting a Path to Sustainable Peace in Yemen](#), received vital support in Luxembourg. During the panel, a representative of the Yemeni Archive presented insights into Yemeni Archive's vital role documenting systemic attacks on schools in Yemen and the resulting impact on children.



In June 2023, Yemeni Archive participated in the [Yemeni International Forum](#) held in The Hague. The forum is dedicated to Yemeni-Yemeni dialogue. It provided a pivotal platform for Yemeni Archive to contribute to two impactful sessions on pathways to justice for Yemen, and on narratives surrounding victim-centred approaches.



In July 2023, Yemeni Archive joined the launch of the '[Yemen Declaration for Justice and Reconciliation](#)', along with 44 civil society organisations. This event marked a significant step towards advocating for human rights and supporting just, comprehensive and sustainable peace in Yemen.



# UKRAINIAN ARCHIVE



## ARCHIVING

Archived **3,383,055 new digital records**, with the support of and collaboration with member organisations including the Ukraine 5AM Coalition, Global Rights Compliance Ukraine and the Conflict and Environment Observatory, making the Ukrainian Archive the largest open source archive – with a total of 6,930,535 records – to facilitate access for over 20 Ukrainian and international NGOs.



## SOURCES

Collected and added **2,298 new sources** to its list of sources, which now totals 8,998.



## LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Supported national, regional and international accountability mechanisms, as well as coordinated with key stakeholders in relation to the international armed conflict in Ukraine.



## CAPACITY BUILDING

Provided training and capacity building to members of the Ukraine 5AM Coalition, offering workshops on Mnemonic's media annotation platform, Elfehrest, which facilitates access to the archive and on the documentation of international crimes in Ukraine.



## OPEN SOURCE INVESTIGATIONS

Published **4 open source investigations** on attacks on cultural heritage and public infrastructure (please see Pages 22-23 for the full list).



## OUTREACH AND PRESS

Featured in several [media articles and productions](#) including: [Are social media companies removing war crimes evidence?](#) on the BBC, [Smartphones are changing the war in Ukraine](#) for the Wall Street Journal, and ['Accountability and justice': Gathering digital evidence of war crimes in Ukraine](#) for France24.



## PARTNERSHIPS

Expanded its network of partners including continuing its coordination and collaboration with the Ukraine 5AM Coalition, Bellingcat, the Global Legal Action Network, the Conflict and Environment Observatory, Global Rights Compliance Ukraine, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, the European Prison Litigation Network, and other valued partners.



## REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Received a total of **24 requests for information**, 23 of which were legal requests from, or submitting to, 4 distinct jurisdictions.

Responded to **18 of these requests** during the calendar year.

# PUBLIC OPEN SOURCE INVESTIGATIONS

## INVESTIGATION INTO ATTACK ON IZIUUM CITY CENTRAL HOSPITAL

In early March of 2022 as Russian forces occupied northern Iziium, Kharkiv oblast, a hospital in the Ukrainian-controlled part of the city was badly damaged by a direct hit from a munition.

**ENGLISH**

**FEBRUARY 2, 2023**



## INVESTIGATION INTO MILITARY ACTIVITY AT KYIV OBLAST PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL NO.2 IN VORZEL FEBRUARY-APRIL 2022

On 25 February 2022 Russian armed forces allegedly occupied Vorzel, a northwestern outer suburb of Kyiv. During their alleged occupation of the area, Russian forces used the hospital to house troops, and even reportedly set up fortified firing positions on the hospital grounds. Upon their retreat from Vorzel on 1 April 2022 it was discovered that the hospital had been thoroughly looted, heavily damaged, and mined.

**ENGLISH**

**JUNE 20, 2023**



## INVESTIGATION INTO ATTACKS ON ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL CATHEDRAL IN MARIUPOL

During the siege of Mariupol by Russian and Russian proxy forces from 24 February 2022 until 20 May 2022, the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel was severely damaged by artillery fire, collapsing one of the domes and leaving entry and exit holes in the walls.

ENGLISH

AUGUST 22, 2023



## INVESTIGATION INTO THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MARIUPOL SYNAGOGUE

During the 2022 siege of Mariupol by the Russian Federation the city's only functioning synagogue was destroyed. This investigation examines the circumstances surrounding this event and who is possibly responsible.

ENGLISH

NOVEMBER 21, 2023



## OUTREACH

- In February 2023, Ukrainian Archive participated in the Investigative Commons panel talk, [Investigating Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine](#), organised by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, on how to combine the complementary aspects of open source investigation and strategic case building to increase the impact of civil society collaborations and interventions.



### **ECCHR | Investigative Commons: Investigating Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine Paneltalk**

- In May 2023, Ukrainian Archive, in partnership with the Ukraine 5AM Coalition, hosted a roundtable discussion, [Observation Tagging Schema and Documentation of International Crimes in Ukraine](#). This brought together Ukrainian and international legal practitioners

and human rights activists. Experts discussed the main challenges, lessons learned and needs for effective documentation of international crimes and human rights violations for accountability purposes, with the support of open source investigative tools and methodologies.

- In November 2023, Ukrainian Archive provided a lecture in Berlin under the guidance of Cultural Vistas Europe at the Allianz Forum. Ukrainian Archive engaged with Ukrainian investigative journalists and human rights activists in a productive discussion and workshop on open source data preservation and investigation. The event received much positive feedback.



# SUDANESE ARCHIVE

A civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces, the country's regular army under Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary organisation headed by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti, started on 15 April, 2023. Our team expanded and shifted its focus to urgently monitor the situation, including increased efforts to protect and preserve documentation at risk of being destroyed or lost.



## ARCHIVING

Archived **126,967 new digital records**, mainly covering the new wave of violence that erupted in April 2023.



## SOURCES

Collected and added **1,587 new sources** to its list of sources, which now totals 4,896.



## OPEN SOURCE INVESTIGATIONS

Published **2 open source investigations** related to the 2021 coup and the current conflict in Sudan (please see Page 26 for the full list).



## PARTNERSHIPS

Connected with several partners working on documenting human rights violations and fact checking information inside Sudan, including Adeela for Culture and Art and the Wayamo Foundation, as well as collaborating

with the Center for Victims of Torture to provide psychosocial support for the Sudanese Archive's own team.



## OUTREACH AND PRESS

Participated in several outreach activities and workshops (please see Page 27 for further details).



## CAPACITY BUILDING

Collaborated with Wayamo Foundation in training **25 journalists and human rights defenders** on open source investigation tools and methods as part of a [Monitoring and Documentation of Human Rights Violations in Sudan workshop](#) held in July 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya. As part of this collaboration, Sudanese Archive, represented by Mnemonic's Legal Adviser, conducted training in Nairobi, Kenya, for Sudanese lawyers on the potential of open source investigations as legal evidence. The training was part of a workshop called [Modern forms of evidence and the potential application of universal jurisdiction in the East African region to international crimes committed in Sudan.](#)



# PUBLIC OPEN SOURCE INVESTIGATIONS

## ACTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST DEMONSTRATORS IN BAHRI AND AL SITEEN IN NOV 2021

This investigation examines the violations and acts of violence against demonstrators in Khartoum on 17 November 2021.

**ENGLISH, ARABIC**

**APRIL 3, 2023**



## AL-KALAKLA: REPORT ON THE RESIDENTIAL AREA ATTACKS IN KHARTOUM

Humanitarian Crisis Unfolds as Civilian Homes in Al-Kalakla Al-Qobba Endure Devastating Attacks

**ENGLISH, ARABIC**

**DECEMBER 21, 2023**



## OUTREACH



As part of the Wayamo Foundation's workshop on Monitoring and Documentation of Human Rights Violations in Sudan, experts from the Sudanese Archive and Mnemonic participated in a July 2023 [symposium](#) dedicated to the World Day for International Justice. The event focused on monitoring and documentation of human rights violations in Sudan and aimed to draw attention to ongoing atrocities in the war-torn country as well as advocate for justice and accountability for all victims.



In July 2023, the Sudanese Archive's project manager participated in a discussion held by the United States Institute of Peace called [From Monitoring to Action: Preventing Atrocities in Sudan](#), which examined the progression of the war and efforts to address atrocities.

# RAPID RESPONSE



## EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Worked on supporting open source documentation efforts in emergency situations including in Iran, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, and Kashmir, India and Pakistan.

Preserved 15 websites belonging to the de facto government of Nagorno-Karabakh that were at risk of takedown, in light of the conflict and the change of control over the territory.



## ARCHIVING

Archived **2,905,348 new digital records**, including 1 million records related to the Iranian Archive.



## SOURCES

Collected and added **1,849 new sources** to its list of sources, which now totals 5,257.



## TECHNICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Developed a standalone instance of Elfehrest, Mnemonic's media annotation platform, for the Iranian Archive, in collaboration with Mnemonic's technology team. This involved new developments and enhancements to Elfehrest, enabling 80 external researchers to collaboratively work on tagging and verifying archived information simultaneously.



## PARTNERSHIPS

Joined a coalition for Iran, consisting of the Atlantic Council, the Promise Institute for Human rights at the UCLA School of Law, the Azadi Archive, the Human Rights Center at the UC Berkeley School of Law, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center and Amnesty International's Digital Verification Corps to develop a standalone Iranian Archive. Partnered with the University Network for Human Rights to develop the Nagorno-Karabakh project and archive relevant at-risk digital, open source materials.



## LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Supported the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Islamic Republic of Iran by submitting information relevant to their investigations, as well as investigations launched by our partners, through the provision of archived data.



## CAPACITY BUILDING

Provided **weekly coaching sessions** to Iranian Archive researchers in addition to **3 training sessions** on open source investigations for Iranian and Armenian project members.

# CONTENT MODERATION

## FOCUS

Our content moderation policy and advocacy work focused on the following priorities:

### **1. Access to online human rights content through:**

- Increasing the availability of Application Programming Interfaces, or APIs, as the most important tool enabling civil society organisations to identify and archive relevant human rights content for accountability. The biggest opportunity in this respect is offered by the Digital Services Act (DSA - Article 40(12)) although wider research tools are needed.
- Countering content over-removal by platforms so that it can still be accessed for accountability purposes. This includes algorithm transparency and the consistent application of allowances for newsworthiness for human rights content. The biggest opportunity in this respect is offered by the Digital Services Act (DSA - Article 40(4)) through vetted researcher access to removed content, to increase scrutiny of over-removal.
- Ensuring that platforms conduct thorough human rights risk assessments and consult with civil society organisations before launching new policies or tools that could hamper human rights work and investigations.

### **2. Use of offline content for accountability:**

- Increasing transparency around content retention time frames by platforms, and enhancing retention period extension requests to include civil society organisations.

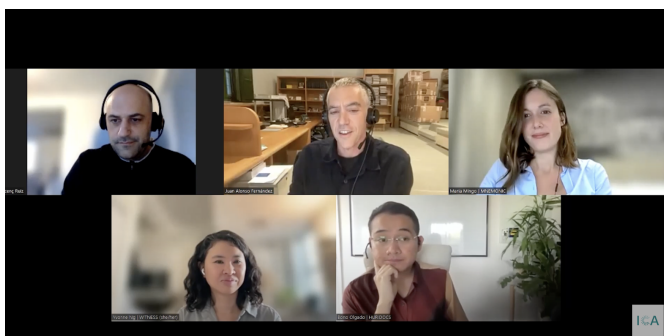
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Mnemonic's Policy and Advocacy Manager engaged bilaterally with social media platforms on relevant content reinstatement and the negative impact of their policies on human rights research, evidence preservation, open source investigations and local activism. Mnemonic also contributed to Google's Online Security Toolkit for Human Rights Defenders and was consulted on tool development.
- Mnemonic provided input to decision makers, such as those on the [Oversight Board](#) on content retention and content moderation risks. For example, Mnemonic was consulted by the Oversight Board on two cases in April 2023:
  - On the interpretation of the word "shaheed" (commonly translated as "martyr") and how it often leads to content over-removal under Meta's [Dangerous organisations and individuals policy](#).
  - On the Oversight Board's ["Armenian prisoners of war video case"](#). Mnemonic recommended that Meta develop and publicly share a protocol to preserve and, where appropriate, share with competent authorities, the information to assist in investigations and legal processes to remedy or prosecute atrocity crimes or grave human rights violations.

Additionally, Mnemonic's Policy and Advocacy Manager and the Sudanese Archive team made a written submission in October 2023 related to the Oversight Board's ["Weapons post linked to Sudan's conflict case"](#). For this submission, Mnemonic obtained feedback from WITNESS, the Berkeley Human Rights Center and the University of Oxford's Institute of Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict .

- Mnemonic's Policy and Advocacy Manager spoke on seven panels about content moderation and the archiving of social media content for accountability purposes:
  - Online roundtable organised by the National Democratic Institute in June 2023.
  - [Digital Sovereignty Conference, or DISCO](#), in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in October 2023.

Webinar organised by the International Council on Archives on the 2023 World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, titled [Fight the Power\(s\): Audiovisual Archiving for Social Justice](#) in October 2023. Other panellists included representatives from WITNESS and HURIDOCS.



- Conference on [Enhancing Sustainability of Civil Society Organisations for Digital Archiving that promoted the work of civil society organisations involved in digital archiving projects](#), as organised by the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation in Belgrade, Serbia, in November 2023.
- Seminar on Defending Human Rights Online, in Society and Business organised by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom in Berlin, in November 2023. Fellow speakers included Mnemonic’s Rapid Response Programme and the Syrian Archive.
- [Conference on Growing Virtuality](#) organised by the Ruhr University Bochum in Bochum, Germany, in November 2023.
- Scrolling for Truth workshop on content moderation and Meta’s “Armenian prisoners of war video case”, during the SIRIUS Project conference co-complemented by the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation on [Electronic Evidence Across Borders](#) in The Hague, the Netherlands, in November 2023. The panel included representatives from Meta, the Oversight Board, WITNESS and Article 19.

Further conferences and workshops attended by Mnemonic’s Policy and Advocacy Manager include:

- [RightsCon 2023](#) organised by Access Now in San Jose, Costa Rica, in June 2023.
- [ASO Communications](#) Campaign Messaging Boot Camp organised by People vs. Big Tech in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in September 2023.
- [New Frontiers Conference: Open Source Evidence](#) organised by The Inner Temple and the TRUE Project in London, UK, in November 2023.

- Mnemonic’s Policy and Advocacy Manager co-authored a [blog post](#) together with Syrian Archive and 7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media in November 2023 on the real world impact of X (formerly Twitter) policies on human rights investigations in Syria and Palestine, and more specifically on how its policy changes stifle human rights work and investigations.
- Mnemonic’s Policy and Advocacy Manager was featured in a Coda Story article titled [“When Meta suspends influential political accounts, who loses?”](#).
- Mnemonic collaborated with other civil society organisations in the context of nine digital rights alliances, networks and working groups at the EU and international level. These included the [Digital Services Act \(DSA\) Human Rights Alliance](#), the Arab [Alliance for Digital Rights](#), [European Digital Rights \(EDRi\) group](#), [People vs. Big Tech](#), the informal Evidence Locker coalition, the [European AI & Society Fund ecosystem](#), and several DSA and content moderation civil society organisation coordination lists.

Examples of joint campaigns and open letters include:

- Statement on [EU Trilogues: The AI Act must protect people’s rights](#) coordinated by EDRi in July 2023, which advocates for the European Media Freedom Act to protect journalists from surveillance and spyware.
- Open letter coordinated by EDRi in September 2023 requesting [the European Parliament to prohibit surveillance of, and use of spyware against, journalists through European Media Freedom Act](#).
- [Statement calling on platforms to respect Palestinian digital rights in times of crisis](#), coordinated by 7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media in October 2023 and supported by over 60 organisations. Please see our [press release](#).
- Open letter to European Commissioner for Internal Market, Thierry Breton, in October 2023 on [why the precise interpretation of the DSA matters, especially when people’s lives are at risk in Gaza and Israel](#). Please see the [press release](#).
- [Meta, let Palestine Speak campaign](#) in November 2023, alongside 15 other civil society organisations, calling on Meta to end the over-moderation of Palestinian content in many forms, and to ensure the protection of and respect for the human rights of Palestinians and all other people.

- Tell Meta: [Stop Silencing Palestine campaign](#) in December 2023, alongside 18 other civil society organisations, renewing our call to Meta to stop its systemic censorship of Palestinian voices by overhauling content moderation practices and policies that continue to restrict content about Palestine. In Mnemonic's [press release](#), we highlighted the campaign recommendations, particularly those critical to enabling human rights research, open source investigations and accountability for grave crimes. Such recommendations relate to human rights risk assessments, algorithmic transparency and the retention of critical human rights content.

## **POSITIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND IMPACT**

- Due to widespread criticism, X (formerly Twitter) quietly backtracked on controversial daily post visibility restrictions it had launched in July 2023.
- The Digital Services Act, the European Union's legislation regulating very large online platforms (VLOPs), including social media platforms, that Mnemonic advised on over several years, entered into force in August 2023.
- Meta finalised its (non-public) data retention policy and updated its privacy policy in December 2023. In it, Meta mentions content retention to cooperate with law enforcement agencies. Conversations around preservation and requests for extended retention (and expanding this privilege to CSOs) is ongoing.



# LEGAL AND RESEARCH

## LAUNCHING MNEMONIC'S NEW RESEARCH HANDBOOK

The Research Handbook is a close to 100-page resource to orient Mnemonic's research and technology work in a foundation that reliably, safely and ethically preserves and analyses large amounts of human rights information. It aims to meet evidentiary standards in legal proceedings and to support trauma-informed open source investigations practice.

First as Syrian Archive, the Mnemonic team was one of the very first groups working to build on human rights aspects of open source investigation. With its focus on technical developments and securing documentation of human rights violations and international crimes at scale, Mnemonic has effectively pioneered targeted, mass archiving of user-generated content. It has done so deliberately, and in solidarity with community activists seeking to leverage such content in the pursuit of justice.

Since then however, this field has evolved. Social media documentation of human rights violations has dramatically expanded in scope and use. Practitioners and key actors have changed over time. Shared understandings of how open source information might be used or how it could be usable as evidence have significantly advanced. The actual use of open source information and analysis as evidence in court has also progressed significantly.

Thus over the last few years, Mnemonic has undergone an extensive systems building process, the outcome of which is the new Research Handbook. This Handbook was drafted to communicate clear practices, standards and policies for core research activities on an organisation-wide basis. It also provides research teams with almost 30 templates and other useful resources, annexed to the Handbook. Taken together, the Mnemonic Research Handbook and each individual Archive's programmatic protocols, constitute that programme's standard operating procedures.

**Officially launched at the beginning of 2023 in both English and Arabic, the Research Handbook is a core resource and reference point for Mnemonic research.** Throughout the year, the Handbook has undergone extensive review and workshopping. We look forward to sharing Version 2 - incorporating this extensive feedback - with the Mnemonic team in 2024. We also aim to publicly share useful resources and lessons learned from this process.

## **BUILDING SKILLS, SHARING KNOWLEDGE**

- Over the first half of 2023, Mnemonic's Legal Adviser and Senior Researcher conducted a series of nine topic-by-topic internal workshop sessions on the new Research Handbook, offering staff deep insights into the drafting process and opportunities to share feedback on this core resource.
- Mnemonic's Legal Adviser provided researchers with refresher training on legal and evidentiary considerations for open source investigations, suggesting tactics for implementing a "legal mindset" during research.
- Mnemonic's Legal Adviser joined the Tech Team's retreat, presenting and advising on key themes and relevant legal frameworks for the team to accommodate in its strategic planning and work.

Mnemonic's Legal Adviser also joined the Syrian Archive team's retreat, supporting them to improve shared understanding of the legal imperatives underpinning their work, while also advising on strategic priorities and needs.

## **OUTREACH**

- Throughout the drafting and review process, Mnemonic has sought input and advice from legal practitioners in diverse jurisdictions, reflecting the wide variety of jurisdictions in which Mnemonic research teams conduct and submit their work. This was done in particular to gather input on key issues likely to be differently interpreted in the respective legal systems.
- As part of the workshopping process, Mnemonic's Research Handbook was also reviewed in full by 22 external partners, including: legal adviser Shabnam Mojtahedi (in her personal capacity), Global Legal Action Network, the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research, the UC Berkeley Human Rights Center, the UCLA Promise Institute for Human Rights, Open Society Justice Initiative, the Center for Justice and Accountability, the Conflict Environment Observatory, WITNESS, Bellingcat, the Syrian Justice and Accountability Center, Videre est Credere, Security Force Monitor, the University of Chicago Law School's Global Human Rights Clinic, the Center for Human Rights Science at Carnegie Mellon University, and the United Nations International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism. These reviewing experts provided written feedback and some also participated in two workshopping sessions hosted by Mnemonic's Legal Adviser and Senior Researcher. One was held in person at RightsCon in Costa Rica and another was held online.

- Mnemonic's Legal Adviser participated in the International Bar Association War Crimes Committee Conference in March 2023, at Leiden University Campus Wijnhaven in The Hague, the Netherlands. The conference addressed justice amid ongoing global conflicts, featuring panels on topics like innovations in criminal accountability, the situation of women in Iran and Afghanistan, legal equality in international law, advancing a convention on crimes against humanity, and overlooked areas in international justice.
- Mnemonic's Legal Adviser co-led a three-day training on open source investigations and evidence for lawyers, in Potsdam, Germany, in September 2023, as part of the curriculum for the [Strategic Litigation for Rights in Europe](#) (STARLIGHT) project of the Hertie School and the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. The STARLIGHT project provides legal practitioners in the European Union with the skills and knowledge to apply the Charter of Fundamental Rights in strategic litigation. This training was co-taught by Amnesty International's Evidence Lab.
- Mnemonic's Legal Adviser and a Syrian Archive Researcher both participated in the Opinio Juris online symposium on Fairness, Equality, and Diversity in Open Source Investigations, sharing insights from their experience. Alongside WITNESS co-authors, Mnemonic's Legal Adviser argued [to renew a community of practice in open source investigations](#). Syrian Archive's attending Researcher offered an important perspective on approaching open source investigations as a [knowledge formation project](#).

# TECHNOLOGY

Mnemonic develops technology that utilises software called Diwan to collect and forensically archive open source information at scale. Additionally Mnemonic also employs an archiving system, Elfehrest, to tag and analyse these vast archives, enhancing their usability and effectiveness for accountability and advocacy work.

## Diwan

Mnemonic preserves online information using Diwan, a software solution that fetches and archives publicly available data from online sources, including social media. Diwan was designed to support journalists, non-profits, academic researchers and human rights defenders to preserve publicly available digital content, including tweets on X (formerly Twitter), YouTube videos, Telegram channels, Facebook posts, websites and other materials.

In 2023, the Tech Team continued making improvements to Diwan, including the plugins that work on capturing information from various platforms, such as X (formerly Twitter), websites, Liveuamap, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Vkontakte. These require regular attention as the accessibility of content is affected by policy and tooling changes of the platforms in question.

## Elfehrest

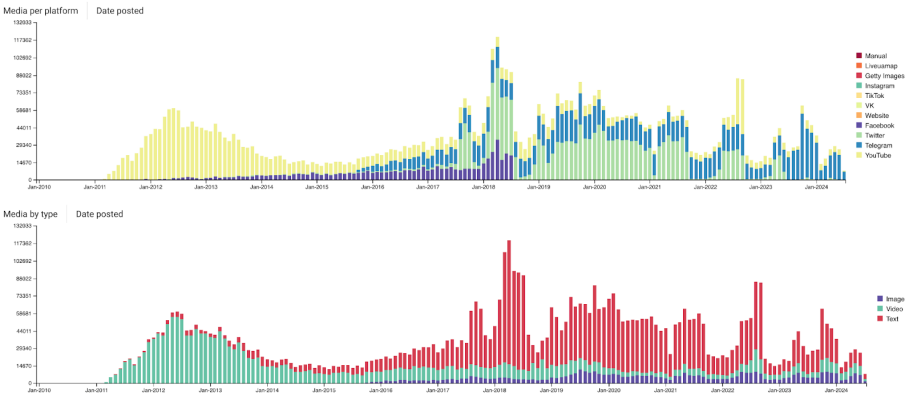
Archived information is available for viewing and analysis on Elfehrest, the web-based platform that Mnemonic developed to interact with archived data that has been collected from online open sources.

In 2023, the use of Elfehrest by external partners was further expanded. In addition to providing access to Ukrainian civil society organisations and high-profile international organisations in 2022, authorised access was also given to selected Yemeni civil society partners, as well as to external Iranian Archive researchers in 2023.

Mnemonic also continues to partner with the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB) [<https://iapbelarus.org/>] to provide the technical infrastructure needed to forensically collect, archive, tag, and analyse open-source information relevant to their investigative and legal work. The current archive includes over 1 million records.

The team also worked on a security audit of Elfehrest, especially because access was extended to various partner organisations which may be more vulnerable to security threats.

The figure below presents an example of the statistics collected on Elfehrest for our Syrian Archive Programme. Similar statistics for our other archival Programme are also available on Elfehrest.



## Digital Security

The Tech Team developed a Digital Security Policy addressing key digital security concerns at Mnemonic. Tailored protocols were created, aligning with standard procedures and project-specific needs. The policy was circulated among staff, followed by training sessions to ensure consistent implementation of these protocols by all staff.

## Tech Team Retreat

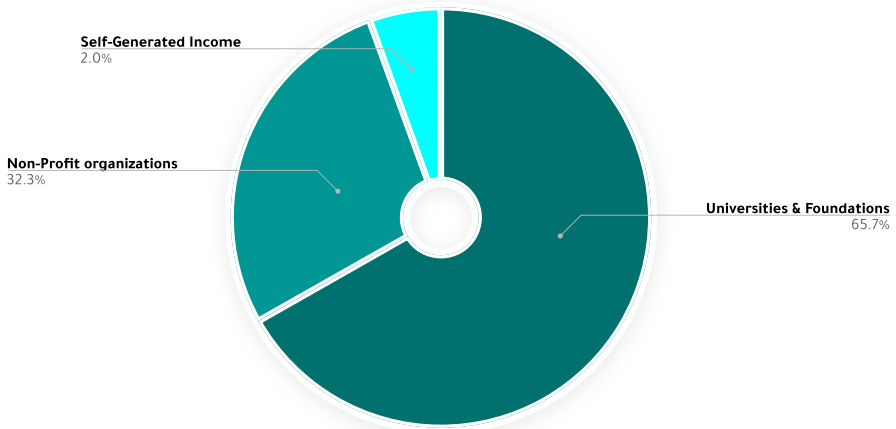
The Tech Team also held its first in-person meeting in September 2023, in Turkey. The meeting took place in the form of a five-day retreat, featuring team-building activities and a review of achievements, a strategic SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, and planning for the year ahead. They also reviewed Diwan and Elfehrest to assess progress and address challenges, including legal and security matters, documentation and infrastructure assessment.

# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

## Fundraising

In 2023, Mnemonic secured a total of €2,167,936.72 in funding thanks to 24 organisations and institutions that support our work. The majority of our funding – just over 65% – has been generously contributed by universities and foundations, reflecting their commitment to our shared mission. Additionally, around 32% of our income comes from partnerships with other non-profit organisations, demonstrating the collaborative efforts within this sector in documenting human rights violations. We are also proud to have generated 2% of our income internally through various self-sustaining activities, including providing training to other non-profit, human rights organisations. As an organisation dedicated to documenting human rights violations and international crimes, this financial support enables us to strengthen our efforts in this important area, and to continue to advocate for justice and accountability.

## Major Funders



- AccessNow
- Alfred Landecker Foundation
- Asfari Foundation
- Center for Justice and Accountability
- Civil Rights Defenders
- Columbia University
- DT Institute
- European AI Fund
- Institute of International Education
- International Media Support
- Meedan
- Oak Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Sigrid Rausing Trust
- Swedish Postcode Lottery

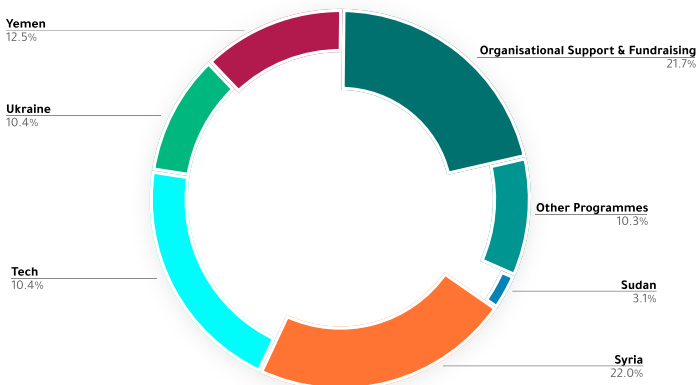
# Programme Expenditure

In our financial breakdown, we allocate resources meticulously to ensure the efficient operation and impactful execution of our mission, reflecting its multifaceted nature. Our commitment to specific regions, such as Syria (22%, €475,988), Ukraine (10.4%, €225,347), Yemen (12.5%, €272,032), and Sudan (3.1%, €66,538), enables targeted interventions tailored to local contexts, advancing investigations into international crimes and human rights violations.

Other Programmes received 10.3% of funding (€222,923), empowering us to diversify initiatives, including our Rapid Response Programme, to dynamically respond to emerging needs. Through our content moderation Programmes and strategic advocacy, we addressed challenges posed by social media platforms' content moderation and data policies, invested in open source tools to bolster human rights defenders' capacities and to promote social justice.

Technical Work received 20.1% (€435,299) of our budget. This underpins our core activities, and ensures we are conducting research, analysis and advocacy efforts most effectively. This work facilitates vital archiving and the sharing of digital information crucial for accountability mechanisms and human rights advocacy.

Organisational Support and Fundraising constituted 21.7% of our budget (€469,810). This support is essential for developing future strategies, sustaining management, operations and infrastructure, and ensuring long term viability and secure funding.



Each part of our expenditure reflects our unwavering commitment to leveraging digital information for positive societal change, guided by principles of transparency, integrity and impact.

