



TRIAL
International

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A way to justice
Une voie vers la justice

Mise en œuvre du droit à la réparation

- Voie judiciaire et voie non judiciaire
- L'État assure aux victimes la réparation des actes ou omissions qui peuvent lui être imputés (...)
- Les États devraient prévoir, à l'intérieur de leur ordre juridique interne, des mécanismes et des procédures adéquats de réparation.

STRENGTHENING FOUNDATIONS, EXPANDING HORIZONS, AND CONFRONTING DOUBLE STANDARDS:

TRIAL INTERNATIONAL'S STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2025 – 2028

SHORT VERSION

FOREWORD BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD

The call for justice has grown tremendously in recent years, and the means of seeking it have expanded too, both at home and abroad. Developments in Ukraine and the Middle East are testaments to this, but there are many more examples. Where serious international crimes such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity are committed, victims and survivors – as well as affected communities and other stakeholders – now expect accountability. At the same time, we have seen that the road to justice can be long and fraught with many hurdles.

In the more than 20 years since TRIAL International began, it has been at the forefront of working with victims and survivors, local civil society, and judicial actors to seek justice – meaningful justice. The organization firmly believes that justice is best achieved close to home in the communities where the crimes have been committed so that those affected can be part of the process and see justice actually being done. At the same time, where justice is not possible locally for political, operational or other reasons, the organization will work to find other means of accountability, most notably through the use of universal jurisdiction.

Addressing double standards is essential not only to ensure justice for all victims but also to uphold the legitimacy of international justice itself. TRIAL International is uniquely equipped to confront these challenges effectively, thanks to two core strengths:

First, it has an unwavering commitment to listening to victims and survivors and to empowering them to seek justice, standing firm at their side throughout the entire process. The organization understands that justice isn't a one-size fits all model and strives to ensure that judicial processes are victim-centered and designed to meet the needs and expectations of those affected. At the same time, these processes aim to establish new legal frameworks, and build judicial precedent.

Second, it does not try to go at it alone. Rather, it works closely with local actors to create efficient synergies and strengthen their legal capacity. This includes partnerships with key civil society players in country and expertise sharing with these actors and judicial stakeholders (such as prosecutors and judges). TRIAL International's way of working ensures local ownership over current and planned judicial processes and helps build a foundation upon which future accountability mechanisms can draw.

TRIAL International has made significant strides over the years, growing from a small pro bono group of Swiss lawyers into a firmly recognized international organization of 50 staff and a budget exceeding 4.6 million CHF. To date, the organization has worked on hundreds of legal cases globally, holding perpetrators accountable and delivering justice for thousands of victims.

In the coming four years, TRIAL International intends to deepen its investigative capacity, explore new and less conventional partnerships, widen its public advocacy efforts, and make better use of new technology and digitalization. It will continue to pursue strategic litigation domestically and internationally to ensure accountability and bring about systemic change, including against corporate actors and private and military security actors. The organization will maintain its crucial work in countries it is already present, but will also prepare itself to be able to jump into new and emerging conflict zones, endeavoring to seek justice in real time and not just many years after as has historically been the case. For these reasons, TRIAL International has named its Strategic Plan for the 2025 to 2028 period "Strengthening Foundations, Expanding Horizons and Confronting Double Standards."

Leslie Haskell
January 2025

VISION TRIAL International believes in a world where justice is attained, accountability for those responsible for international crimes is realized and victims and survivors participate, are heard, respected and empowered.

CASE BUILDING AND STRATEGIC LITIGATION

- Domestic litigation, including UJ, collaboration with international courts and special mechanisms, reparations and human rights litigation.
- Carry out investigations and in-court representation.
- Provide non-legal support including trauma-sensitive psycho-social support, and ensuring that justice is seen and heard by victims and communities.

PARTNERSHIP AND SHARING EXPERTISE

- Work with local partners and local judicial authorities.
- Key role in documentation and identification of victims.
- Building cases together.
- Collaborate with victim-led, OSINT, legal aid and human rights organizations.

POLICY AND ADVOCACY ON INTERNATIONAL CRIMES

- National and international strategic advocacy linked to mandate.
- Generate ideas, and be a depository of jurisprudence.
- Publish more reports aimed at legal practitioners and States.

MISSION TRIAL International confronts double standards in international justice and fights impunity for international crimes by holding perpetrators - be they individuals, corporate actors, or states - accountable. Through strategic litigation, documentation, expertise-sharing, and targeted advocacy, we work closely with victims, bridge accountability gaps, and drive systemic change. Working closely with survivors and local partners worldwide, we ensure justice processes are inclusive, sustainable, and focused on the needs of those most affected.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Key principles

Emphasizing **partnership**, we collaborate with diverse stakeholders to leverage collective strengths and resources. By adopting a **victim-centered approach**, we prioritize the needs and ownership of victims, ensuring they are at the heart of our efforts. **Local ownership** puts the needs of communities first, fostering sustainable solutions that resonate with their unique contexts. We aim for our interventions to be **sustainable**. We seek to bring about change with a lasting impact beyond the individual case. Together, these principles create a cohesive framework that drives our commitment to justice, empowerment, and effective action.

Core themes

TRIAL International will continue to work on international crimes (genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture and enforced disappearances) in increasingly progressive, innovative ways. We use the core themes where we have expertise as an entry point in case selection. We will select cases of international crimes in these thematic areas for strategic litigation. The themes will also be further explored for research to feed our policy and advocacy activities, influence legislation and the development and implementation of legal instruments.

We work on **corporate accountability** for human rights abuses, incurring the liability of economic actors for the commission of international crimes. A special category of corporate actors we address are **Private Military and Security Actors**, who have been able to operate with near-impunity for a long time. We address **Sexual and Gender Based Violence** within conflict settings and outside, as well as accountability for **crimes against children**. We also work on international crimes against the environment and ecocide.

In this strategic plan, we will work on a number of themes that so far, we have not been able to explore in detail. These include **economic, social and cultural rights in occupation settings**, accountability for **the crime of aggression**, accountability for the crime of **apartheid and gender apartheid**, crimes against humanity in **non-conflict settings**, and in particular against specific categories of victims, such as refugees and migrants.

Strategic Objectives

For the next four years, we have selected four strategic objectives and four strategic enablers¹ to deliver our mission. The strategic objectives are the following:

Strategic objective 1: Enhance accountability for international crimes

Our added value: TRIAL International has the ability to use its expertise to build cases and subsequently use strategic litigation to address impunity for international crimes. We focus on bringing justice to victims and hold perpetrators to account.

Our core business is to advance accountability for international crimes. We will continue to address this through all pillars: from strategic litigation and capacity building to policy and advocacy. The focus is on all types of strategic litigation, not just criminal liability, and on creating solid legal precedents and jurisprudence. We will continue to explore ways to support national judicial systems in prosecuting international crimes, including through capacity-building, strategic litigation, and expert legal advice. Whilst we have already done much of this in already targeted countries, we aim to increase our efforts, including in new jurisdictions. We identify perpetrators and use OSINT to track and trace them. Where possible, we look for the establishment of responsibility for superiors/commanders for crimes committed by their subordinates.

¹ Strategic enablers are key factors or resources that significantly contribute to the successful implementation of our mission and objectives. They include: new types of partnerships; organizational efficiency; outreach efficiency; and digitalization.

Where possible we will continue to partner with others – in particular local actors – who may be better placed to carry out the investigation while we focus on preparing the case on the basis of evidence and documentation gathered. By leveraging a range of legal avenues and strengthening investigations, TRIAL International will hold perpetrators accountable while creating legal precedents that empower victims and strengthen institutions. Through strategic litigation and advocacy, we aim to close accountability gaps and drive systemic change in the fight against impunity.

Strategic objective 2: Strengthen domestic legal capacity to address impunity

Our added value: TRIAL International has a wide network of partners in civil society and among judicial authorities as well as a unique knowledge and understanding of accountability processes for international crimes. This combination makes us the perfect provider of capacity building and a conduit for information and expertise sharing. The proximity to the UN human rights bodies can be further exploited.

In countries of commission of international crimes, as well as countries of jurisdiction, we will continue to work with legal actors and civil society, including victims' groups, to share our expertise to bring an end to impunity. We already work to build the capacity of three types of local actors: civil society organisations (including victims' groups and NGOs), lawyers, and prosecutors and judges. Each group requires tailored capacity building.

Our capacity building objectives cut across all our pillars of action. It needs to be a concerted and transversal effort by the whole organization, which includes outreach and advocacy. Sharing expertise aims to have a positive impact on legal frameworks, laws and practices. We mobilize like-minded actors to step up and join forces with us and look at the capacity building of (in particular) young professionals embarking on a career in international (criminal) law. TRIAL International will enhance the capacity of local actors—civil society, lawyers, and judicial authorities—by sharing expertise and fostering collaboration. Strengthening domestic legal systems ensures accountability is sustainable, locally driven, and rooted in the communities most affected by international crimes.

Strategic objective 3: Increase affected communities' ownership of accountability processes

Our added value: TRIAL International amplifies the voice of victims and survivors through its advocacy efforts, ensuring that their experiences, needs, and wishes shape both international and national judicial processes. By prioritizing victim-centered justice, we aim to ensure that legal accountability translates into actual benefits for those who have suffered from human rights violations. Victims and survivors of international crimes should have agency where it concerns their quest for justice. We work with victims in supporting their representation, explaining what legal action means, filling gaps and providing support. We get victims involved in making decisions as to what litigation should look like (local, regional or international) throughout the different stages.

The shifting power dynamics in the international development and human rights world also impact TRIAL International. Local actors should take the lead in decisions and processes that affect them, whether it is in the identification of cases or providing information. They become the drivers of accountability processes. A survivor-centered approach is at the heart of decision-making processes, where TRIAL International will play a more supportive and facilitative role. We will continue to support victims and survivors in obtaining reparations and have built up a significant track record on obtaining reparative measures. This is often key to achieve closure, as it not only provides some support in rebuilding a future, but it also shows an acknowledgement of suffering.

Strategic objective 4: Reinforce organizational foundation and culture

Our added value: TRIAL International has a dedicated and motivated team, and its staff has the expertise to implement its mission.

In the next four years, we strive to ensure that we are fit for purpose and have the right foundation and culture to ensure sustainable growth. Growth does not only mean an increased budget or increased

number of staff, but rather we understand it to mean an increased ability to do our work effectively and to respond to unforeseen events, and an increased capacity for impact. We aim to improve on long term planning, both with respect to our operations and our financial stability. We will ensure that our ambitions align with our resources and will explore different avenues to do more work with existing funding, for example through partnerships, especially with local partners who are well-placed to do documentation or investigations.

We are aware that the kind of work we do can lead to vicarious trauma among staff members. Under this strategic plan we will be more focused on staff wellbeing. This includes, among others, making available psychological support when needed, and improved awareness about security and vicarious trauma risks. Security management, internal communication and wellbeing of staff are crosscutting concerns which will be improved to meet the organization's duty of care.

CONCLUSION

In a world where international justice faces increasing challenges - marked by double standards, shrinking multilateralism, and emerging global crises - TRIAL International remains unwavering in its commitment to accountability, justice, and empowerment. Over the next four years, our strategic plan will guide us as we strengthen our foundations, expand our reach, and ensure that perpetrators of international crimes are held to account, while victims and survivors are placed at the center of the process.

Our core mission to fight impunity will be achieved through a combination of innovative strategic litigation, robust documentation, expertise-sharing, and targeted advocacy. By leveraging a diverse range of legal avenues and building strong partnerships, TRIAL International will continue to address accountability gaps wherever they exist - whether in courts, international bodies, or national systems. These efforts will not only deliver justice to individuals but also create legal precedents and systemic changes that prevent future violations.

A victim-centered approach remains at the heart of everything we do. By working hand-in-hand with survivors, local organizations, and communities, we ensure that justice is inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable. Supporting victims to participate in and lead accountability processes, while addressing their needs through legal and non-legal support, will help build trust and resilience in the pursuit of justice. At the same time, TRIAL International will strengthen the capacity of domestic legal systems to address impunity. By supporting civil society organizations, lawyers, and judicial authorities, we aim to foster local ownership and equip local actors with the tools they need to pursue justice. This focus on building sustainable legal frameworks ensures that accountability becomes deeply rooted within affected societies.

To deliver on this ambitious vision, we recognize the need to reinforce our own organizational foundation. By investing in financial sustainability, staff wellbeing, and efficient internal systems, we will ensure that TRIAL International remains agile, resilient, and prepared to respond to emerging challenges. Our ability to adapt, collaborate, and innovate will be central to our success in this dynamic and often volatile environment.

As we look ahead to 2025-2028, TRIAL International stands ready to confront the challenges of our time. Through our commitment to justice, collaboration, and systemic change, we will challenge double standards, amplify the voices of victims, and drive progress toward a more equitable and accountable world. This strategic plan is not just a roadmap but a reflection of our enduring resolve to bridge accountability gaps and ensure that no perpetrator remains above the law, and no victim goes unheard.