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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2421 \(2018\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on progress made towards the fulfilment of all responsibilities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The report covers key developments relating to Iraq and provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq since my previous report of 1 February 2019 ([S/2019/101](#)) and the briefing to the Security Council provided by my Special Representative for Iraq and Head of UNAMI on 13 February 2019.

II. Summary of key political developments

A. Political situation

2. The Council of Representatives, the parliament of Iraq, which concluded its first legislative term on 24 January, resumed its work on 9 March. The impasse over the completion of the formation of the Government of Iraq continues. Four ministerial posts, for Ministers of the Interior, Defence, Justice and Education, remain unfilled owing to continuing disagreements between and within political blocs over candidates. On 27 February, President of Iraq, Barham Salih, Prime Minister, Adil Abd al-Mahdi, and Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mohamed al-Halbousi, convened a national consultative meeting with party leaders and senior officials from the executive, legislative and judicial branches to discuss the way forward on a number of matters, including the completion of the government formation process. Notwithstanding a shared recognition of the need for progress, the leaders did not reach consensus.

3. Delays in forming the Cabinet have distracted from the implementation of the governmental programme for the period 2018–2022, which has in turn limited the Government's ability to respond to widespread public concerns over poor living conditions, lack of basic services, unemployment and reconstruction needs. To date, parliamentary committees have yet to start their substantive work.

4. A series of programmes on water, electricity and service delivery are being implemented in the Basrah governorate. On 19 March, the Prime Minister noted that



the situation in Basrah remained a major challenge, but that the Government was fully prepared and wanted to do all in its power to meet the needs of citizens. On 27 March, the Basrah Provincial Council approved project plans for 2019, including 53 projects in the municipal sector and 42 projects in the water sector.

5. On 5 March, the Prime Minister, highlighting the fight against corruption, announced that the Government had developed a comprehensive, national anti-corruption strategy. Under his chairmanship, the Supreme Council for Combating Corruption continues to discuss the challenges and priority areas in combating corruption and achieving greater transparency, including the strengthening of supervisory authorities and the enhancement of the coordination between executive, legislative and judiciary institutions.

6. The parliament has also made the fight against corruption a priority of its legislative agenda. On 9 March, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives opened the second legislative term of the parliament in the presence of the President, the Prime Minister, the Chair of the Higher Judicial Council, Faiq Zaidan, the acting Chair of the Integrity Commission, Izzat Tawfiq and the acting Chair of the Audit Commission, Salah Nouri. The Prime Minister and the President stressed the necessity of strengthening the legal framework and institutional coordination. During the session, the parliament approved a decision to provide financial and human resources to support the judicial authority in stepping up anti-corruption measures. In subsequent sessions, held on 11 and 12 March, the parliament reviewed corruption-related legislation, including an amendment to the Integrity Commission Law. On 10 March, the Speaker stated to the media that the parliament was committed to enacting comprehensive anti-corruption legislation so as to enable the prosecution of all individuals involved in corruption, smuggling and the misuse of public resources.

7. On 24 March, the Council of Representatives unanimously voted to dismiss the Governor of Ninawa, Nawfal al-Akouf, on the grounds of corruption and wasting public money. The decision followed the tragic sinking of a ferry in the Tigris River in Mosul on 21 March, with heavy loss of life, and was based on the findings of a parliamentary fact-finding committee on Ninawa and the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

8. As negotiations continued among the political parties of Kurdistan on the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) met in Sulaymaniyah on 15 and 16 February to discuss the completion of the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government and other issues, including the candidates for the position of the federal Minister of Justice.

9. On 18 February, KDP and Gorran signed a four-year political agreement that guarantees the latter's participation in the next Kurdistan Regional Government. On the same day, the Kurdistan Regional Parliament convened to elect a Speaker and two Deputy Speakers. Vala Fareed (KDP) was elected Speaker, in a temporary capacity. Heman Hawrami (KDP) was elected First Deputy Speaker and Muna Qahwachi (Turkmen Reform Party) was elected Second Deputy Speaker. PUK boycotted the parliamentary session, owing to the lack of agreement with KDP over the Kurdistan Regional Government formation process.

10. On 26 February, the Kurdistan Regional Parliament convened to elect the members of its Legal Affairs Committee, which comprises 11 members, four from KDP and one each from the following groups: Kurdistan Islamic Group, Gorran, Turkmen, Christian and New Generation Movement. Two seats were reserved for PUK, which again boycotted the session, owing to the lack of progress on the Kurdistan Regional Government formation process.

11. On 4 March, following a meeting between the First Deputy Secretary-General of PUK, Kosrat Rasul Ali, and the leader of KDP, Masoud Barzani, the two political parties signed a political agreement on the next Kurdistan Regional Government. In a joint press conference, the parties announced that a joint committee would be formed to implement the agreement, underlining their commitment to expedite the government formation process.

12. On 10 March, the Speaker and Deputy Speakers of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament met with heads of all political parties to consider candidates for the 14 remaining parliamentary committees, who were then formally elected during a regular parliamentary session on 12 March. On 19 March, the Kurdistan Regional Parliament convened a session to elect the committee chairpersons. Among them, four women were elected as chairpersons and four as deputies.

13. On 19, 24 and 27 March, representatives of KDP and PUK met for further consultations on the Kurdistan Regional Government formation process, with no success. On 3 April, the two parties reached a provisional understanding on the allocation of key cabinet posts, but a final agreement has yet to be signed.

B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil

14. On 16 February, internal customs checkpoints established by the federal Government in September 2018 between Erbil and Kirkuk, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah and Dahuk and Mosul were removed pursuant to the decision of the Committee on Economic Affairs of the Council of Ministers of 4 December 2018.

15. On 27 February, the Federal Supreme Court held a hearing on a lawsuit filed by the former Minister of Oil of Iraq against the Kurdistan Regional Government regarding the constitutionality of the unilateral, direct export of oil from the Kurdistan Region, at which the Court decided to postpone the issuance of its ruling until 3 April. During the hearing on 3 April, the Court decided to further postpone the issuance of its ruling until 7 May, indicating that both the Prime Minister of Iraq and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, had declined to sign legal documents at the Court's request.

16. On 28 February, the Kurdistan Regional Government issued a statement refuting media reports of an alleged decision of its Oil and Gas Committee to renege on the agreed delivery of 250,000 barrels of oil per day to the State Oil Marketing Organization of Iraq in accordance with the approved 2019 Federal Budget Law. Although the Kurdistan Regional Government reaffirmed its commitment to resolving issues relating to oil with the federal Government through dialogue, to date the expected oil deliveries are still pending.

17. Following a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Kurdistan Regional Government on 8 March, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region announced the end of a three-year civil servant salary withholding system. He confirmed that the salaries of all civil servants in the Kurdistan Region would be paid in full from March, in line with the 2019 Federal Budget Law, which guarantees the regular and predictable payment of salaries of civil servants of the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Peshmerga forces. Accordingly, on 15 March, the federal Government confirmed the transfer of 522 billion Iraqi dinars to the Kurdistan Regional Government for that purpose.

C. Security situation

18. Iraqi security forces continued their efforts to counter the threat from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). While ISIL ceded ground in its final stronghold in Baghuz in the eastern part of the Syrian Arab Republic, reorganized ISIL cells in Iraq increased their operations and attacks in Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates. Meanwhile, Iraqi security forces continued to monitor military developments in the eastern part of the Syrian Arab Republic, in particular in the village of Baghuz on the Syrian-Iraqi border and intensified operations along ISIL routes and safe havens in Anbar, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates. National Security Adviser of Iraq, Falih al-Fayyadh, visited Qa'im, Anbar Governorate, on 9 March to inspect security operations along the border.

19. On 6 March, ISIL militants attacked a convoy of the popular mobilization forces redeploying from Makhmour district in Ninawa Governorate to the Dibis district of Kirkuk Governorate. Six combatants of those forces were killed and others were wounded. On 7 March, the Prime Minister ordered an investigation into the attack.

20. The Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government continued to explore ways to improve security and stability in Sinjar district in Ninawa Governorate and other sensitive areas. During his visits to Sinjar on 2, 3 and 9 March, the National Security Adviser confirmed that local police would maintain security in the town, while Iraqi Army units would be deployed on the outskirts of the district and on Mount Sinjar. He highlighted the importance of the involvement of local residents in maintaining security and stability. On 15 March, the National Security Adviser also met with the leader of KDP, with whom he discussed the situation in the disputed territories and security cooperation.

21. On 17 and 19 March, clashes erupted between the Iraqi security forces and the Sinjar Resistance Units over the control of the border between the Syrian Arab Republic and Sinjar. Iraqi security forces sent reinforcements to the area, while local authorities initiated mediation in an attempt to de-escalate tensions.

22. Improvised explosive devices remained ISIL's primary tactic as the group continued to perpetrate hostile attacks across the country, including kidnappings for ransom, assassinations of community leaders and ambushing Iraqi security forces personnel and civilians and destroying property. On 18 March, ISIL released a communiqué reasserting its presence and calling upon supporters to intensify the fight and take revenge for the Baghuz and Christchurch attacks.

23. Armed groups continue to operate in areas outside of State control. Reported activities include extortion, smuggling and collecting fees at illegal checkpoints, undermining the authority of the State. Although the Government of Iraq denounces those activities, much work remains to be done.

24. The Government of Iraq has issued various public statements clarifying the foreign military presence in Iraq. On 19 February, the Prime Minister confirmed that the forces of the international counter-ISIL coalition were present in Iraq, at the request of the Government, to train and assist the Iraqi security forces. On 4 March, the Iraqi Joint Operations Command indicated that the movement of coalition forces was governed by strict operating procedures and was conditional upon the approval of the Prime Minister, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. On 1 April, the President stated that the current presence of military of the United States of America in Iraq was based on a request from the Government of Iraq and that its presence observed Iraqi sovereignty.

25. The issue of the repatriation of Iraqi ISIL fighters and their families surfaced, with reports that large numbers of them had been handed over by the Syrian

Democratic Forces to the Iraqi authorities. On 26 February, the Prime Minister of Iraq indicated that the Ministries of the Interior and Justice would determine the appropriate criminal proceedings for ISIL fighters, on a case-by-case basis, and that there was a need to distinguish between family members who had been taken hostage and those who had intentionally accompanied them. Concerning ISIL fighters of foreign origin, the Prime Minister noted that Iraq could provide assistance for their repatriation to their countries of origin.

26. The Turkish air force conducted air strikes in northern Iraq, in Dahuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah Governorates, inflicting material damages but with no casualties reported. At least 12 sorties and two clashes between Kurdistan Workers' Party elements and Turkish forces were reported by the Turkish armed forces between 14 February and 9 April.

D. Regional and international developments

27. On 24 and 25 February, the President attended the European Union-League of Arab States summit held in Egypt. In his address to the summit, the President stated that the threat of terrorism and its extremist ideology required from the countries of the region and the international community a lasting victory, and he asserted his Government's policy of openness towards its neighbours. On the margins of the summit, he met with the Chancellor of Austria, Sebastian Kurz, the Prime Minister of Czechia, Andrej Babiš, the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the Prime Minister of Finland, Juha Sipilä, the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the King of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, the President of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmajo, and the Prime Minister of Sweden, Stefan Löfven. Discussions focused on bilateral relations, the fight against terrorism, contributions to the reconstruction of Iraq and investments in the fields of energy, industry and oil.

28. During an official visit to France on 25 February, the President of Iraq met with the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, in Paris. Discussions focused on mutual commitment to promoting stability, security and reconstruction in Iraq and to strengthening economic cooperation and investments in the industry, energy and oil sectors. In a joint press conference, the two Presidents stated that Iraq needed to recover its leading role in the region. The President of Iraq underlined that the Government of Iraq must not become an arena for regional conflicts but rather a place where consensus with and among its neighbours could be reached.

29. On 27 February, following a meeting in Baghdad between Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Iraq and the Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait, Marzouq al-Ghanim, the former announced that Kuwait and Iraq were seeking durable solutions for Iraq's displaced population. Discussions also focused on implementing the outcomes of the International Conference on the Reconstruction of Iraq, held in Kuwait from 12 to 14 February 2018.

30. On 4 March, during an official visit to Iraq, the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, held meetings with the President and Prime Minister of Iraq on strengthening bilateral relations, enhancing cooperation and the importance of realizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

31. Building upon the President's visit to Turkey earlier in 2019, on 5 March, the Minister of Water Resources, Jamal al-Adli, met with the Ambassador of Turkey to Iraq, Fatih Yıldız, to discuss co-management of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and the formation of a joint working group to reach a solution on transboundary water management.

32. From 11 to 13 March, the President of Iran (Islamic Republic of), Hassan Rouhani, undertook his first official visit to Iraq, where he met with political, tribal and religious leaders. Several memorandums of understanding were signed in the sectors of oil, trade, health and transport, including agreements on the establishment of a railway between Basrah and Shalamjah and on easing visa requirements between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Iraq to facilitate trade and investment. The parties also announced their intention to implement the bilateral agreement on borders and good neighbourly relations of June 1975, made on the basis of the Algiers agreement of March 1975, and to start dredging the Shatt al-Arab waterway, with the aim of restoring the principal navigation channel and, by doing so, placing their mutual boundary in the Shatt al-Arab at its 1975 position.

33. On 13 March, in Najaf, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani received the President of Iran (Islamic Republic of), the first sitting President of Iran (Islamic Republic of) to meet with the Grand Ayatollah. According to an official statement released on the Grand Ayatollah's website, the President briefed him on his discussions with Iraqi officials on strengthening bilateral ties between Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Iraq. The Grand Ayatollah welcomed all efforts to strengthen Iraq's relations with neighbouring countries based on respect of sovereignty. The Grand Ayatollah indicated the challenges that Iraq was facing, including with regard to countering corruption, improving public services and the State's control of weapons. He emphasised that regional and international policies in that sensitive region of the world should be balanced and moderate to avoid tragic outcomes for the peoples of those countries.

34. On 20 March, the Government of the United States confirmed the extension of Iraq's exemption from sanctions against Iran (Islamic Republic of) for another 90 days so as to enable energy imports critical to meeting Iraq's national demand.

35. On 24 March, the Prime Minister of Iraq arrived in Cairo to attend the tripartite Egyptian-Jordanian-Iraqi summit, at which he held discussions with the President of Egypt and the King of Jordan, Abdullah II. The leaders issued a joint statement stressing the importance of working with the leadership of the rest of the Arab world to combat terrorism and enhance economic cooperation and trade.

36. During a two-day official visit to Iran (Islamic Republic of), from 6 to 8 April, the Prime Minister of Iraq held a series of meetings with the President of Iran, the Supreme Leader of Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ali Khamenei, and the First Vice-President of Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ishaq Jahangiri, in Tehran. In a joint press conference with the President of Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Prime Minister of Iraq explained that the purpose of his visit was to follow up on implementation of agreements made during the visit of the President of Iran (Islamic Republic of) to Iraq in March and to achieve further cooperation in the political, economic and social fields. During his meeting with the First Vice-President of Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Prime Minister of Iraq affirmed that Iraq remained open to all neighbouring countries and rejected the "policy of axes" and "aggression".

III. Update on the activities of the Mission and the United Nations country team

A. Political activities

37. During the reporting period, my Special Representative held discussions with representatives of the federal Government on its priorities for long-term political, economic and social stability in Iraq, with a view to aligning the work of UNAMI with those priorities. My Special Representative also engaged with government

officials, representatives of political parties, parliamentarians, women's groups, civil society and religious and community leaders on issues relating to national and community reconciliation, water management and the hydrocarbon and revenue sharing laws. She reiterated the readiness of UNAMI to provide technical assistance and expertise and her strategic advice and good offices to bridge differences and promote confidence-building between communities.

38. As a first step, my Special Representative established a core group on water, bringing together UNAMI and country team expertise to engage with directorates of the Ministry of Water Resources on transboundary water management issues. A first meeting between the teams was held on 10 April, at which they discussed ways in which the United Nations could assist the Government of Iraq on the matter, paving the way for further cooperation.

39. In her engagement with government officials, my Special Representative emphasised that, for Iraq to maintain its hard-won stability, the Government must address the basic needs of Iraqi citizens without delay. In that regard, my Special Representative visited Basrah on 18 February to understand the views and concerns of local government officials, civil society and protestors regarding the status of the provision of services and economic development and to assess efforts to address the needs of the population. Following the visit, my Deputy Special Representative and resident and humanitarian coordinator and resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) visited Basrah on 28 March. She subsequently initiated the development of a United Nations strategy on the southern region to expand United Nations programme activities and communications in the southern governorates, including Basrah.

40. On 20 February, in Baghdad, my Special Representative visited a shelter for women who are survivors of gender-based violence, who shared their stories. My Special Representative underlined the urgent need to enact the national Anti-Domestic Violence Law to prevent and respond to domestic violence in Iraq and emphasized the readiness of UNAMI to provide the necessary technical and legal assistance.

41. Addressing the Sulaimani Forum, under the auspices of the American University of Iraq, on 6 March, my Special Representative underlined that, in order to revive public trust, three systemic concerns needed to be addressed, the establishment of viable and responsive State institutions, the immediate countering of pervasive corruption and resolute action against armed groups operating outside State control.

42. In the framework of the mandate of UNAMI to promote inclusiveness and the participation of women at all levels of decision-making, my Special Representative met with the 22 members of the newly established Women Advisory Group for Politics and National Reconciliation in Iraq during a three-day workshop held in Baghdad from 23 to 25 March. My Special Representative and the Women Advisory Group agreed to focus in 2019 on three thematic priority areas, namely, increasing the political participation of women in decision-making, establishing adequate national mechanisms to address issues concerning women and advocating for legislative reform to promote gender equality.

43. Both my Special Representative and Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance participated in various events marking International Women's Day, on 8 March, urging authorities, political parties and communities to expand and restructure to attract competent Iraqi women and to enable them to rise through their ranks. As women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions, my Special Representative reiterated her strong call for the meaningful and equal participation of women in such positions.

44. On the same day, a side event was organized at Headquarters by the Permanent Missions of Germany and Iraq to the United Nations, my Special Representative on sexual violence in conflict, the office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in Iraq and the Grace Initiative, on the margins of the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Under the theme of “Iraqi women at the helm of rebuilding, peace and stability”, participants discussed how the Government of Iraq, Member States and the United Nations could work towards the implementation of the national action plan pursuant to Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and the joint communiqué between the United Nations and the Government of Iraq on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence.

B. Electoral assistance

45. From 10 to 14 March, the Independent High Electoral Commission, with the support of UNAMI and UNDP, organized a planning workshop in Sulaymaniyah to define the Commission’s strategic direction for the next five years. In her opening remarks, my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance emphasised the importance of forward planning for elections. She suggested areas for consideration in the workshop discussions, including the integrity of the voter registry, the use of sound and innovative election methodologies, stakeholder outreach to enhance trust and confidence in electoral processes and the need for more inclusive participation, in particular by women, members of minority communities and those who have been displaced from their areas of origin.

46. On 20 February, the Electoral Assistance Office of UNAMI took part in public consultations organized by the Council of Representatives and the Independent High Electoral Commission on proposed amendments to the Political Parties Law of 2015. UNAMI provided suggestions on improving provisions relating to the registration of political parties, the membership of women therein, the public financing of political parties and the monitoring capacity of the political parties directorate. On 19 February, UNAMI also shared a set of recommendations with the Commission for amending the Governorate Council Electoral Law of 2018, with particular emphasis placed on provisions for quotas by gender, delimitation of electoral constituencies, internally displaced persons, absentee voting, and the holding of elections in Kirkuk. On 28 March, the parliamentary Legal Committee deliberated on draft amendments to electoral law, retaining the provision for holding district elections simultaneously with governorate elections, which the Commission has warned would require technical operations that could further delay the governorate elections.

47. The Independent High Electoral Commission has proposed to hold the Governorate Council elections on 16 November 2019, subject to meeting several prerequisites, including the finalization of the amendments to electoral law, which are still being deliberated by the parliament. The election date has thus remained a topic of discussion within the Commission and the Council of Ministers and among members of the Council of Representatives, with several suggestions having been mentioned but with no consensus to date. The Commission is in favour of holding elections in February 2020, enabling registration and distribution of biometric voter cards to 11 million eligible voters, which represents 47 per cent of Iraqi voters. February is also the time of the year when schools are closed for holidays, allowing the Commission to use school buildings as polling centres without jeopardizing the education process. UNAMI continues to work with the Commission in developing the operational plan for the Governorate Council elections and in reviewing electoral procedures and methodologies.

48. On 17 February, the Kurdistan Region Independent High Electoral Commission completed a UNAMI-supported post-electoral review of the recent Kurdistan Region parliamentary elections. The Commission requested further technical assistance from the United Nations to address the weaknesses identified in the review, including on electoral legal reform, voter registration, results and data management, electoral procedures and capacity-building training for electoral officials, which are all crucial elements for improving the conduct of subsequent elections. The tenure of the Board of Commissioners of the Commission is set to expire in 2019, with the Kurdistan Regional Parliament mandated to initiate the selection process for the new commission members.

C. Human rights and rule of law developments and activities

49. From 14 February to 11 April, the Human Rights Office of UNAMI documented a total of 152 civilian casualties, comprising 60 civilians including 2 women, killed and 92 wounded, of which 2 were women. The number is significantly lower than during the same period in 2018, when 429 civilian casualties were recorded, 146 killed and 283 wounded. The leading causes of civilian casualties were improvised explosive devices and small arms fire, with Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninawa, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil and Salah al-Din as the most affected governorates.

50. On 19 February, the Higher Judicial Council of Iraq instructed senior court officials to facilitate the observation by UNAMI of trials and investigative hearings throughout Iraq, including in juvenile courts. UNAMI is currently undertaking a systematic programme of trial observation to promote more consistent adherence to due process and fair trial guarantees in accordance with Iraq's international human rights obligations.

51. During the reporting period, UNAMI observed more than 50 trials and investigative hearings of alleged ISIL defendants, raising concerns over the widespread lack of access to legal counsel, the frequent reliance upon confession evidence, with some defendants alleging that the confessions were extracted under duress, and the use of evidence from anonymous informants. UNAMI also noted that the courts' ongoing practice of prosecuting defendants for ISIL membership or association under the Anti-Terrorism Law, rather than seeking to hold them to account for specific acts involving grave violations of human rights, may not sufficiently address the needs of victims or their families for justice and accountability.

52. On 11 March, the parliamentary Women and Children Committee was formally separated from the Human Rights Committee, after a vote by the Council of Representatives. Following the decision to establish a joint committee in January 2019, UNAMI had advocated with relevant Members of the parliament to reconstitute the committees as separate entities, in line with previous practice. UNAMI received reports of returns of Iraqi citizens from the Syrian Arab Republic to Iraq, including members of minority communities. The Department of Yazidi Affairs of the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs of the Kurdistan Region confirmed that 51 Yazidis, comprising 10 women and 41 children, had returned from the Syrian Arab Republic to Dahuk City, Dahuk Governorate, between 10 February and 11 March, and that 35 of them were unaccompanied children. The returnees have been united with their relatives in camps for internally displaced persons in Dahuk Governorate.

53. The number of members from the Yazidi community who are unaccounted for remains high. According to the data maintained by the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs of the Kurdistan Regional Government, in Erbil, 91 missing members of the Yazidi community were found or freed from ISIL captivity since the

beginning of 2019. As at 4 April 2019, a total of 2,995 Yazidis (1,379 women and 1,616 men) remained in ISIL captivity or missing.

54. In the Kurdistan region, UNAMI documented several incidents of arbitrary restriction of access for the media, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including the denial of permission for protests that criticized the Kurdistan Regional Government. Media workers reported interference from security personnel while trying to cover political protests and arrests and seizure of their technical equipment.

55. With support from film and theatre representatives in Baghdad, Basrah, Erbil and Mosul, UNAMI held a national short film festival and screened shortlisted films in Baghdad, from 3 to 5 March. The short films highlighted contemporary challenges faced by minority groups in Iraq and wider human rights issues, including suppression by ISIL of the right to culture, the impact of armed conflict on human rights, obstacles faced by women and children, internally displaced persons with perceived affiliations to ISIL, domestic violence, child marriage, access to education and restrictions on women and girls exercising their rights.

56. In line with its continuing efforts to support the Government in fulfilling its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in February 2019, UNAMI conducted a series of advocacy meetings with government authorities, in conjunction with civil society organizations and representatives of minority communities, encouraging them to implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, including ensuring that all members of the Roma community are granted unified official identity documents without discrimination. Following those advocacy efforts, in late February 2019, the Ministry of the Interior instructed all national identity directorates to issue unified identity documents to Roma in accordance with the Committee's recommendations, thereby facilitating their full and equal access to education, health care and other basic services provided by the Government.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

57. The United Nations country team continued to support emergency response, immediate stabilization programmes, recovery, reconstruction and development. Although the focus of the United Nations and the Government of Iraq is shifting towards recovery and development interventions, humanitarian needs and protection concerns remain.

58. Under the humanitarian response plan for 2019, \$701 million is sought to help 94 partners to implement projects throughout Iraq, targeting 1.75 million people in need, including internally displaced persons who are in camps and those not in camps, returnees and vulnerable host communities. Operations are organized under three strategic objectives, namely, post-conflict transition towards durable solutions, ensuring the centrality of protection and strengthening contingency planning and preparedness.

59. Since the defeat of ISIL, more than 4 million internally displaced persons have returned to their places of origin. However, according to the International Organization for Migration, as at 28 March, approximately 1.75 million people remain internally displaced in Iraq in approximately 3,200 locations across 104 districts. More than half have been displaced for longer than three years. Those data also indicate that 50 per cent of all internally displaced persons come from five districts in Ninawa and Anbar. Assessing why those internally displaced persons in protracted displacement are not returning to their areas of origin, and the impact of that fact on options for durable solutions, is a priority in 2019.

60. During the reporting period, humanitarian actors in Iraq experienced multiple access constraints, primarily in Ninawa and Kirkuk. Persistent ad hoc checkpoints erected by numerous so-called “security actors” along main routes in the north of the country impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, some provincial or security authorities reportedly refused to accept access letters issued by the federal Government. As a result, activities by the United Nations and non-governmental organizations have been delayed and even suspended in some areas, because humanitarian actors are unable to comply with numerous requests for additional authorizations from local or regional actors. The United Nations is engaging at the highest political levels to find a solution and is also preparing quarterly access maps to track such incidents.

61. The situation of persons with perceived affiliations to extremist groups continues to be a concern for the humanitarian community. Those residing in camps for internally displaced persons experience restrictions on movement, harassment by fellow camp residents and security actors, denial of humanitarian assistance and of access to acquire civil documentation, which is needed for numerous administrative processes, including for gaining access to health care and education.

62. There are persistent reports of sexual exploitation and sexual violence perpetrated against women with perceived ties to ISIL. The United Nations is advocating such women be afforded every protection guaranteed to them by international humanitarian and human rights laws, including the principle of distinction. The humanitarian country team will continue taking steps to strengthen coordination and collaboration among the members of the network for protection against sexual exploitation and abuse to better enable safe and accessible reporting, accountability and the conduct of investigations and ensure the quality of victim assistance.

63. The UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilization continued to scale up its housing programme in western Mosul, with more than 2,500 houses rehabilitated of the 15,000 total for which funding has been received; once completed, an estimated 90,000 people will be able to return home. The Facility also expanded the housing works to western Anbar, Bayji and Batnay in the Ninawa plains.

64. UNAMI, UNDP and the Government advanced discussions on cost-sharing for stabilization. At the Stabilization task force meeting held on 17 February, the Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, Mahdi al-Alaq, committed 46 billion Iraqi dinars (approximately \$38.3 million) to UNDP. Thereafter, the legal directorate of the secretariat of the Council of Ministers authorized the budget for the cost-sharing agreement. The Facility still remains critically underfunded, however, with an approximate \$325 million funding gap. The locations where assistance is required most urgently are Mosul, western Anbar, Bayji, Hawijah and western Ninawa.

65. The United Nations continued to support longer-term recovery and reconstruction efforts. More than one year after the International Conference on the Reconstruction of Iraq, the recovery and resilience programme is operational in all 18 Iraqi provinces. A multi-partner trust fund has been established in collaboration with the UNDP Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office to underpin the programme, and efforts to mobilize resources for the trust fund are under way. To date, over \$350 million has been mobilized, although most of the contributions have been made on a direct project funding basis rather than through the trust fund.

66. The Government moved forward on recovery, reconstruction and development coordination, convening a series of meetings leading up to an Executive Committee meeting with key partners, including the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union, on 11 March, at which progress on commitments from the

International Conference on the Reconstruction of Iraq and recovery and reconstruction initiatives were discussed.

67. Also on 11 March, the Ministry of Planning and the secretariat of the Council of Ministers, together with United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), launched the national platform for reconstruction and development, which provides up-to-date information on reconstruction and development projects. By sharing project information, the platform reduces duplication and increases coordination for better planning and monitoring. Open to the public and connected to social media, the platform also allows the Government to receive feedback from citizens on reconstruction and development projects, helping to build trust between the Government of Iraq and its people.

68. On 6 March, in further recognition of the critical role of a solid evidence base in the planning and implementation of the recovery of Iraq, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, in close partnership with the Ministries of Planning of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, the Central Statistics Organization and the Statistics Office of the Kurdistan Regional, launched an assessment of the labour market and a skills analysis, covering eight sectors. The findings will inform the development of new competency-based curricula in the areas of agriculture, construction and tourism, for which initial pilot training programmes were conducted in February and March.

69. The United Nations Mine Action Service continued to support the Government of Iraq to increase the coordination and efficiency of explosive hazard management, notably in the clearance of residential areas. On 14 February, the Service convened an explosive hazard clearance workshop with several government agencies to enhance coordination and ensure timely operational response from mine action implementers. The Service also hosted a workshop on clearance of residential areas with participants from the Government, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and improvised explosive device-clearance operators and the donor community to discuss lessons learned from a recent pilot project in western Mosul.

70. As Iraq rebuilds its health system, the World Health Organization (WHO) is increasing the Government's capacity for disease control and surveillance in all governorates, ensuring that timely preventive actions are taken to save lives. In that connection, a national immunization campaign against measles was conducted in March, focusing on 9 governorates with low immunization coverage. The vaccination was targeted at a population of more than 2.5 million children from 9 to 59 months of age. Of those, approximately 90 per cent have been reached. In addition, during the period under review, WHO technical teams supported departments in the Ministry of Health in reviewing and prioritizing public health programmes in four governorates, with a focus on strengthening tuberculosis care and control services and the capacity of public health laboratories.

E. Security and operational issues

71. UNAMI continued to deploy significant security risk mitigation measures to provide adequate safety and security to its entities while enabling the delivery of their programme activities in a diverse and fluid security environment. The United Nations maintains close coordination with the Government of Iraq for security support, which is fundamental for its continued presence and operations across the country.

72. The United Nations Department of Safety and Security in Iraq supported an average of 50 daily field missions (1,230 in total, in February) across the country, ranging from medium to high risk, to facilitate the increasing post-conflict

reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts and protect them against the prevailing ISIL and other security threats and hostilities.

73. Preparations continued for the establishment of a permanent UNAMI presence in Mosul, while awaiting the official approval of the Government of Iraq. UNAMI also continued to extend logistics and administrative support to the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Refurbishment of the building that will serve as its headquarters in Baghdad is expected to be completed soon and will be occupied immediately thereafter.

74. As part of my management reform initiative, I have delegated authority to my Special Representative for the four functional areas, namely, human resources, procurement, property management and finance and budget, to enable UNAMI to perform more efficiently and to ensure full, uninterrupted operational capacity within the Mission.

75. Under the leadership of my Special Representative, UNAMI completed implementation of the recommendations of the independent external review conducted in November 2017, which included, inter alia, reviewing and strengthening UNAMI and country team collaboration and coordination, the Mission's mechanisms for setting strategic priorities and strategies and its performance measurement and reporting. The United Nations security architecture and posture for Iraq is being updated in line with the recommendations of the integrated security assessment mission conducted in October 2018.

IV. Observations

76. Iraq is at a critical juncture in its recovery process. National ownership, strong political will and leadership, as well as engagement with all Iraqi communities, will be necessary for building a more stable and prosperous Iraq.

77. This requires, first and foremost, the completion of the government formation process. All stakeholders must overcome political infighting and fill the remaining vacant government positions without further delay. I strongly urge the Government to appoint women and ensure inclusive and effective governance.

78. The strengthening of the State institutions of Iraq, enabling the Government to accelerate the implementation of its programme for the period 2018–2022 aimed at the improvement of basic services and promoting reconstruction and economic development throughout Iraq should be addressed as a matter of priority.

79. I commend the efforts of Prime Minister Abdal-Mahdi to fight corruption through the launch of a comprehensive national anti-corruption strategy aimed at achieving greater transparency. Achieving concrete results will be crucial to reviving public trust.

80. I urge all parties in the Kurdistan Region to work together closely and to conclude the formation of an inclusive government as soon as possible in order to address the challenges faced by the region and to resolve all outstanding issues with Baghdad through dialogue.

81. Despite some positive steps in Baghdad-Erbil relations, several underlying issues remain unresolved and require bold decisions by both sides, including the enactment of a robust national hydrocarbon law, the implementation of relevant provisions in the Constitution of Iraq of 2005, and the adoption of a revenue-sharing law. Both the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government should

continue to meet their respective commitments following the adoption of the 2019 Federal Budget Law.

82. The federal Government's sustained and active outreach to strengthen its relations with neighbouring countries based on mutual political, economic and security interests will help to advance Iraq's regional positioning. With that in mind, I encourage Iraq and its neighbours to promote the development of good neighbourly relations based on the fundamental principles of respect for the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of States.

83. The air strikes in northern Iraq are of concern. I reiterate my call upon the Governments of Iraq and Turkey to intensify efforts to resolve their differences through constructive dialogue.

84. It is encouraging that preparations for holding the previously delayed governorate council elections are under way. Amendments to the Governorate Council Electoral Law must be passed in a timely manner. It is important that the elections are well prepared and conducted transparently and in accordance with an agreed timetable, in order to address the legitimate aspirations of the people of Iraq for more accountable governance and delivery of services at the local level. UNAMI is providing support to Iraq's electoral authorities in accordance with its mandate.

85. I welcome the cooperation of the Higher Judicial Council in facilitating the Mission's programme of trial observation, including observation of trials and investigative hearings of alleged ISIL defendants. It is incumbent upon the Government and the judicial authorities to uphold the relevant international guarantees of fair trial and due process.

86. The people of Iraq have been among the primary victims of ISIL. In that regard, I call upon the international community to support the Government of Iraq in addressing the issue of large numbers of ISIL fighters and families returning to Iraq and to pay particular attention to the special needs of the large number of women and children returnees. Member States must exercise their responsibilities with regard to the prosecution, rehabilitation and/or reintegration of their respective nationals. Any limitations to the right of citizens to return to their country of origin must be lawful, pursuant to a legitimate aim and necessary and proportionate to the achievement of that aim.

87. While more than 4 million internally displaced persons have returned to their places of origin, it is a matter of concern that more than 1.75 million remain internally displaced. More than half of them will soon enter their fifth year of displacement, with almost 500,000 remaining in camp settings. Although the resilience of Iraq's internally displaced communities has been remarkable, many people have limited access to livelihood options or social protection programmes and remain dependent upon humanitarian aid. The majority of those who are currently displaced have indicated that they have no intention to return to their areas of origin within the coming year. The lack of social cohesion, the insecurity, the damaged or destroyed houses and the lack of employment opportunities are reported to be the main obstacles to their return.

88. I urge the Government of Iraq to facilitate the continued voluntary, safe and dignified return of members of internally displaced communities to their places of origin and to ensure that all vulnerable communities receive the assistance they need and to which they are entitled. Dedicated support is required for internally displaced children who face interruption in their education owing to a lack of resources, teaching staff and formal structures for schooling. Some children are unable to acquire access to education because they lack civil documentation. I encourage the Government to prioritize funding to support education for all of Iraq's school-age

children and to establish expedited procedures for the issuance of birth certificates and other necessary documents. I call upon the international community to continue to provide strong support for Iraq's humanitarian needs, including through contributions to Iraq's humanitarian response plan for 2019.

89. It is encouraging that the Government and international partners, with the support of the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union, continue to strengthen their strategic partnership through the Executive Committee for Recovery, Reconstruction and Development. In support of the Executive Committee, and under the joint leadership of my Deputy Special Representative and the World Bank country manager, the donor community has also strengthened its coordination mechanisms through the establishment of a renewed development partners forum.

90. Notwithstanding the fact that there has been progress on funding actions under the Iraq recovery and resilience programme, with 53 projects receiving approximately \$350 million, or 70 per cent of the required funding for the first year, more immediate support is needed for the Funding Facility for Stabilization, which continues to have a \$335 million funding gap in 2019. Without strong, sustained support from the international community, including additional funding for critical stabilization needs, Iraq will continue to face a crisis of protracted, large-scale displacement and risks a relapse into conflict. The international community must do its utmost to prevent such a scenario.

91. In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to my Special Representative for Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and the staff of the United Nations in Iraq for their continued efforts and dedication to the implementation of the Organization's mandate under challenging circumstances.
