

In 2011, in response to allegations of gross human rights violations committed by protagonists in the Syrian conflict, ARK and its justice sector partner Tsamota supported the establishment of the Syrian Commission for Justice and Accountability (SCJA). The SCJA has grown to be a majority-Syrian not-for-profit organisation with over 90 staff committed to ending impunity for crimes carried out by all armed factions in Syria.

Initially working with seed funding from the UK Conflict Pool to support investigative and forensic training for Syrian war crimes investigators, the project experienced several stages of sustainable growth. It secured funding from the US-supported Syrian Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) to extract contemporaneous documentation from the conflict zone, and in May 2012 obtained funding from the EU Instrument for Stability to support the development of its analytical and headquarters components. With a deployed in-country field team and trained investigators supporting documentation collection, exfiltration, archiving and analysis, the SCJA has grown to become a major component of Syria's transitional justice architecture. By August 2014, when the EU component of the project ended, ARK and Tsamota were able, as planned, to step away from the day-to-day operations of the SCJA, which is now firmly established as a coherent, independent, Syrian organisation. To date the project has collected over 1,500kgs of contemporaneous documentation from inside Syria, scanned or is in the process of scanning over 310,000 pages of evidential material as well as reviewing and indexing over 12,000 videos, all of which had to be hand carried from Syria. This project marks a new development in international justice: the contemporaneous gathering of evidence of violations of international humanitarian law, whether conducted by regime forces or members of armed opposition or Islamist groups, whilst the conflict is ongoing.

In addition to harnessing complementary funding streams (UK for in-country investigative capacity, US for documentation and archiving and EU for analysis and support) ARK and Tsamota were able, through a donor government project steering committee, to further expand the funding base. By September 2014, the project had secured Norwegian, Swiss, German and Danish funding, achieving sustainability, and realising core objectives. The SCJA, through expert training (ARK and Tsamota utilised international investigators and lawyers with broad experience of international judicial instruments – the ICC, ICTY, ICTR, UNIIIC/STL), effective equipment provision and a commitment to the truth were able to ensure that when the conflict ends, the raw material of a post-conflict war crimes process is ready for trial, in turn providing a key contribution to truth telling, reconciliation and the future of Syria. In addition, by utilising experience of multi-donor funding, including grants and contracts within the same programme, ARK and its partners were able to leverage far greater programmatic effect and value for money for all individual donor governments. Whilst respecting individual financial oversight and reporting requirements, the project was also able to rationalise the implementation process, both by the introduction of a project steering committee and the use of joint narrative reporting to ensure visibility to all donor governments, without duplication of effort.