



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9253**<sup>rd</sup> meeting

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New York

*Provisional*

*President:* Mrs. Frazier . . . . . (Malta)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China . . . . .	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Pérez Loose
France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon . . . . .	Ms. Bongo
Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Boateng
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ishikane
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation . . . . .	Ms. Evstigneeva
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Mills

## Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Thirty-sixth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2023/51)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2631 (2022) (S/2023/58)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Expression of thanks to the outgoing President**

**The President:** I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. Ishikane Kimihiro, Permanent Representative of Japan, for his service as President of the Council for the month of January. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Ishikane and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation concerning Iraq**

#### **Thirty-sixth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2023/51)**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2631 (2022) (S/2023/58)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Iraq to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq; and Mr. Ahmed, Director of Donor and International Relations at the Iraqi Health and Social Care Organization.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/51, which contains the thirty-sixth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013), and document S/2023/58, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2631 (2022).

I now give the floor to Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert.

**Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert:** In May 2003, nearly 20 years ago, the Council adopted resolution 1483 (2003) to chart a way forward for post-Saddam Iraq. Sergio Vieira de Mello was appointed as the Secretary-General's Special Representative, for four months, to help set up United Nations operations at their early stages. At the time, he stated: "The people of Iraq, as we know only too well, have suffered and have suffered enough. It is time that we all [...] come together to ensure that this suffering comes to an end, and that Iraqi people take their destiny into their own hands".

That same year, in mid-August, the Council established the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). A few days later, Sergio Vieira de Mello and 21 colleagues lost their lives in an attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. Another 150 colleagues were wounded in the blast. While they fell victim to the violence they were committed to stopping, our work continued. But yes, 2023 will surely be a year of remembrance in many ways. I would like to use this opportunity to thank the successive Iraqi Governments for the constructive working relationship that they have maintained with the United Nations throughout these two decades.

In the past four years, I have often said that Iraq's situation could hardly be judged without placing it in the context of Iraq's history, as decades of trouble continue to have an impact on the present. This still holds true today. Iraq's challenges did not arise overnight, and dealing with both the legacy of the past and the many challenges of the present will take time, no matter who is in the driver's seat. It should also be underlined that no government can go it alone. In other words, it is of the greatest importance that political parties and other actors prioritize the country's interest above all else. At the end of the day, it is and remains a joint responsibility.

As any government will require both time and broad political support to move Iraq forward, let me emphasize the importance of managing public expectations. Overpromising and underdelivering can have dire consequences, and sugar-coating the situation will only add to feelings of frustration and disillusionment.

Some three months ago, the Council of Representatives confirmed Iraq's new President and Government, ending more than a year of tensions, political discord and power plays. Three out of 23 cabinet ministers are women. Needless to say, we eagerly await a further increase of women in decision-making positions.

Looking ahead, and as I explained, no one can expect Iraq's challenges to be resolved overnight, but I would also like to see the glass as half full. In my most recent briefing to the Council, last October (see S/PV.9145), I emphasized — not for the first time — that, since 2003, too many opportunities to conduct meaningful and much-needed reform have been wasted, while stressing that pervasive corruption is a major root cause of Iraqi dysfunctionality. I made it clear that it is past time to act on several key issues, and that the window to do so is only too brief.

In its first three months in office, Iraq's new Government, under the lead of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani, showed its commitment to tackling the most pressing challenges facing the country, including endemic corruption, poor public service delivery and high levels of unemployment.

On the fight against corruption, the Government has taken a number of important steps, including with regard to the recovery of stolen funds and the investigation of corruption allegations. I can only encourage the Iraqi Government to persevere, as those who stand to lose will undoubtedly seek to hinder those efforts. But if Iraq is to build a system that serves the needs of society rather than of a closed community of collusion, ensuring accountability across the spectrum is absolutely essential. That means giving no respite to those who extract State resources for private or other interests. Moreover, systemic change will prove vital. I have spelled it out so many times. Over the years, Iraq's corruption has turned into a system — that is, it has become something that has gone beyond a collection of individuals or a series of events. The ongoing Government efforts to improve public service delivery should also be acknowledged. That said, and mindful of managing public expectations, I want to remind the Council that effecting meaningful change that has a positive impact on the lives of all citizens will take time, because it can happen only through structural change, which requires systemic socioeconomic reform, stronger institutions and better governance at every level.

Furthermore, and there is no denying it, delays in introducing much-needed and long-awaited economic, fiscal and financial reforms are palpable throughout the country. Most recently, it has been concerning to see increases in the exchange rate on the parallel market adding to the pressure on ordinary Iraqi women and men. In the short term, it is obviously essential that a

federal budget be passed as soon as possible. Further delay will only worsen the situation resulting from the well-known spending constraints. On that topic, I would like to yet again caution against measures that will further bloat Iraq's public service sector. Despite the pressing need to address high levels of unemployment, Iraq simply cannot afford to add to the burden of an already extremely inflated public sector. In a related observation, let me reiterate that oil dependency leaves the Iraqi economy more vulnerable to external shocks. Iraq should therefore prioritize sustainable economic diversification, including the development of a value-adding, employment-generating private sector.

There are of course many other areas that require the immediate attention of Iraq's Government. They range from the significant environmental challenges, the importance of energy independence, the continued returns of Iraqi nationals from Al-Hol and other camps and prisons in north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic, the need to swiftly implement the Sinjar Agreement, the long-awaited finalization of the Kirkuk dialogue, the transition from humanitarian response to durable solutions and development, to constitutional amendments and substantive progress on security-sector reform, to name but a few.

I will certainly report on those issues in future briefings, but there is one more area I would like to mention now, which is the protection and promotion of human rights, including accountability for human rights violations and abuses. I believe that Sergio Vieira de Mello, before he flew out to Baghdad in 2003, said that respect for human rights is the only solid foundation for durable peace and development. In line with his words, I want to emphasize that silencing, obstructing, dismissing or undermining constructive criticism achieves only one thing. It tarnishes the image of the State and erodes public trust, whereas encouraging public discourse enables institutions to flourish and adapt. Needless to say, a genuine commitment to human rights is pivotal to any country, including Iraq.

Turning to relations between Baghdad and Erbil, the Government programme expressed a commitment to resolving outstanding issues between the federal authorities and the Kurdistan Regional Governments, including legislating the oil and gas law within six months. Some initial steps have been taken to that end, including a number of high-level visits and the creation of joint technical committees. The dynamics have been generally described as positive, and that is a

good thing. Yet a structured dialogue, which continues to be of great importance to institutionalizing relations, is still missing. And crucially, those consultations have yet to be translated into concrete agreements, including, as mentioned, on the pressing issue of the 2023 federal budget. All things considered, it is our hope that the recent ruling of the Federal Supreme Court will not stymie the ongoing negotiations on the budget. Rather, we want to see both Baghdad and Erbil remaining incentivized to reach a lasting arrangement that will enable them to move away from constant crisis management.

Zooming in on the Kurdistan region, in my previous briefings I outlined the risks of political infighting. Regrettably, divisions among the ruling parties in the region continue to have adverse effects on its institutions and its people and have even translated into one coalition party boycotting the Cabinet sessions since October. Last Saturday, a meeting of the parties in Sulaymaniyah offered a glimmer of hope. While the meeting in itself was an important message, I can only emphasize the need to act quickly and pragmatically. To be clear, the Kurdistan region's political parties cannot afford to lose any more time, and swift compromises on outstanding fiscal, administrative, security and electoral disagreements are therefore urgently needed.

With regard to Iraq's external relations, I am pleased to report that the Government continued its policy of openness and balance, based on, of course, mutual interests and on respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and good-neighbourliness. As I stated on 20 December, during the second Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, held in Amman, I wholeheartedly support the Prime Minister in his endeavour to make Iraq a platform for dialogue and investment. That said, Iraq continues to face repeated and destabilizing violations of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. To state the obvious, messaging through strikes does nothing but recklessly heighten tensions, kill people and destroy property. Again, established diplomatic instruments are at everyone's disposal, including when neighbours are faced with perceived national security threats. For Iraq to further bolster its domestic stability, it is incumbent on all of us to help foster an enabling environment.

In anticipation of the next speaker, I should reiterate that Iraq remains one of the countries of the world most badly contaminated by explosive ordnance. Its nationally led clearance efforts, including national budget

allocations, are truly commendable. However, the sector as a whole remains underfunded, and Iraqi civilians are consequently paying the price. In 2022, explosive remnants of war continued to be the leading cause of child casualties in Iraq and the cause of a third of civilian casualties overall. I can therefore only encourage the international community to continue its support.

I would now like to turn to the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives. Of course, we very much welcome the steps taken by the Government of Iraq to encourage more witnesses to come forward. We also commend the continuing cooperation of the members of the Tripartite Committee on the provision of satellite imagery. Both are vital to the efforts to identify other potential burial sites.

In conclusion, I would like to convey both a sense of hope and a sense of urgency. The hope is that the confirmation of Iraq's new Government will provide an opportunity to structurally address the many pressing issues facing the country and its people. The urgency is for Iraq's political class to seize the brief window of opportunity it has been awarded and finally lift the country out of its recurring cycles of instability and fragility.

Lastly, I would like to once again congratulate Iraq's national football team on its recent Arabian Gulf Cup victory. It is worth noting that Iraq hosted the tournament for the first time since 1979, after decades of isolation, violence, strife and tensions. In my humble opinion, it is a great testimony to Iraq's return to normality and its potential to rally not only the nation but also its regional partners around a common and positive objective.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ahmed.

**Mr. Ahmed:** Iraq is one of the most explosive-ordnance-contaminated countries in the world. The contamination consists of large volumes of different types of both recorded and unquantified explosive remnants of war throughout the country. It is a result of successive wars and conflicts, including the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf wars and the latest conflict with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), when a new era of unprecedented types of improvised explosive devices emerged. Large civilian areas suffered both from fighting on the ground and from aerial bombing.

Explosive-ordnance contamination remains an obstacle to people's safe and dignified return. It is a huge threat to people's lives and causes disabilities. Its latest victims were some children in Nineveh on 16 December 2022. Four children between the ages of eight and nine went out that Friday afternoon to play near a historical shrine on the outskirts of their village. They encountered a metal object that they tampered with and that subsequently exploded when they threw stones at it. That tragic incident claimed the lives of three of the children and injured the fourth. That sad accident is not unique, as dozens of other different occasions have led to fatalities and physical implications for civilians.

Explosive-ordnance contamination impedes normal daily life, socioeconomic activities, stabilization efforts, reconstruction, development and the safe return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homelands. Explosive-hazard contamination blocks housing, roads, agriculture, irrigation, industry and infrastructure in general. According to the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix, by the end of 2022 approximately 1.2 million people were still displaced across Iraq, and they are returning at a very slow rate. Around 13 per cent of IDPs noted that they could not return to their areas of origin due to explosive-ordnance contamination. Meanwhile, that contamination often results in secondary displacement and the occupation of other people's property.

International donors, the United Nations, the Government of Iraq, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector have joined forces to mitigate the negative humanitarian and socioeconomic impact of explosive hazards. Search-and-clearance efforts, explosive-ordnance risk education and victim-assistance activities have been conducted. There has been much progress in the mitigation processes, with many notable achievements in terms of surveying and clearing critical infrastructure, providing risk education to millions of Iraqis and integrating explosive-ordnance risk education into the national educational curriculum. There are nonetheless still some shortcomings that have been identified and that demand stakeholders' attention and efforts. Assistance for victims and their family members through various medical and health services, physical rehabilitation, socioeconomic integration and the empowerment of victims are generally not considered by mine-action programmes in Iraq. At this stage, it will be crucial

to rethink the planning and implementation of such programmes by donors and mine-action operators by including victim-assistance components to be aligned with the national mine-action strategy.

It is worth noting that the Iraqi Government's Directorate for Mine Action, with the support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, has developed a 2022–2028 strategic plan and a relevant 2022–2023 implementation plan, in consultation with stakeholders. However, the plans completed in mid-2022 still have to be endorsed by the Government of Iraq in order to be activated, and the process in that regard is slow. Iraq is not expected to meet its Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention obligations by the 2028 target because of the slow rate of clearance. It is acknowledged that various Iraqi authorities are working to facilitate the mine-action operations implemented by organizations, but challenges still exist. The accreditation and accreditation renewal processes are very lengthy and can have further implications by interrupting the implementation of operations and hampering the ability to reach project objectives, with a consequent waste of resources.

Access permissions issued by the authorities for mine-action organizations to operate in the task areas are another challenge. Access letters issued by the Government are valid only for 30 days, which is not practical. Organizations have to start the process all over again on a monthly basis, adding stress and administrative burdens, and new requests by the authorities for additional documentation are piling up. Recently, mine-action operators have not been the only ones suffering due to newly added demands for tax-clearance documentation as a prerequisite for the reissuance of access letters, as wider humanitarian work is also at or nearing a standstill. Ad hoc decisions and rules are issued by different Government entities and take immediate effect without any buffer period.

After the ISIL crisis, the donor community generously provided significant emergency funding in the liberated areas. Lately, however, the dwindling of international donor funds has been evident, due to various factors, and is posing a serious threat to the continuation and sustainability of efforts initiated and capacities developed in the post-ISIL era. The fact is that donor Governments have new internal priorities in the post-coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation. Other crises have emerged globally in Europe, Africa and Asia. New global thematic issues related to

climate change and environmental challenges are clear and have prompted donors to redirect funds to those priority areas.

It is also true that according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's list, Iraq is an upper-middle-income country, and that it has accumulated unprecedented revenues in the wake of the spike in oil prices. But corruption, disparity, unequal distribution and high poverty rates persist nevertheless. According to Iraq's Ministry of Planning, the poverty rate has increased from 20 per cent in 2019 and 2020 to 25 per cent in 2022. Children have been hit the hardest, with 38 per cent of them living below the poverty line. And Iraq's national budget lacks allocations for funding operational mine-action programmes.

All of those factors have contributed to Iraq falling off the donors' radar, and mine-action operators have been suffering from that steep drop in donor funding. National NGOs have been hit the hardest, with their very survival at stake. The drop in support is detrimental to the international community's efforts to promote localization and live up to commitments under the Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change. The United Nations Mine Action Service has been leading the localization agenda in mine action in Iraq through a model that brings together international NGOs with national NGOs to facilitate the transfer of the knowledge and skills that national NGOs need to operate as independent humanitarian mine-action operators. However, capacity-building projects cannot be limited to two or three years only, as they require a complete learning and development process that must be adequately funded. Developing local mine-action capacities is a longer and continuing journey, not merely a destination. Globally, humanitarian funding provided to local actors was 3.8 per cent in 2019 and 4.7 per cent in 2020, but it fell to only 2 per cent in 2021, while the Grand Bargain target is 25 per cent. So there is a stark gap between the localization rhetoric and practice that must be addressed. The number of Iraqi operative mine-action NGOs is less than 25 per cent of the number of the operative international NGO counterparts and commercial options.

Before the ISIL crisis, only two or three international NGOs were accredited for mine action in Iraq, but since 2018, with donor money pouring into liberated areas, there has been an influx of international NGO registrations and accreditations with the federal Government. It is understandable that international

NGOs come and go based on external factors, including donor strategies and supply and demand in terms of availability of funds, as well as because of internal factors such as legal and bureaucratic issues or security implications. Meanwhile, local NGOs are destined to remain in the country. After the 2003 terrorist attacks on the United Nations compound and the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Baghdad, United Nations agencies and the vast majority of international NGOs had to leave Iraq for security reasons. That created a big vacuum during a critical period in Iraq's history. National NGOs, although they were fledgling institutions during that period, had to step up and try to bridge the gaps.

In mine action, national organizations will continue to add significant value from various angles, including but not limited to a better understanding of the country's cultural, sociopolitical and bureaucratic structures and dynamics; the ability to implement projects cost-effectively; sustainable knowledge and capacity; and the capacity for innovation. My organization, for instance, an Iraqi NGO, created the world's first bilingual electronic application for explosive-ordnance risk education. During the COVID-19 response period, the Iraqi Health and Social Care Organization worked to adapt risk education techniques and methodologies to reach beneficiaries safely without physical contact. We also developed and implemented multiple levels of community-based initiatives to which children, young people and adults of both genders have been contributing to keep their communities safe. Those innovative experiences have been shared with stakeholders on various platforms inside and outside Iraq, and national and international NGOs have followed suit.

Non-governmental organizations are integral components of civil society. And civil society remains the best way to ensure local ownership and involvement in an increasingly political world that all too often marginalizes and disenfranchises large swaths of the population. Giving support and empowerment to that structure contributes to maintaining a functional democratic system, holding the State accountable, supporting the Government in providing services, representing local constituents and ensuring the sustainability of local capacities.

Localization is not just about making the humanitarian system as local as possible and as international as necessary. It must first and foremost be about local ownership and empowerment to ensure

a better internal balance of power between civil society and the State, on the one hand, and a better balance of power externally between national organizations, the United Nations and the international NGO community, on the other. We urgently need to transform planning, programme design and funding modalities if we are to ensure a genuine commitment to localization. Localization must exist within and be enabled by both the strategic and operational contexts, and greater effort must be made to understand the premises for localization and ensure that strategic factors are fully integrated.

In conclusion, Iraq remains one of the most contaminated countries in the world. Its obligations under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention will not be met as the situation currently stands. Donors have prioritized clearance and risk education over victim assistance. The Government of Iraq should be funding mine action in a transparent manner with a focus on NGOs. Generally, donor funding is decreasing and is being allocated one-sidedly to international agencies, with only limited investment in Iraqi civil-society organizations. We urge donors to break the taboos of engaging, funding and dealing directly with national NGOs. There is no reason why they should not use direct channels with local partners and listen to those partners before, during and after projects are implemented. More efforts need to be made towards localization.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Ahmed for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Mills** (United States of America): Let me first thank the delegation of Japan for its effective stewardship of our work last month. I also welcome you, Madam President, and your delegation to the presidency, and we look forward to working with you on a busy and important programme of work this month. I would like to thank Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert for her thoughtful and frank briefing, and Mr. Ahmed for his extensive briefing on the worrying situation regarding unexploded ordnance in Iraq.

Let me start by offering the United States' congratulations to Iraq and Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani on forming a Government in October. We encourage the new Government to act with urgency to address the many challenges facing the country. The Iraqi people deserve economic opportunity and effective governance. We therefore seek to support

Prime Minister Al-Sudani's efforts to achieve his stated goals of rooting out corruption and improving public services, particularly the provision of electricity. We also encourage the Government to promote private-sector development and job growth, with a focus on increasing women's participation in the workforce. We welcome the reports of progress towards an agreement between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government on budgetary arrangements and the management of Iraq's oil and gas resources.

We are eager to work with the Government of Iraq to address the negative effects of climate change, including through sustainable development, water management, the use of renewable energy, natural-gas capture and gas-flaring reduction. We applaud the establishment by the United Nations of the post of Adviser to Iraq on climate change and climate security. We encourage the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to continue its support to Iraq in that area. Addressing climate change will have a positive economic impact in Iraq.

The new Government of Iraq must respond to the call from its constituents to improve its respect for human rights. To demonstrate its human rights commitment, the new Government should hold accountable those responsible for the brutal repression of protesters by Iran-affiliated militias in October 2019, which left hundreds dead and thousands wounded.

Turning to the critical issue of displaced persons, the United States encourages continued cooperation between the Government and UNAMI in seeking durable solutions for all displaced Iraqis by providing families and orphans with essential legal documents and supporting their safe, voluntary and dignified reintegration into communities in accordance with their wishes. To that end, it is also important to commit to the implementation of the 2020 Sinjar Agreement, in close consultation with the Yazidi community.

The United States calls on all Member States to repatriate, rehabilitate, reintegrate and, where appropriate, prosecute their foreign terrorist fighters and associated family members from Iraq and Syria. We also urge States to support the Global Framework on United Nations Support to Member States on Individuals returning from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, a multi-partner trust fund, to provide Member States with all-of-United Nations assistance for returning individuals. As highlighted by the Secretary-

General at the Framework's launch, the current untenable situation poses humanitarian, security and human rights concerns.

Thanks to the bravery of the Iraqi security forces, attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) in 2022 were significantly fewer than the year before. Nonetheless, the threat remains. The attacks near Kirkuk and Albu Bali in December 2022 provide a stark reminder that ISIS remains bent on death and destruction, and it must be confronted. The United States remains committed to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and working with our Iraqi partners to eliminate the terrorist group. We urge Prime Minister Al-Sudani to follow through on his commitment to bring weapons under the control of official and legitimate State institutions in order to preserve stability and security.

Before I conclude my remarks, I want to join the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in congratulating the Government and the people of Iraq on hosting and winning the twenty-fifth Arabian Gulf Cup. Like the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, I agree that the fact that Iraq was able to host the tournament — the first major international tournament that the country has hosted in 43 years — speaks to the significant improvements that Iraq has achieved over the years. There is still much work to be done, as the Council knows, but we are confident that Iraq can continue to build on its success, and the people of Iraq can count on UNAMI and the United States to continue to assist them in this process.

**Mr. Abushahab** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and to wish you every success. I also express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to our colleagues in the delegation of Japan for their outstanding efforts and professionalism during Japan's successful presidency of the Council in January. Additionally, I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, for her important briefing, as well as Mr. Ahmed for his valuable intervention. I also welcome the participation of Iraq's representative in this meeting.

In the light of Iraq's long-awaited formation of a new Government, in October 2022, we emphasize the importance of building on that welcome step and prioritizing Iraq's national interest and unity. That will enable the country to address its challenges and

strengthen its security and stability. Going forward, it is critical for Iraq to continue to work diligently at reforming various sectors, particularly through promoting the rule of law, strengthening state institutions, accelerating development and achieving economic progress. We look forward to Iraq's adoption of this year's annual budget, which will support vital projects in the country.

In terms of the appointment of three women in the new Government and the recently ongoing efforts to empower Iraqi women economically, we stress the importance of promoting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in various fields, especially in the public and private sectors. Women have an essential role in building prosperous, stable and sustainable societies. We also commend the United Nations activities to support Iraqi women, including through raising awareness of the psychosocial and social needs of women survivors of crimes perpetrated by Da'esh.

While Iraq recently commemorated the fifth anniversary of the declaration of victory over Da'esh, we must not lose sight of the continuous threats posed by that terrorist organization to the security and stability of Iraq and the region. The Da'esh organization continues its activities across several areas of Iraq. Just recently, terrorist attacks by Da'esh have taken place, most notably near the village of Albu Bali, in Kirkuk governorate, on 18 December 2022, which claimed the lives of eight civilians and nine police officers. We reiterate our support for all measures taken by Iraq to protect its gains in the fight against terrorism and to eliminate it completely.

My country condemns any interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and any actions under any pretext that may undermine its security and stability. Considering the increase of attacks against Iraq in recent months, we stress the need for the international community to reject, in one voice, such acts that not only violate the sovereignty of Iraq, but also constitute a flagrant violation of international law and threaten the stability of the region.

Our region has recently witnessed two different events that reflect positively on the engagement between Iraq and its region. The first event, in December 2022, was the joint organization, by Iraq, Jordan, and France, of the second Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership. The Conference demonstrated the willingness of the countries of the region to strengthen



cooperation with Iraq and support its stability. The second event was the Arabian Gulf Cup tournament hosted by Iraq. The Iraqi people's warm reception of Arab visitors during that event reflected their broad desire to build bridges with the Arab region, to which they belong.

With regard to the missing Kuwaitis and third-country nationals, as well as lost Kuwaiti property, including national archives, we hope that progress will be made on that dossier during the upcoming period. We commend the efforts of both Kuwait and Iraq in that regard.

In conclusion, we commend the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq for the efforts it is making within its mandate to assist Iraq in overcoming the difficulties the country is currently facing. That includes supporting the Government's efforts to address emerging challenges, such as climate change, which affects the lives of Iraqis in many ways. We hope that Iraq will continue on its path towards peace and stability and that its people will achieve their aspirations for security and prosperity.

**Mr. Afonso** (Mozambique): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Gabon, Ghana and my own country, Mozambique.

First of all, the A3 would like to warmly congratulate you, Madam President, and your country, Malta, on your accession to the presidency of the Security Council. We assure you of our full support and convey our best wishes for an excellent leadership of the Council's proceedings. In the same vein, we highly commend the remarkable work done by Japan during its presidency in the exacting month of January. We thank Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), and Mr. Ahmed for their important briefings. We welcome the participation of the representative of Iraq in this meeting.

I will address the political, security, economic, regional and humanitarian issues of the reporting period. We note, in this connection, that, after almost a year-long political deadlock, following the 2021 elections, we are witnessing today an encouraging political development in the situation in Iraq. The election of the President of the Republic, the subsequent appointment of the Prime Minister and the formation of a Government with a

vote of confidence by Parliament constitute a great step forward towards the creation of solid foundations for stability in Iraq. We were interested to note the appointment of three women to the Cabinet, which is an important step towards inclusive governance, and we encourage the Iraqi Government to continue its efforts to expand the meaningful participation of women in the political decision-making process.

We call on the Government to implement the reforms needed to improve the Iraqi people's living conditions by prioritizing combating corruption, addressing unemployment and creating job opportunities, supporting vulnerable and low-income groups, reforming the economic and financial sectors and enhancing public services. We also encourage it in its quest to resolve the issues between Baghdad and Erbil, increase the capacity and effectiveness of local governance, return internally displaced persons to their places of origin, address human rights and women's empowerment, support the security forces, preserve judicial independence and promote Iraq's role in the region. We reaffirm the importance of regional dialogue in promoting security and stability in Iraq as well as adaptation to the impact of environmental challenges and climate change.

On the security front, the A3 countries are deeply concerned about the continued asymmetric attacks conducted by Da'esh and other terrorist groups, as well as the proliferation of arms in the region and the serious risk they pose to peace and security. Despite extensive counter-terrorism operations, Da'esh attacks continue to be a serious security challenge for the Iraqi Government. The A3 stresses the importance of continuing the efforts to ensure the defeat of Da'esh and of supporting Iraq's regional role in the fight against terrorism. We therefore support the continued engagement of the Iraqi security forces' operations to counter Da'esh activity. In that regard, we welcomed the second round of the Baghdad Conference for Partnership and Cooperation, hosted by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in December 2022, an event that brought together Iraq's neighbours to address security challenges in the region, including the threats posed by Da'esh.

With regard to the economic situation, we expect that the implementation of the Government programme on matters pertaining to combating corruption, addressing unemployment and creating work opportunities, supporting vulnerable and low-

income groups, reforming the economic and financial sectors, and enhancing public services will help to deal with the economic difficulties Iraq is facing. It will certainly create a platform to stabilize the economy and promote development.

At the regional level, we welcome the importance that the Iraqi Government's programme has assigned to fostering relations with other countries, particularly its neighbours and the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and other Arab countries. That framework, and the Government's intention to promote Iraqi sovereignty and strengthen the role of Iraq in Arab, regional and international organizations, will be critical to addressing the current regional security challenges.

On the humanitarian situation, the A3 is concerned about the fact that as of 31 December, approximately 1.2 million people remained internally displaced in Iraq. In that context, we welcome the work being undertaken by the United Nations humanitarian country team in Iraq on the development of a humanitarian transition strategy for 2023, by focusing on the remaining humanitarian needs while work on the transition from humanitarian to development aid continues.

We take note of the report of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances following its visit to Iraq, and encourage the Iraqi Government to implement its recommendations, including the adoption of legislation criminalizing enforced disappearances.

In conclusion, the A3 countries reiterate their strong support to the Special Representative and the UNAMI team for their commitment to supporting the interests of the Iraqi people and Government.

**Mr. Pérez Loose** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by joining my colleagues in congratulating you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We are sure that with your team and experience, you will be successful. I would also like to thank the delegation of Japan for its excellent work and professionalism in the month of January.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert, for the information she provided and Dr. Ahmed, Director of Donor and International Relations at the Iraqi Health and Social Care Organization. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of Iraq to this meeting.

Ecuador recognizes the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the actions undertaken by the Special Representative to facilitate the conditions for an inclusive political dialogue that can lead to a period of stability and governance that would make it possible to address the fundamental demands of the Iraqi people, in accordance with resolution 2631 (2022). In particular, we commend their efforts to pursue the effective implementation and regulation of the law on Yazidi female survivors, as outlined in resolution 2631 (2022). The enactment of that law constitutes a significant step in the pursuit of justice and reparations for female victims of intersectional violence, and is a clear signal pointing in the direction of national reconciliation.

Nonetheless, my delegation, like other colleagues before me, is concerned about the persistent attacks attributed to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Those incidents, along with explosive improvised devices, have been the main cause of civilian deaths, including among women and children. Ecuador condemns such acts, and we urge all parties to refrain from violence.

Four months ago, during the previous briefing on Iraq (see S/PV.9145), Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert provided the members of the Security Council with a clear assessment of the causes of the political stalemate and its impact regarding the lack of control over non-State armed groups operating on Iraqi territory.

We are encouraged to learn that the political stalemate came to an end following the parliamentary elections and the election of the Kurdish President, Abdullatif Rashid, and the appointment of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani. Free elections and the establishment of democracy have a positive impact on institution-building, which is the very approach by which people can find stability and overcome conflicts.

Today it should be acknowledged that steps have been taken to overcome the political crisis, strengthen State authority, eliminate the ongoing security threats in the country and reconfigure the institutional framework and the rule of law. However, more resources must be invested so as to intensify the fight against terrorism, identify mechanisms to counter desertification and the subsequent decline in water sources, and strengthen the planning and implementation of policies in order to improve access to health services, education and justice and the protection of the human rights of Iraqis.

As signatories to the declaration of shared commitments on the women and peace and security agenda, we are convinced that including a participatory approach to gender and intergenerational equity in dialogue and negotiation processes is essential to consolidating and sustaining peace. We therefore commend the establishment of conditions to promote the technical training of women and their participation in electoral processes and democratic political activities. We encourage the conclusion of legislation against domestic violence.

We support what the Secretary-General says in his report on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2022/46) with regard to the need to continue the demining efforts and the call for children illegally recruited by rebel armed groups to be treated as victims, not as combatants.

Ecuador believes in the value of regional and global multilateralism. In that regard, we welcome all the Iraqi Government's efforts to promote internal unity and, at the same time, its focus on building constructive and cooperative multidimensional relations with other countries of the region, regional bodies and international organizations.

**Ms. Evstigneeva** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank the delegation of Japan for having presided over the Security Council in January. We wish you, Madam President, and your team success and work that is as smooth as possible this month.

First of all, we would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, for her briefing on the situation in the Republic of Iraq. We reiterate our continued support for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. The Mission marks its twentieth anniversary this year. We listened carefully to Dr. Ahmed's assessments. We welcome the participation of Iraqi representatives to the United Nations.

We note the Organization's various efforts in Iraq to improve public and political life and the functioning of the State. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the friendly country of Iraq continues to face complex domestic political and socioeconomic challenges against the backdrop of the continuing terrorist threat posed by the militant Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group.

In that regard, we would like to welcome the election by the Council of Representatives of Iraq of the new President of the Republic, Mr. Abdullatif Rashid, and the formation of the Government, headed by Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani. We reaffirm our full support for the efforts of the new Cabinet to improve the situation in the Republic and ensure stability, security and the rule of law. We hope that all Iraqi political forces will take a responsible approach and seek to resolve their differences solely through negotiations in the interests of all ethnic and religious communities and population groups.

We understand that it is impossible to instantly resolve the many problems facing the Iraqi authorities, which have accumulated over the years. The socioeconomic and humanitarian areas, disrupted by the events of 2003 and the ensuing war against ISIL, require international attention and assistance. In that context, the adoption of the new Government's programme, one of the priority tasks of which is reforming the Republic's financial sector, is especially timely. We hope that that will pave the way towards addressing pressing issues affecting the Iraqi people, such as tackling unemployment and providing support to vulnerable groups of the population.

At the same time, we are well aware of how difficult it will be for the Iraqi leadership to take into account the views of all representatives of the country's political, social, ethnic and religious contexts. We are convinced that inclusive dialogue will help to overcome internal differences in Iraq.

We highly commend the ongoing substantive dialogue between the Iraqi Government and the Kurdish Autonomous Region to resolve existing differences, particularly regarding oil and gas. The further improvement of relations between them will clearly help Iraq to strengthen its security and will benefit the entire Iraqi people.

We regret to note that, despite the counter-terrorism achievements of the Iraqis, the security situation remains fragile owing, inter alia, to the resurgence of terrorist cells, which, according to the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2023/58), regularly launch attacks in various provinces of the Republic. We are convinced that that challenge can be effectively overcome only through the broadest possible coordination of counter-terrorism efforts, while respecting the sovereignty of the Iraqi State and the need to coordinate all actions

with Baghdad. Ensuring the national security of Iraq's neighbouring countries should not be achieved at the expense of its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Sustained normalization in the country is being hampered by the attempts of certain external forces to exploit intra-Iraqi tensions. In that regard, we would like to once again emphasize that it is unacceptable for Iraqi territory to become an arena for settling scores and confrontation between third States. We highly appreciate Baghdad's efforts to build good-neighbourly relations, and we welcome the Republic's ever-increasing role in regional, including pan-Arab, ties. We hope that Iraq and other regional actors will use their diplomatic potential to collectively promote peace and stability throughout the Middle East, including on the basis of resolution 598 (1987) and the relevant Russian collective security concept in the region.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to join my colleagues in thanking Japan for its excellent work during the month of January and wish you, Madam President, every success for the month of February. You can count, Madam, on Switzerland's support.

My thanks also go to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and to Mr. Ahmed for their briefings. Switzerland appreciates the work of the Special Representative and the entire staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), who have been committed to peace and stability in the country for almost 20 years. We welcome the presence among us of the representative of Iraq.

I would like to reaffirm Switzerland's support for security and stability in Iraq. The country and its people have come a long way and aspire to consolidating a prosperous and democratic future. Such an Iraq could further contribute to stability in the region by facilitating dialogue. The second Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, hosted in December by Jordan and co-organized by Iraq and France, is an example that Switzerland welcomes.

Switzerland congratulates the new Iraqi Government and wishes it every success in implementing its reform programme, including the fight against corruption, the provision of basic social services, the protection of human rights and the establishment of responsible institutions. It is also crucial that the dialogue with the Kurdistan Regional Government be deepened.

We thank UNAMI for supporting the Government in implementing these reforms. In addition, we welcome the proper representation of women in parliament and note that three women hold Ministerial positions. We encourage Iraq's commitment to strengthening women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of life, particularly in political decision-making. In addition, approval of the law against domestic violence would be an important step towards reaching gender equality.

With a view to attaining a stable and prosperous Iraq, I would like to highlight three additional points. First, the return and reintegration of the nearly 1.2 million internally displaced Iraqi men and women is essential to stability and social cohesion. We encourage Iraq to continue its efforts aimed at finding durable solutions in a secure, voluntary and dignified manner. We support Iraq in these efforts. Civilian documentation for all displaced persons is fundamental to enabling them to gain access to basic social services, including education.

Mines also impede the return of displaced persons, as they bring casualties, especially among children. Humanitarian mine clearance, risk education and assistance to mine victims must therefore be intensified.

Secondly, the security situation in Iraq remains worrying. Switzerland condemns all violations of Iraqi sovereignty. We call for respect for Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We are also very concerned about the more than 110 attacks attributed to Da'esh between October and December. In this context, we wish to recall that measures to combat terrorism must be carried out in full respect of international law, particularly human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, climate change is a destabilizing factor in Iraq. It is one of the elements contributing to droughts and water scarcity, with serious consequences for agriculture and livelihoods. At the recent Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, the Iraqi Prime Minister called water scarcity an existential threat to his country. We are pleased with Iraq's willingness to work with its neighbours on joint management of transboundary water resources and welcome UNAMI's support to this end. Switzerland is also pleased to continue its long-standing cooperation with the Iraqi authorities on this issue in the framework of the Blue Peace Initiative.

Finally, Switzerland welcomes the close cooperation between the members of the Tripartite Commission on missing Kuwaitis and third-country nationals.

The formation of the new Government in Iraq and the ambitious agenda it has announced are a sign of hope after a prolonged period of political stalemate. Nevertheless, the challenges remain significant. The Security Council must support Iraq with a united voice as the country continues on its journey to a stable and prosperous future.

**Mr. Dai Bing** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to congratulate Japan on the seamless completion of its presidency last month and look forward to positive results in the work of the Security Council in February under the leadership of Malta.

Just now, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Hennis-Plasschaert gave us an in-depth briefing, for which I thank her. I welcome the presence of the representative of Iraq at today's meeting. I have also listened carefully to Mr. Ahmed's briefing.

Last October, Iraq completed the formation of a new Government, laying a political foundation for reform and development in the country. China welcomes this achievement and supports the new Iraqi Government in delivering effective governance and independently exploring a development path that corresponds to its national conditions. It is in the fundamental interests of the Iraqi people for all parties in Iraq to enhance unity, achieve reconciliation and accelerate development.

The current security situation in Iraq remains dire, and terrorist remnants are still conducting asymmetric attacks, resulting in casualties, including among civilians. The international community should continue to support Iraq in combating terrorism, eliminating terrorist extremist forces such as Da'esh, preventing the return and spread of these groups, and consolidating the hard-won achievements in counter-terrorism. The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant should hand over the collected evidence to Iraq as soon as possible to help the country bring the terrorists to justice in accordance with its national laws. We welcome Iraq's continued efforts aimed at advancing the repatriation and resettlement of Iraqi nationals from Al-Hol camp in Syria and urge relevant countries to assume responsibilities as Iraq did and move forward as soon as possible on the identification and repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters and their families in Iraq.

According to the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/58), explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices continue to cause civilian casualties and are the leading cause of child casualties in Iraq. Much of this explosive ordnance was left behind by the war 20 years ago. The country that launched the war at that time should step up to the plate and take concrete actions to help Iraq with mine clearance and victim assistance, among other aspects.

Peace in Iraq hinges on a stable regional environment. China has repeatedly stressed that Iraq is not an arena for geopolitical competition. China supports Iraq in developing good-neighbourly friendships with countries in the region with a view to jointly responding to cross-border challenges. We call on all parties concerned to respect Iraq's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and resolve their own security concerns through cooperation with the Iraqi Government.

Over the past few decades, Iraq has been hit hard by wars, and its people have suffered a great deal. The international community should actively help Iraq to rebuild its infrastructure, accelerate economic and social development, and improve people's livelihoods and well-being. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and other United Nations entities in Iraq should devote greater resources and energy to the priority areas most needed by the Iraqi people, carry out work in accordance with their mandates and division of labour, and fully tap the role of the country team.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of UNAMI. On that basis, it is necessary to take this opportunity to seek the opinions of Iraq, systematically examine and evaluate the work and performance of UNAMI, and carefully study the medium- and long-term prospects of the Mission.

China is a sincere friend of Iraq. Last December, President Xi Jinping of China met with Iraqi Prime Minister Al-Sudani and reiterated that China will continue to firmly support Iraq in safeguarding its national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and in rebuilding its economy, restoring its industry, improving people's livelihoods and achieving sustainable development. We are ready to work with the international community to make positive contributions to long-term peace and stability in Iraq, as well as to peace and development in the region.

**Mr. Eckersley** (United Kingdom): Let me start by thanking Japan for a highly professional and effective presidency in the month of January. Let me assure you, Madam, and your team of the full support of my delegation for your presidency this month. I would also like to thank the Special Representative for her briefing and Mr. Ahmed for the messages he brought to the Council today.

The United Kingdom commends the vital work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). As the Special Representative said, we also commend the long-standing commitment of successive Iraqi Governments to working closely with the United Nations Mission.

We welcome the formation of the new Government of Iraq and Prime Minister Al-Sudani's focus on the delivery of services that the people of Iraq need. The United Kingdom will continue to support the Iraqi Government on the range of challenges it faces. Key among those challenges are securing the country's economic stability and the need for climate action, including energy transition and green economic reform. We hope to see the Government propose and pass a sustainable budget that stimulates investment in Iraq's future. We encourage the Government's continued focus on tackling corruption, as the Special Representative said, and we echo her and others on the importance of human rights and accountability.

Another central challenge is Iraq's security. We remain committed to supporting the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government in their efforts to ensure the safety of Iraqi civilians, not least in the ongoing fight against the scourge of Da'esh, and to safeguard the security and sovereignty of Iraq. We welcome Prime Minister Al-Sudani's work to reinforce the security of Iraq's borders.

We commend Prime Minister Al-Sudani's engagements throughout the region and his Government's efforts to encourage regional stability through broader bilateral relations. We encourage further regional dialogue, including on crucial transnational issues such as water security and the adverse impacts of climate change, and we welcome the important role of UNAMI in support of those efforts. Continued close cooperation between the Government of Iraq and regional partners is important to reinforce both Iraqi and regional security and stability.

We welcome ongoing contacts between Baghdad and Erbil in order to settle outstanding issues of concern. We encourage all sides to engage in dialogue in order to resolve differences where they exist, including on the hydrocarbon law and the budget. We also welcome and encourage dialogue between the Kurdish political parties, and we will continue to emphasize the urgent importance of passing a law facilitating elections in the Kurdistan region this year.

Finally, we would also like to thank the Special Representative for her update on missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property. We welcome and encourage the commitment of all parties to making further progress on this important issue.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I join the rest of my colleagues in congratulating the delegation of Japan for a very successful and professional presidency of the Security Council for the month of January and in wishing you, Madam President, every success during your presidency this month. You can count on our full support.

I thank the Special Representative for her very complete briefing, and I also thank Mr. Ahmed for his briefing. I would also like to welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Iraq.

I would like to emphasize four points today.

First, the Council has a duty to support the stability and security of Iraq. France reiterates its commitment to the sovereignty of Iraq and to the stability of the autonomous Region of Kurdistan within it. At the end of December, the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, visited Jordan on the occasion of the second Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership. He reaffirmed, alongside the countries of the region, the importance of strengthening Iraq's security and supporting the democratic and constitutional processes under way.

France condemns all violations of Iraqi sovereignty. We agree with the Iraqi authorities, who have repeatedly stated that Iraq is not a place for settling scores among regional Powers. We call on the actors concerned to stop interfering in Iraq's internal affairs.

Secondly, Iraq must continue to play a positive role at the regional level. France welcomes the balanced regional diplomacy led by Iraq, which allows key countries of the region to resume dialogue. We welcome

the Iraqi Prime Minister's efforts in that regard. The participants in the second Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership unanimously promoted dialogue as a means of resolving regional disputes. Future meetings in that format will follow. A credible regional dialogue is also the first step towards cooperation based on joint projects that will promote the economic integration of the region and make it possible to respond to climate and environmental challenges in particular.

I would also like to stress the importance of cooperation between Iraq and Kuwait on the issue of missing Kuwaitis and third-country nationals. We encourage the two States to continue their dialogue on that subject.

Thirdly, Iraq's partners also have a responsibility to support it in implementing the necessary reforms. France is a strategic partner and ally of Iraq. That partnership took concrete form with the official visit to Paris, on 26 and 27 January, of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani and the signing of a strategic partnership treaty between our two countries.

France is ready to support Iraq in the implementation of the reforms expected by the Iraqi people. One of the concrete expressions of that commitment, for example, was the signing of a memorandum of understanding by the Iraqi Commission on Integrity and the French anti-corruption agency in order to structure our cooperation in that area.

France also calls for the resumption of a constructive dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil, particularly with regard to security and the sharing of oil revenue. The revival of cooperation between the federal authorities and the autonomous region is essential, and we are willing to facilitate exchanges.

Fourthly, recent weeks have shown the persistence of the terrorist threat. On 20 December, the Council condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Iraq. France salutes Iraq's courageous fight against Da'esh. Together with its partners in the Global Coalition against Da'esh, France will continue to stand by Iraq in its fight against terrorism, in full respect of Iraqi sovereignty, for as long as necessary and as long as Iraq requests it.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho** (Brazil): Let me start by congratulating Japan for its efficient and successful presidency during the month of January. We congratulate you, Madam President, on Malta's accession to the

presidency of the Security Council. Malta's presidency can count on the full support of the delegation of Brazil during the month of February.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing and for remembering Sergio Vieira de Mello, whose commitment to the cause of peace and human rights makes us proud and inspired. I thank Mr. Ahmed for the information he provided, and I welcome the Iraqi delegation to today's meeting.

Last October, Brazil was pleased with the formation of the new Iraqi Government. We note that the Government of Iraq has set out a comprehensive list of priorities, including important reforms aimed at meeting the aspirations of the Iraqi people. We encourage all political actors to support the Government plan in all the areas that the country — through its own domestic political processes — has determined to be a priority, in the exercise of its right to determine its own destiny without foreign interference.

The inclusion of Iraqi women in high-ranking positions in the new Government also deserves praise, particularly in the light of women candidates' performance during the 2021 elections, including beyond the quota system. The appointment of women to senior Government positions signals an effort to translate the will of the Iraqi people for inclusive representation. We hope that the new Government can contribute to an environment that enables the meaningful participation of women in politics and society, in general, without discrimination based on gender. The adoption of the anti-domestic violence law would contribute to that end.

Brazil also commends Government efforts, in accordance with the constitutional framework of Iraq, to resolve outstanding issues in the relations between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, including regarding the management of oil revenues. We underscore the importance of sustained dialogue among all the relevant authorities, bearing in mind their shared responsibility towards the Iraqi people. It is our belief that mutual understanding and cooperation, with a unity of duty and purpose, will strengthen the capacity of all governmental entities to pursue Iraq's right to development in a manner that is consistent with the permanent sovereignty of the Iraqi people over their country's natural wealth and resources.

Brazil acknowledges Iraq's efforts to repatriate its citizens from refugee camps in northern Syria and reintegrate them into Iraqi society. We commend the

partnership established with the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations in that endeavour, as well as the priority given to the care and protection of children, who are otherwise prone to recruitment by armed militias and terrorist groups when they return.

Promoting the economic development and well-being of the population should also be considered a key instrument in countering terrorism. The threat posed by Da'esh in Iraq, and in other countries as well, cannot be eradicated through sanctions and individual accountability mechanisms alone. It is essential to address the root causes of violent extremism, one of which can be the sense of injustice felt by marginalized populations, including economic injustice arising from poverty, inequality, income disparities and lack of opportunities, locally and at the global level. Countering the global threat of terrorism in Iraq also requires cooperation among States, particularly neighbouring countries. Regrettably, where Iraqi territory is concerned we have been witnessing a number of actions that are in disregard of the most fundamental tenets of the Charter of the United Nations. Brazil reiterates that there can be no legitimate right to self-defence against any State unless it is in response to an actual armed attack attributable to that State. Furthermore, there is no right to preventive self-defence. Attempts to justify violations of the prohibition on the use of force on those grounds have no place under Article 51 of the Charter or in customary international law.

In terms of progress in the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Brazil would like to point out that the Mission's existence has hinged on the consent of the Iraqi Government for many years already. As a Chapter VI Mission, UNAMI was established to assist Iraq in realizing its full potential as a sovereign and independent country, following the progressive devolution to Iraqis of control over all aspects of the country's life after the collapse of its institutions in 2003. In our view, that objective is better served by a focus on measures that can actively support political dialogue and national reconciliation, as well as the Iraqi people's ownership of their political system and institutions. We therefore encourage UNAMI to continue working constructively with the Iraqi Government within the limits of the Mission's mandate, in a manner that contributes to building capacities in Iraqi society and accelerates the transfer to the Iraqi Government of all remaining public services currently provided by humanitarian organizations.

Brazil commends the continued efforts of the tripartite mechanism, under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross, in the search for missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals. We also note the resolve of the Iraqi Government to continue searching for missing property, which we hope will bear fruit as soon as possible.

Let me end by congratulating Iraq on successfully hosting and winning the Gulf Cup in January. Well done to the Iraqi national football team, the Lions of Mesopotamia, for their remarkable triumph.

**Mr. Hoxha** (Albania): I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, and your team on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Council this month, and to assure you of our full cooperation. We reiterate our thanks to Japan for steering the work of the Council very successfully in January. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Hennis-Plasschaert for her update on recent developments in Iraq. I also thank Mr. Ahmed for his informative remarks and welcome the representative of Iraq to the Council today.

Today's meeting comes not quite three months after the formation of a new Iraqi Government, which we welcome. Putting an end to political deadlock, partisan rivalry and power plays is a significant step forward and we commend the Iraqi political forces for taking that important and necessary step towards political stability. A stable, sovereign, prosperous and democratic Iraq is what the people want and what the region needs.

We support Prime Minister Al-Sudani's inspiring reform agenda and encourage all political leaders to collaborate in tackling the many issues and policies before them, including through a serious commitment to the fight against corruption and to ensuring human rights for all. We reiterate our support for the efforts of the Government of Iraq to deliver meaningful reforms through inclusive dialogue and by increasing women's participation in the workforce. We are pleased to note the appointment of three women to ministerial positions and encourage the Iraqi Government to go further and broaden women's participation in decision-making positions and institutions in order to be in a better position to respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Iraqi people. In that respect, we echo the call to the Council of Representatives to accelerate its



consideration of the proposed anti-domestic-violence law. Iraqi society needs vital tools of that kind to prevent and combat domestic violence.

We welcome the first steps taken by the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to address pending issues. Continued efforts are required if they are to create the right conditions to adopt a budget and develop oil and gas legislation that is acceptable to both Governments.

We remain worried about the security situation in Iraq and especially the continued attacks by armed groups, including the persistent threats posed by Da'esh. Albania commends Prime Minister Al-Sudani's determination to reassert State control over armed militias, and stands with the Iraqi leaders in Baghdad and Erbil. We reaffirm our strong support for Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity and condemn all attempts to undermine Iraq's stability and political independence.

Despite an overall positive assessment and outlook, it is clear that Iraq continues to face a number of political, security, economic and environmental challenges. To tackle them properly, it needs support from the international community, but it also needs the understanding and cooperation of its neighbours, which should engage constructively in diplomacy and dialogue, not malicious interference. In that respect, we welcome the second Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, held in December 2022 in Jordan, as a joint effort to promote dialogue among the main actors in the Middle East, in support of activities that promote and support foreign investment initiatives and programmes.

In conclusion, let me mention the issue of climate change, which is a serious challenge for Iraq. The historically fertile lands between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers have been adversely affected, and if the manifestations of climate change are not properly mitigated, they will make the country more inhospitable by the year. Dust storms and sandstorms, as well as drought and water scarcity, are resulting in considerable financial and human costs for Iraq and will have a negative impact on fundamental human rights, security, economic viability and political stability.

We see UNAMI as a critical partner in working together with the Government and domestic stakeholders to help Iraq face all those multifaceted challenges, as

the country embarks on a newly charted path towards its development and political transition.

**Mr. Ishikane** (Japan): At the outset, we congratulate you, Madam President, and Malta on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for February. I wish you all the best during your presidency. I thank Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), and Mr. Ahmed for their briefings.

The stability, prosperity and security of Iraq are indispensable to the peace and security of the Middle East. In that regard, Iraq took an important step forward in successfully forming a new Government last October. We strongly support the Iraqi Government's priority of tackling corruption and welcome its commitment to responding to its people's aspirations by pursuing economic and fiscal reform as well as job creation. In that respect, Japan hopes that the Government will take concrete measures as soon as possible to show its people tangible results from its reforms.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the role played by UNAMI in areas such as the provision of electoral assistance and in its tireless engagement with political leaders and civil society throughout Iraq's difficult path to overcoming its political impasse. It will be important to discuss the best approach in future for the United Nations to support Iraq's efforts to become ultimately truly self-reliant by building on what has been achieved so far.

A prerequisite for peace and stability in Iraq is full respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as good-neighbourly relations. Any attack that threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq, including in the Kurdistan region, is contrary to international law and must cease. We also condemn the series of recent terrorist attacks in Kirkuk, Diyala and other areas in Iraq. Japan commends the Iraqi Government's active engagement in building confidence among its neighbours through regional dialogue. The successful convening of the second Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership last December is proof that its efforts are making progress.

Compliance with international obligations is also part of the foundations of regional stability. The closure of the United Nations Compensation Commission last December, which followed Iraq's final payment of compensation to Kuwait, marked an important

milestone. Japan welcomes the steady cooperation between Iraq and Kuwait on missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, and takes note of the progress made towards a mutually agreeable conclusion.

Finally, investing in people, including women and young people, is a way to turn the diversity of Iraqi society into a real strength for the country. To ensure a resilient society, investments must be made in basic socioeconomic infrastructure such as energy, water, electricity, education and health care. Institution-building is also of critical importance. Moreover, the challenges posed by climate change are concerning and must be addressed urgently. UNAMI's assistance to Iraq in such areas is crucial. Japan will remain a reliable partner of UNAMI and Iraq and will continue to provide its full support to their efforts.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Malta.

I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert and Mr. Ahmed of the Health and Social Care Organization in Iraq for their briefings. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/58) notes the significant progress we have witnessed in Iraq, as well as the work still to be done. Central to that progress is the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) over the past 20 years.

Malta welcomes the formation of a new Government in Iraq and encourages all political stakeholders and institutions in Iraq to work constructively together to enable the Government to address the country's needs, including in the implementation of relevant reforms. We also welcome the adherence to the country's legislated gender quotas. Echoing the Secretary-General, we urge Iraq's political leaders to ensure the full, equal and meaningful inclusion of women in all political processes and at all levels of governance, including the executive and judicial branches.

Malta urges the Government of Iraq to enact its draft anti-domestic-violence law and to rigorously pursue accountability for gender-based crimes with a view to protecting all women and girls, regardless of nationality. On the political front, we also welcome the clear commitment and steps taken by the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments to address outstanding issues.

The deadly clashes that occurred at the end of August in Baghdad underline the fragility of the security situation. We call on the new Government to address the root causes of that instability, manifest in its political, economic, social and environmental challenges, and express our support for its continued pursuit of much-needed reforms in that context. Such action is essential to promoting long-term stability in Iraq. In that respect, the timely passage of a new budget is vital. In that regard, we also call on all States, particularly neighbouring countries, to respect and support Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and democratic political process. Any attacks on Iraqi territory imperil its stability and that of the region, and should cease immediately. We welcome and commend the positive role played by Iraq in the region, in particular its diplomatic efforts to advance stability, including through its engagement and facilitation of dialogue with regional partners. We also stress the importance of fighting terrorism and Da'esh's recurring attacks in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law, and reiterate our steadfast support for the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Malta emphasizes the importance of respecting human rights and democratic principles, and expresses concern about the attacks on protesters, activists and journalists. In that context, we thank and commend non-governmental organizations for their constant and tireless efforts aimed at improving the situation on the ground. As we heard today, landmines remain a real problem with devastating consequences. Efforts aimed at addressing the issue must also be adequately funded.

We are deeply concerned about the 42 grave violations committed against children, the high incidence of conflict-related sexual violence and the 84 civilian casualties documented by UNAMI. Furthermore, we urge the Government of Iraq to fully implement the Yazidi Female Survivors Law and to consider similar provisions for the children of survivors, including those born of conflict-related rape. On the humanitarian front, significant needs remain, and we urge for the lifting of all restrictions on humanitarian access. As Mr. Ahmed alluded to in his briefing today, it is civilians who are paying the heaviest price for the instability in Iraq. As of 31 December, a staggering 1.17 million Iraqis remained internally displaced and 990,000 people were in acute need of humanitarian assistance.

Malta stresses the importance of addressing issues related to climate and security in Iraq, which is fifth on the list of the countries in the world most affected by climate change. We welcome UNAMI's efforts to assist it in mitigating the effects of the climate crisis, including through sustainable development and the use of renewable energies. Malta calls for increased international and regional efforts to address the challenge of water scarcity.

We urge the Government to work to remove the key barriers to ending displacement, including extensive explosive-ordnance contamination and the incomplete restoration of housing and basic services in areas retaken from ISIL. The return of internally displaced persons must be safe, voluntary, dignified and based on consent. Malta urges regional and international partners to ensure that both national and international aid and development organizations are equipped and facilitated to address those challenges.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

**Mr. Fatah (Iraq)** (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also thank Ambassador Ishikane for his outstanding efforts during Japan's presidency of the Council in January. And I am grateful to Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), for her briefing. We also took note with appreciation of the remarks delivered by Mr. Ahmed, Director of Donor and International Relations at the Iraqi Health and Social Care Organization.

The new Government of Iraq was formed according to the principle of national partnership, with a ministerial approach that focuses on a number of key pillars, most notably maintaining openness to all political forces; holding early elections; combating administrative and financial corruption and uncontrolled weapons; comprehensively reforming State institutions and sectors; addressing the electricity crisis; implementing strategic projects; promoting human rights and empowering women; addressing the issue of displaced persons and minorities; combating poverty, unemployment and inflation; meeting the demands of the people in general and young protestors

in particular; ensuring Iraq's share of water; improving and increasing agricultural production; and establishing the security and stability of Iraq.

In terms of foreign relations, Iraq seeks, through diplomacy, to become a source of stability in the region and to play an active role in communication and dialogue towards converging points of view. We welcomed the successful outcomes of the first and second rounds of the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, in addition to the growing regional and international momentum we gained from hosting the twenty-fifth Arabian Gulf Cup for football, which was won by Iraq's national team.

I would like to briefly share with the Council the most important developments that have taken place in Iraq over the past four months.

First, on the relations between the federal Government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government, understandings have been reached, and dialogue continues between Baghdad and Erbil in order to resolve a number of important outstanding issues, including the issuance of oil and gas legislation, the distribution of oil revenues and customs revenues and the appointment of a chairperson for the special committee on article 140 of Iraq's Constitution.

Second, on the security dossier, Iraq is committed to cooperating with the international community, the United Nations and specialized agencies in order to combat and eliminate terrorism once and for all, as well as to ensure judicial accountability, security-related follow-up and support for victims. We stress the importance of the United Nations adopting a unified definition of the term "terrorism".

Iraq extends its thanks to the United Nations and welcomes the meeting that took place in the city of Najaf between Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, High Representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations; Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq; and the Grand Ayatollah, His Eminence Sayyid Ali Al-Sistani. We welcome the United Nations action plan for the protection of holy sites in order to ensure that religious sites and places of worship and meditation are a refuge for all worshippers. Iraq also commends the Security Council for its support and for condemning the various acts of terrorism that Iraq has endured, as well as for consistently

affirming Iraq's demands for its territories not to be used as an arena for settling scores, political purposes or under the pretext of combating terrorism.

Third, on Turkey and Iran's violations, Iraq strongly condemns the repeated aggressions by Turkey and Iran targeting Iraq's territories under the pretexts of self-defence and invoking Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. Iraq reaffirms its constitutional commitment to refraining from threatening the territories of its neighbours, as well its desire to engage in bilateral dialogue with them to find peaceful solutions, and addressing internal problems of countries within their borders and not outside of them. Moreover, Iraq commends the League of Arab States' adoption of resolution 759, entitled "Taking a unified Arab position regarding the Turkish forces' violation of Iraqi sovereignty" at the Algiers summit held in November 2022.

Fourth, regarding support for liberated areas, Iraq commends the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in partnership with the international community, for the support it has provided to Iraq's national plan geared towards alleviating the suffering of displaced persons, a plan that has facilitated the safe, dignified and voluntary return of nearly 4 million internally displaced persons. Moreover, on 27 December 2022, Iraq's Council of Ministers adopted a series of decisions on that same issue, including a decree guaranteeing thousands of Iraqi Yazidis in the Sinjar region the right to own their homes, after depriving them of those rights for more than four decades, during which discriminatory and exclusionary policies were practiced against them.

Fifth, regarding the governmental programme, Iraq is committed to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. We submitted our second national report to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and we voiced our desire to submit a third voluntary report. Iraq is working to promote cooperation and partnership with neighbouring countries through integrated infrastructure, economic integration and mutual investments. The Iraqi Government has launched a broad campaign at the highest level to counter financial and administrative corruption. We call on the international community to help us to restore the stolen and smuggled Iraqi money and to facilitate the extradition of the perpetrators who reside in certain countries.

The financial situation in Iraq is at present stable, despite the volatility of exchange rates, specifically the dollar rate. The Government has adopted a number of urgent measures to address the volatility in the exchange rate.

Sixth, on the empowerment of women, preparations are under way to implement the second national action plan for 2021–2024 pursuant to resolution 1325 (2000) and to discuss the national strategy on Iraqi women for the period 2023 to 2030 at the local level, in cooperation with UNDP in Iraq, to support the participation, protection and empowerment of women socially and economically.

Seventh, the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Iraq has continued to cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its educational activities on civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights. Iraq calls on the United Nations to deliver psychosocial support services to the women survivors of sexual violence committed by elements of the Da'esh terrorist organization. We would like to thank the United Nations and its specialized agencies working in Iraq, and we call on them to provide technical assistance pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/233 on policies on operational activities, as per the mandate of each of them and in accordance with the principle of national ownership, in line with national plans and priorities.

Eighth, on countering desertification and addressing climate change, climate change and dwindling river water levels due to water policies adopted by co-riparian States that either restrict water or change river courses represent a challenge for the Iraqi Government, which has been seeking to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the governmental programme. That also has a negative impact on food security, health care and transportation. It causes displacement and demographic change. It threatens biodiversity and historical sites included in the list of world heritage sites, as well as wetlands classified by the Ramsar Convention.

Iraq stresses its commitment to improving measures to adapt to climate change based on the outcome of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27). Iraq also began to take practical steps towards promoting

the use of modern irrigation systems and countering the squandering of water while implementing important strategic projects related to the green economy.

Ninth, turning to the relations with the sisterly State of Kuwait, Iraq is keen to promote bilateral relations with Kuwait as part of a series of positive developments at the political, economic, cultural and historic levels. That has been reflected through the visit of His Excellency Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani to the sisterly State of Kuwait. It was the first official visit of the Prime Minister to a Gulf State since he assumed office.

Iraq has been following with interest the shared electricity production project with the Al-Wafra station in the south of Kuwait with the aim of enhancing electricity production between the States of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Iraq.

The Ministries for Foreign Affairs and Defence in Iraq have reiterated the humanitarian call for those who have information related to the burial sites of Iraqi or Kuwaiti citizens who were lost during the second Gulf War to come forward; or any information on Kuwaiti property, including the Kuwaiti national archives. They are requested to urgently contact the two aforementioned Ministries, or the International Committee of the Red Cross in Baghdad. In that context, Iraq wishes to express its thanks and appreciation to the International Committee of the Red Cross for its tireless efforts. That Committee has chaired the Tripartite Commission, which has been tasked with addressing the issue of

Kuwaiti prisoners and missing persons as well as third-country nationals. Iraq is committed to cooperating with the Committee and with any party that may assist in achieving our goals.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the United Nations Secretary-General for his firm position on respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. We highly value the important visit of Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, to Iraq in response to an invitation that was extended to her by the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs. She met with Iraqi officials in Baghdad and Kurdistan. I also highly appreciate the continued support to Iraq by the international community for achieving prosperity and stability for the Iraqi people. At the same time, I note that my country and the Iraqi people are grateful to UNAMI for its efforts during the last two decades, to the country team representing a number of United Nations specialized organizations and to the specialized funds for their provision of basic humanitarian assistance. We commend the important work they undertook, especially their work related to prevention, mediation, peacebuilding and counter-terrorism, as well as their response to the humanitarian situation.

**The President:** There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.*