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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2522 \(2020\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three months on progress made towards fulfilling the mandate 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 11 August 2020 ([S/2020/792](#)) and the briefing to the Security Council by the Special Representative for Iraq and Head of UNAMI on 26 August.

II. Summary of key political developments

A. Political situation

2. Preparations for early elections, a popular demand and the Government's priority, have been the focus of political activities. On 31 July, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, announced that parliamentary elections would be held on 6 June 2021. The next day, the Independent High Electoral Commission issued a statement expressing its readiness to hold elections in 2021, provided that four conditions were met: (a) the finalization and publication of the electoral law and the technical annexes thereto; (b) agreement on the membership of the Federal Supreme Court, which is necessary for the certification of electoral results; (c) the provision of the necessary budget, security and technical support by the Government; and (d) United Nations and international "support and monitoring".

3. The President of Iraq, Barham Salih, in a statement on 4 August, welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement and indicated that he would approve any request from the Prime Minister to dissolve parliament, which he would subsequently submit to the Council of Representatives for a vote. He noted that elections would be held within two months of the dissolution vote, in accordance with article 64 of the Constitution. The Government, the Independent High Electoral Commission, the judiciary, parliamentarians, political blocs and others have since been preparing the ground for early elections.

4. On 13 August, the Prime Minister met the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission to discuss technical preparations. He



affirmed the Government's determination to hold free, fair and credible elections, urged the Commission to intensify its preparations, and reiterated that his Government would employ all its capacities to hold elections on the set date. He also requested that all ministries and departments facilitate the Commission's work.

5. On 24 August, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mohammed al-Halbousi, and other parliamentarians also met with members of the Independent High Electoral Commission and its electoral security committee. During a review of the Commission's electoral preparations, the Speaker affirmed the Council of Representatives support for the work of the Commission and underlined the need to preserve the Commission's independence in order to restore confidence in the electoral process.

6. The Council of Representatives reconvened on 5 September, the first parliamentary session since 24 June. The parliamentary legal committee presented its latest report on the finalization of the technical annexes to the electoral law. It reported that the delineation of constituencies remained unresolved, noting that most political blocs had not provided their final positions. During that session, the Council of Representatives concluded the first reading of the draft amendment to the Federal Supreme Court law, which, if passed, would allow the Court to reach a quorum. A second reading of the law was completed during the session on 21 September.

7. The session of the Council of Representatives on 26 September was set aside for completing the electoral legislative annexes. However, parliamentarians were unable to reach consensus on the delineation of constituencies and the annexes remain under consideration in the Council of Representatives.

8. The Government continued to discuss measures to address the current economic situation, which has been worsened by the impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). During the parliamentary session on 5 September, the Speaker noted that the Council of Ministers had missed the 60-day deadline to submit an economic reform programme, a requirement of the law on domestic and external borrowing ratified on 25 June. The Speaker requested the General Secretariat of the Council of Representatives to invite the Ministers of Finance and Planning to appear in parliament to answer questions on the matter.

9. The economic reform programme was discussed at a meeting convened on 6 September by the Prime Minister and the Speaker and attended by ministers, deputies and advisers. Participants also discussed the Government's general budget for 2020, cooperation between legislative and executive authorities on the national economy and the federal budget for 2021. The Ministers of Finance and Planning attended the session of the Council of Representatives on 8 September to address questions about the economic reform programme. The Government formally adopted the White Paper for economic reforms on 13 October.

10. At a special session on 14 September, the Council of Ministers approved a draft 2020 federal budget law to organize the spending process and secure the necessary expenditures for the remaining three months of the fiscal year. The draft was submitted to the Council of Representatives for adoption on 21 September, but subsequently recalled for further revision.

11. The Government renewed its commitment to empower women and advance their political, economic and social participation. On 1 October, the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced Government plans to adopt a national development plan for women, which would complement existing legislation to strengthen women's participation in senior decision-making roles.

12. The Government made progress on its commitment to compensate victims of the violence perpetrated against demonstrators since October 2019. On 11 August, the

Council of Ministers adopted a decision to provide medical treatment to injured protesters. It further granted protest victims, to be identified by the Government, certain rights and privileges available under the Martyrs' Foundation law (2009). During a speech on 30 August, on the occasion of the Ashura' religious festival, the Prime Minister announced that the Government had completed the first phase of its investigation by compiling a list of martyrs, had begun to review the list of the wounded, and had started to make compensation payments.

13. Protests continued in central and southern governorates. Protesters called for broad reforms, accountability for perpetrators of protest-related violence, job creation and the improvement of public services. Protests escalated in Basrah and Dhi Qar following violence against activists, including targeted killings. On 16 August, clashes broke out with the security forces as protesters gathered in front of the Governor's residence in Basrah to demand justice for an activist assassinated on 14 August. Following the assassination of a woman activist on 19 August, demonstrators demanded the removal of the Governor and set fire to the local office of the Council of Representatives.

14. In response to the events on 14 and 16 August, the Prime Minister dismissed Basrah's Director of National Security and its police chief on 17 August. He then visited Basrah on 22 August to meet the family of the woman activist killed on 19 August. While there, he publicly promised to hold accountable those responsible for the killing of activists. Separately, on 3 September, the Ministry of Interior issued an order to disband the Law and Order Forces command, created in October 2019 to protect major social gatherings, and transferred its personnel to the Baghdad police department. This followed the Prime Minister's announcement of a re-evaluation of the command, after reports of illegal activity by its members in Baghdad.

15. Meanwhile, in Dhi Qar Governorate, the Security Media Cell of the Office of the Prime Minister reported that an explosive device had detonated at the sit-in site in Al-Haboubi Square in Nasiriyah on 21 August. The next day, protesters in Nasiriyah set fire to offices of Kata'ib Hizbullah and the local headquarters of several political parties.

16. In Sulaymaniyah on 12 and 22 August, protesters called for the immediate dissolution of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the establishment of an interim authority, early elections and the appointment of non-partisan candidates in judicial and electoral institutions. During these demonstrations, the Halabjah municipality headquarters was set on fire. In Dahuk Governorate, a protest took place on 19 August against the opening of the Ibrahim Khalil border crossing with Turkey to Turkish vehicles. On 27 September, protesters in Sulaymaniyah demanded the payment of civil service salaries.

17. As a measure to counter corruption, the Prime Minister issued an executive order on 27 August to form a permanent committee to investigate "corruption and major crimes". The order clarified the authority and staffing of the committee and noted that the Counter-Terrorism Service "shall implement the decisions issued by investigation judges or the courts on the cases related to the work of this committee in accordance with the law". Arrests have since been made under warrants issued by the committee. In addition, the Prime Minister has reported on an agreement with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) for the arrest of several "senior corrupt officials" living outside Iraq.

18. The Prime Minister also highlighted the threat of unauthorized weapons and the need to control them as part of efforts to restore State authority, another government priority. During a visit on 3 September to the Joint Operations Command, the Prime Minister instructed security leaders to address the issue. On 8 September, the spokesperson of the Commander-in-Chief reported that operations launched in

Baghdad, Basrah and Maysan Governorates had led to the arrest of wanted persons and the confiscation of unauthorized weapons.

19. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect daily life in Iraq and remained a focus of Government activity, directed and coordinated by the High Committee for Health and National Safety, chaired by the Prime Minister. On 15 August, the Committee extended the partial curfew to seven days a week, restricted movements between governorates and banned all tourist travel to Iraq, although airports remained open to commercial passenger flights. On 7 September, the Committee adopted new health measures that included increasing staff attendance in government institutions to 50 per cent, and the reopening of all land border crossings for commercial purposes. It also granted the Independent High Electoral Commission permission to open voter registration centres and to exempt its staff from curfew regulations.

B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil

20. The federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government agreed on an interim solution for budget transfers. A long-term agreement on resource- and revenue-sharing remains pending, however. After a telephone discussion on 15 August with the Kurdistan Region Prime Minister, Masrour Barzani, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Mr. Al-Kadhimi, committed to transfer 320 billion Iraqi dinar (approximately \$268 million) to the Region for each of the months of August, September and October. By early October, the only confirmed transfer had taken place on 17 August.

21. Several high-level reciprocal political visits followed. On 2 September, the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, travelled to Baghdad to meet the President of Iraq, the Prime Minister of Iraq and the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, and other Iraqi political leaders. Discussions focused on finding “a constitutional solution” to differences between Baghdad and Erbil.

22. Building on four preceding visits to Baghdad between May and June, on 8 September, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Qubad Talabani, led a delegation to Baghdad to continue discussions with federal authorities. While there, he met with the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker and the Ministers of Finance and Oil.

23. On 10 September, the Prime Minister of Iraq travelled to Erbil, where he met with the President and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. On 11 September, the Prime Minister of Iraq travelled on to Sulaymaniyah, where he met political leaders as well as the President of Iraq. Discussions focused on border management, resource- and revenue-sharing, federal budget allocations to the Kurdistan Regional Government, and cooperation between Iraqi armed forces and the Peshmerga. The Prime Minister also visited the official border crossings with Turkey in Dahuk and Sulaymaniyah Governorates.

24. The Speaker travelled to Sulaymaniyah and Erbil on 3 and 6 September, respectively, for meetings with the leaders of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Discussions focused on the national parliamentary elections. Other topics discussed included the importance of continued dialogue between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, the amendment to the Federal Supreme Court law, and the need to unite political forces to address the ongoing crisis.

25. On 9 October, the Prime Minister announced an agreement between the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments on administrative, service and security matters

for the Sinjar district in Ninawa Governorate. The Prime Minister expressed optimism that the agreement would accelerate the return of internally displaced persons to Sinjar and constituted a first step towards the resolution of outstanding issues in the ethnically diverse district. He pledged that the federal Government, in coordination with the Kurdistan Regional Government, would implement the agreement in cooperation with the people of Sinjar. On the same day, the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq welcomed the agreement, which he described as “a step in the right direction to restore and strengthen trust between Baghdad and Erbil”. He also expressed his hope that the agreement would be followed by the resolution of all other pending issues between the two sides, the peaceful return of Yazidis, the restoration of stability and the start of reconstruction efforts.

C. Security situation

26. Attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) continued, primarily in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates. In response, the Iraqi security forces conducted counter-terrorism operations. On 23 August, the international counter-ISIL coalition completed the handover of Camp Taji to the Iraqi security forces, the eighth transfer of a coalition facility since March 2020. A coalition statement affirmed that the handover resulted from the success of the Iraqi security forces campaign against ISIL and was part of a “plan coordinated with the Government of Iraq”. General Kenneth McKenzie, commander of the United States Central Command, later announced during a visit to Iraq on 9 September that the United States presence in the country would be reduced from 5,200 to 3,000 troops. He added that the new footprint would allow the continuation of advice and assistance to Iraq in fighting ISIL remnants, and was “due to our confidence in the Iraqi Security Forces’ increased ability to operate independently”.

27. Between 11 August and 2 October, the Security Media Cell reported 17 improvised explosive device attacks in the governorates of Babil, Baghdad, Dhi Qar, Qadisiyah and Salah al-Din, targeting logistic and supply transport convoys contracted by the international counter-ISIL coalition. Two Iraqis died and seven more were wounded in these attacks. On 26 August, an improvised explosive device exploded close to a United Nations vehicle travelling along the Mosul-Erbil road in Ninawa Governorate, injuring one World Food Programme (WFP) staff member. The Iraqi authorities launched an investigation into the incident. On 15 September, a British diplomatic vehicle was struck by an improvised explosive device in Baghdad. On 18 September, an improvised explosive device damaged the American Institute for English Learning in Najaf. Meanwhile, on 30 September, the Security Media Cell reported the detonation of an improvised explosive device, striking a civilian vehicle on the road to Baghdad International Airport with no reported casualties.

28. On 11, 16, 27 and 29 August, and 14, 16 and 22 September, the Security Media Cell reported that rockets had landed in the former International Zone, while a rocket landed close to the Zone on 5 October. It also reported rocket attacks in the vicinity of Baghdad International Airport on 14, 18 and 30 August, and 6, 10, 20 and 28 September. The Security Media Cell reported that the attack on 28 September struck a house, killing two women and three children, and injuring two children. On 13 August, the Security Media Cell reported that three rockets had struck Balad airbase, Salah al-Din Governorate, where United States and Iraqi troops are co-located, while on 15 August it reported that two rockets had struck Camp Taji. In addition, on 30 September, according to a statement by the Kurdistan Regional Presidency, six rockets landed in the vicinity of Erbil International Airport, with no casualties. Claims of responsibility for several rocket and improvised explosive device attacks were

made by various armed groups. Iraqi political leaders publicly condemned the attacks and called on the Government to take action to hold the perpetrators accountable.

29. On 30 September, the Prime Minister received a delegation of ambassadors and chargés d'affaires from 25 countries to discuss the security of diplomatic premises in Iraq. A joint statement from the international representatives expressed "deep concern at the rise in the number and sophistication of attacks against diplomatic premises in Iraq" and welcomed the action taken by the Government. In a telephone conversation on 2 October with the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Michael Pompeo, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Fuad Hussein, reported that the Government of Iraq had taken measures to protect the International Zone and Baghdad International Airport. The Minister also noted that the conversation had focused on bilateral relations and on a reported decision by the United States to withdraw its Embassy from Baghdad.

30. The Ministry of National Defence of Turkey reported military activity throughout the reporting period against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) positions in northern Iraq. On 11 August, the Iraqi Security Media Cell reported that a Turkish drone targeted a military vehicle in the Sidakan area, northern Erbil Governorate, resulting in the deaths of two senior Iraqi military officers and their driver. In a letter dated 26 October addressed to the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations referred to the military operation on 11 August in the Sidakan area of Erbil and noted that "Turkey targeted the identified PKK elements in that area", adding that "it had no information about the presence of 'Iraqi border guards' who allegedly lost their lives at the operation site".

31. On 11 August, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement noting that Iraq "strongly condemns" the attack as "a violation of the sovereignty and sanctity of [Iraq]" and the "international charters and laws that regulate relations between countries". Statements issued by the spokespersons of the Presidency and the Commander-in-Chief also condemned the attack, while the statement from the Presidency also called for an "immediate cessation of such aggressions ... and opening dialogue to resolve the border problems between the two neighbouring countries".

32. On 12 August, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq reported that the Ambassador of Turkey to Iraq had been summoned to the Ministry and had received a letter of protest. On the same day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey affirmed in a statement that "as long as the PKK's presence in Iraq continues to be tolerated", Turkey was "determined to take necessary measures to safeguard its borders".

33. In a letter dated 2 September, addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2020/885), the Government of Turkey stated that "Turkey is obliged to take appropriate measures against terrorist threats to its security emanating from Iraq". Referring to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Iraq at the Security Council meeting held on 26 August 2020, the letter noted that: "Any criticism towards Turkey for exercising its inherent right of self-defence as outlined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, and acting within the context of responsibility attributed by relevant Security Council resolutions to States Members of the United Nations in the fight against terrorism is unacceptable".

34. In identical letters dated 29 October, addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2020/1065), the Government of Iraq transmitted "a summary of violations of Iraqi territory and airspace committed by Turkey between 13 July and 29 September 2020". The letters state that "these violations of the sovereignty of Iraq by Turkey are contrary to the principles of good-neighbourliness and constitute a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law". In the letters,

the Government of Iraq also “reiterates its willingness to cooperate with ... Turkey with a view to finding common ground and arriving at appropriate solutions that will bring an end to these repeated violations”.

D. Regional and international developments

35. Iraq continued its efforts to establish stronger ties with its regional and strategic partners and to diversify its economic partnerships. The Prime Minister visited Washington, D.C., between 19 and 21 August. In the joint statement following their meeting on 20 August, the Prime Minister, Mr. Al-Kadhimi, and the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, reaffirmed their commitment to “build a prosperous and stable Iraq”, that “serves as a stabilizing force for the Middle East”. During the visit, the Prime Minister also met with the United States Secretary of State and other senior officials.

36. In parallel, on 19 August, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq and the United States Secretary of State convened the second meeting of the two countries’ Strategic Dialogue Higher Coordination Committee. A subsequent joint statement affirmed a mutual commitment to “a robust and productive bilateral relationship”. In addition, the United States announced \$204 million in humanitarian assistance to Iraq and \$10 million for the UNAMI electoral support programme.

37. On 25 August, the Prime Minister participated in a third tripartite summit, in Amman, with the President of Egypt and the King of Jordan. A joint communiqué released after the summit outlined the intention to deepen trilateral “coordination, cooperation and strategic integration ... on the economic, development, political, security, cultural and other levels”.

38. On 4 and 5 September, the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, met in Ankara with the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. The resolution of tensions in the border area, economic cooperation and the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were among the topics discussed.

39. Between 15 and 19 September, the Minister for Foreign Affairs travelled to Berlin, Brussels and Paris for meetings with representatives from the host States and international organizations to discuss efforts to achieve political stability and economic development.

40. The Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mr. al-Halbousi, visited Kuwait on 16 and 17 September, where he met the Speaker of the Kuwaiti Parliament, Marzouq al-Ghanim; the Prime Minister, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Sabah, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah. Mr. al-Halbousi affirmed the Government’s commitment to resolve the file on Kuwaiti and third-country nationals pursuant to Security Council resolution [2107 \(2013\)](#).

41. The President of France, Emmanuel Macron, paid his first official visit to Iraq on 2 September. He met separately with the President of Iraq, the Prime Minister of Iraq and the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and other political leaders in Baghdad. The parties pledged to enhance cooperation in several fields, including security, politics, health and energy, and reaffirmed their commitment to Iraqi sovereignty.

42. On 27 August, the Minister of Defence of France, Florence Parly, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, travelled separately to Iraq. On 29 September, the Minister of Defence of Italy, Lorenzo Guerini, visited the country.

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

A. Political activities

43. The Special Representative engaged extensively with the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker, parliamentarians, political party leaders, the Independent High Electoral Commission and others on preparations for early elections. In her meetings, she underlined the readiness of the United Nations to provide support and technical assistance to Iraq's electoral authorities. She also emphasized that it was the responsibility of the Government, parliament, political parties and other stakeholders to implement the necessary measures for the conduct of free, fair and credible early elections aimed at restoring public trust in the electoral process. The Special Representative furthermore highlighted the necessary prerequisites for electoral preparations to progress, which include the enactment of the electoral law and the technical annexes thereto, the finalization of the Federal Supreme Court law, voter registration and budget allocation.

44. On 13 September, the Special Representative met with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. He stated that early elections should be conducted without delay, with integrity and transparency, guided by a fair and just electoral law, and independently of partisan interests. He further underlined that elections should be "supervised and monitored" in coordination with UNAMI. The Grand Ayatollah's statement was welcomed by political leaders in Iraq, who affirmed their commitment to his guidance.

45. In response to an increased number of killings and attacks on activists and human rights defenders by unidentified armed assailants, the Special Representative issued statements condemning the killings and urging the Government of Iraq to increase its efforts to hold the perpetrators accountable and prevent the recurrence of such attacks and intimidation against activists. On the occasion of the issuance on 27 August of a special report on human rights violations and abuses in the context of demonstrations in Iraq, from October 2019 to April 2020, by UNAMI and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Special Representative reiterated the need for enhanced justice and accountability measures to rebuild public trust. In meetings with government officials, she continued to highlight the importance of bringing all weapons under the control of the State.

46. Addressing the ongoing attacks against diplomatic missions and convoys, the Special Representative engaged with a broad spectrum of actors and authorities, emphasizing that such acts undermine Iraqi interests, and called for de-escalation and resolution through constructive dialogue.

47. The Special Representative made visits to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where she met separately with the President, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and a leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, as well as others. In her meetings, she discussed electoral preparations, as well as outstanding issues between the federal Government and Kurdistan Regional Government, including the need to reach a long-term agreement on resource- and revenue-sharing, approve the federal budget and resolve local tensions in Kirkuk and Sinjar. On 9 October, the Special Representative attended the signing of the Sinjar agreement between the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments, in Baghdad. The Special Representative issued a press release welcoming the accord as a "first and important step in the right direction" that would "help displaced people return to their homes, accelerate reconstruction and improve public service delivery". She also emphasized continued United Nations support to

help normalize the situation in Sinjar. Prior to the announcement, the Special Representative actively engaged the authorities in Baghdad and Erbil, urging them to expedite an agreement on Sinjar and help rebuild the community through the provision of services, security structures and a unified administration.

48. On 19 September, the Special Representative took part in the twelfth annual Islamic conference on countering violence against women, organized by the Al-Hakim International Foundation and attended by the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker. During the event, my Special Representative commended the Government's efforts towards the enactment of the anti-domestic violence law that protects all family members, in line with the Iraqi Constitution and international standards. She further urged parliamentarians to prioritize the adoption of the law. Other participants also urged the Government to pass the anti-domestic violence law, endorse the national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), support women's economic empowerment and promote the equal participation of women in political and electoral processes.

49. Meanwhile, the Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance met with the Independent High Electoral Commission on 18 August to discuss UNAMI support and preparatory requirements for elections. She also liaised with the international community to garner their support for UNAMI project proposals for enhanced electoral support, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

50. The Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance, along with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), continued to work with the Government and civil society to finalize the second national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security. On 31 October, she represented UNAMI at an online event to mark the twentieth anniversary of resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#). She highlighted the challenges facing Iraqi women entering politics, urged political leaders to expand opportunities for women's participation and called for a cultural shift to eliminate negative stereotypes of women in the media. The event included the launch of a research study on the challenges and needs of Iraqi women entering politics.

51. In addition, the Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance led an online workshop for young people in Baghdad Governorate on 27 September, as part of a series of regional workshops with young people in Iraq organized by UNAMI, in cooperation with the Committee for Coexistence and Societal Peace of the Prime Minister's Office and the Amal Association, an Iraqi non-governmental organization. Bringing together youth representatives and senior local political actors, the workshop focused on the challenges faced by young people in Iraq, including unemployment, limited access to local decision-making and security concerns.

B. Electoral assistance

52. UNAMI continued its support to Iraq's electoral stakeholders, primarily the Independent High Electoral Commission. On 24 August, UNAMI took part in a meeting chaired by the Speaker and attended by members of the Legal Committee of the Council of Representatives and electoral commissioners, to discuss technical and administrative preparations for the early elections. Subsequently, UNAMI provided inputs to the development of the Commission's operational plan and electoral timeline. In addition, on 6 September, UNAMI provided additional advice to the Commission for the accreditation of international observer organizations.

53. Following the approval of the High Committee for Health and National Safety, the Independent High Electoral Commission started preparations to reopen biometric voter registration centres and to resume the distribution of voter cards. To date, 14.3 million voters have been registered, but the process is not complete and not all biometric voter cards have been distributed. In order to address these and other issues, UNAMI met with the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners on 13 September to discuss ways to accelerate the registration process. UNAMI also provided advice to the Commission on its engagements with the Council of Ministers on the audit of election technologies for voter identification and results management.

54. The work of the Independent High Electoral Commission has been hampered by the lack of a budget and delays in the finalization of technical annexes to the electoral law, which will define constituency delineation, seat allocation and the representation of women in the Council of Representatives. The continued lack of clarity impedes the Commission's ability to develop a detailed implementation plan and operational timeline for early elections.

55. Some progress has been made regarding the staffing of the Independent High Electoral Commission. The Commission has appointed managers for its governorate electoral offices and completed the selection of four Directors General at its headquarters. However, several Director General posts remain to be filled, and progress has been delayed by an ongoing review of previous appointments, as requested by the Council of Representatives. All appointments remain subject to confirmation by the Council of Ministers, which has led to temporary assignments in sensitive operational posts. UNAMI worked closely with the Commission in preparing an intensive induction and capacity development process to train new staff for their functions, within increasingly condensed timelines.

C. Human rights and rule of law developments and activities

56. Targeted killings of protesters, including civil society, political and human rights activists continued, with limited measures taken to ensure accountability. In separate incidents on 14 and 19 August, two human rights activists, including a prominent women's rights advocate, were assassinated in Basrah by unknown gunmen. A further three activists, including one woman, were targeted by unidentified armed men in Basrah on 17 August, resulting in injuries. According to activists, unidentified armed men also attempted to assassinate an activist in Nasiriyah city on 14 August, an activist in Nasiriyah city on 19 August, two activists, in two different incidents, in Baghdad on 19 August, and three activists in Babil in one incident on 20 August. On 21 August, an improvised explosive device detonated in Al-Haboubi Square in Nasiriyah city, injuring 11 protesters. On 19 September, in Nasiriyah city, unidentified gunmen attacked a vehicle carrying activists, seriously injuring one and abducting a prominent activist who had previously received threats related to his role in demonstrations.

57. UNAMI continued to document incidents that infringed freedom of expression. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, on 19 and 20 August, security forces raided and closed the offices of a television outlet in Dahuk and Erbil, respectively, for allegedly inciting people to violate COVID-19-related preventive measures. The Ministry of Culture of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which has regulatory authority over broadcast media, stated that it had not requested this action. In addition, UNAMI identified several arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists for covering protests in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, despite repeated statements from the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in support of freedom of expression and the right to demonstrate peacefully.

58. To date, despite issuing compensation payments to injured protesters, the Government has yet to take action to promote criminal accountability and to protect at-risk protesters and activists from violence. The fact-finding body mandated to examine violations related to the protests since October 2019, which the Government committed to establish in May, is not yet in place, as its members have yet to be appointed. Building on four previous special reports concerning the public protests, on 27 August, UNAMI and OHCHR issued a joint comprehensive report documenting patterns of human rights violations and abuses in the context of demonstrations in Iraq. The report, covering the period from 1 October 2019 to 30 April 2020, reiterated previous calls on the Government of Iraq to implement its commitments.

59. On 30 August, the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, UNAMI and OHCHR published a joint report on enforced disappearances allegedly perpetrated by Iraqi Security Forces, including the Popular Mobilization Forces and local tribal militias in Anbar Governorate in 2015 and 2016 during military operations against ISIL. The report estimates that more than 1,000 Sunni Arab men and boys were subjected to enforced disappearance. The report calls on the Government of Iraq to carry out independent, effective investigations to establish the victims' fate and whereabouts, hold perpetrators accountable, provide redress to victims' families, establish a comprehensive domestic legal framework against enforced disappearances and promote compliance with procedural safeguards of persons deprived of liberty.

60. During the nineteenth session of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, held online from 7 to 25 September, the Committee followed up on its 2015 periodic review of efforts by Iraq to protect persons from enforced disappearances. The Committee's public sessions with the Government, originally planned for 14 and 15 September, were postponed owing to COVID-19 restrictions, then rescheduled for 5 and 7 October, with UNAMI facilitating the participation of the Government delegation.

61. As part of measures to reduce overcrowding in detention facilities in response to COVID-19, the Ministry of Justice reported the release of approximately 300 prisoners following a presidential special pardon in August, while the High Judicial Council reported the judicial release of 17,585 detainees between March and August.

62. In partnership with Al-Namaa Centre for Human Rights and Iraqi artists, UNAMI completed a countrywide campaign to raise awareness of the human rights dimensions of COVID-19 and general awareness. The campaign included dissemination on social media of 13 cartoons prepared by seven Iraqi artists, including three women, that reached over 360,000 viewers from UNAMI platforms alone. A total of 117 youth volunteers, including 27 women, disseminated 28,500 posters in 90 public spaces, in 18 governorates. A group of youth artists completed 20 murals in 10 Baghdad neighbourhoods, raising awareness about the increase in domestic violence, stigma, access to health care and education during the pandemic. Reflecting the country's rich cultural diversity, the cartoons were translated into seven languages spoken in Iraq.

63. ISIL continues to perpetrate violence against civilians. A total of 34 deaths and 51 injuries were attributed to ISIL and resulted from attacks with the use of small arms, the use of improvised explosive devices and rocket or mortar attacks.

64. Continued armed activities between Turkish forces and PKK have also affected civilians. From 1 July to 30 September, five deaths and one injury were attributed to Turkish military air strikes in northern Iraq. Responsibility for the killing of 11 persons and injuring of 34 persons was attributed to unidentified armed groups; and an exchange of small arms fire between Iranian forces and PKK elements in northern Iraq resulted in the injury of a 15-year-old boy and a man. In a letter dated 26 October addressed to the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Permanent Representative of Turkey affirmed that Turkey has "displayed maximum

precision not to cause civilian losses”. The letter further stated that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey “categorically refuted allegations of civilian casualties as PKK propaganda”.

65. On 3 August, the Council of Ministers endorsed a draft anti-domestic violence law, prepared under the auspices of the Office of the Prime Minister, and on 5 August referred the draft law to the Council of Representatives. On 7 September, the Directorate for the Empowerment of Women in the Council of Ministers secretariat, supported by UNAMI, held a consultative meeting with stakeholders and relevant United Nations entities to expedite the enactment of the draft law, with support from UN-Women and civil society partners.

66. During interviews and focus group meetings conducted in Dahuk and Ninawa in September and October, UNAMI continued to document barriers to education for children and young adults of minority communities and children who remain displaced, which are exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. On 11 October, UNAMI marked the International Day of the Girl Child by highlighting the continued prevalence of early marriage among families who live in poverty, including those who remain displaced in formal and informal settlements in territory formerly under ISIL control.

67. On 10 August, the Prime Minister appointed a prime ministerial adviser on components affairs. The post had been newly created to support efforts to promote equal participation and fair representation of minorities during elections, to develop legislative reforms for preventing discrimination against minorities, to promote the return of displaced minority households and to encourage peaceful coexistence among various components of Iraqi society.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

68. The COVID-19 pandemic remains a focus of efforts and a significant challenge to the Iraqi health system and humanitarian actors, increasing vulnerabilities among displaced people and returnees, adding to pre-existing access challenges and complicating logistics. The number of cases reported by the Ministry of Health of Iraq rose to 379,141, including 9,339 deaths, as at 5 October, at which point there were more than 62,620 active cases, the majority of which were treated at home. Tackling the widespread transmission requires urgent measures, including a revision of the country’s preparedness and emergency plans to respond to a rapid increase in cases. With 16,931 health workers infected with the virus by early October, the risk of collapse of the health-care system remains a serious concern. Meanwhile, the crisis continued to affect the socioeconomic situation of the most vulnerable people in Iraq.

69. Considering the challenges, the United Nations country team undertook a concerted effort, coordinated by the World Health Organization (WHO), to assist the Government of Iraq in the development of solutions and mitigation measures. A rapid assessment of health-care facilities revealed the urgent need to improve the management of positive cases and implement proper isolation and quarantine protocols. In response, WHO cooperated with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to support the Government of Iraq in the development of a social and behavioural change campaign and worked with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to distribute brochures and posters, as well as personal protective equipment, to health facilities and at ports of entry. They also continued to provide training and technical expertise at border crossings and airports with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and continued to strengthen the national health infrastructure by providing ventilators, personal protective equipment and specialized laboratory equipment, and support for the setting up of 140 isolation rooms with

UNDP in partnership with the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, the WHO donated 10 fully equipped ambulances to the Ministry of Health in Ninawa, to ensure that people in remote locations receive support and access to secondary health facilities.

70. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), through its local partner, supported an orientation session on COVID-19 and its impact on women's health for reproductive health-care providers in Ninawa. UNFPA also supported family planning services for hospitals and facilities in Erbil, Dahuk, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah.

71. Increased efforts to assist the Government's response to the pandemic have yet to be adequately funded. The calculated requirement to fund appropriate humanitarian action stands at \$662.2 million, including \$264.8 million for COVID-19-related work and \$397.4 million for other areas of work. As of 1 October, the humanitarian response plan and COVID-19 response plan were 68 per cent and 44 per cent funded, respectively.

72. Protecting the 1.4 million displaced persons from the spread of COVID-19 has been a major concern of humanitarian actors. As at 4 October, there had been 126 cases in 27 camps. Of those, 56 cases were still active and three persons had died. In order to contain the spread, seven new quarantine and isolation areas were activated in camps in Kirkuk and Ninawa.

73. So as to improve protection and increase the resilience of displaced families, UNHCR continued to provide cash assistance and sanitary kits to displaced families. As at 12 September, a total of 98,153 refugees and internally displaced families had received cash assistance of around \$200 per family, along with 69,078 sanitary kits for women and girls.

74. The Iraq Information Centre, run by the United Nations Office for Project Services on behalf of the humanitarian country team, developed a campaign by text message to improve hygiene awareness, which reached a total of 291,541 internally displaced persons. The Centre received calls and information requests from more than 16,000 people (79 per cent of callers were male and 21 per cent were female). Most calls related to loss of income (49 per cent) and food insecurity (21 per cent).

75. The World Food Programme detected that over 3 million people do not have enough food, which is attributed to a drop in income brought about by COVID-19. Therefore, in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade, WFP released a new mobile application called "Tamwini" (My food ration) that enables users to calculate food entitlements and handle digital payments.

76. Even before the pandemic, more than 2.6 million children, including 1.5 million returnees, 775,000 internally displaced children and 98,000 refugee children, required assistance to access education, while between 20,000 and 45,000 children without civil documentation were unable to enrol or to move on to secondary school. United Nations entities jointly undertook advocacy initiatives with relevant government ministries and/or institutions so as to ensure that birth certificates and other documents for children were provided to all citizens. Those efforts include advocacy with the Ministry of Education to allow children who reach school-going age to enrol without restrictions regarding required documentation. Meanwhile, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, supported mobile civil documentation missions in the areas most affected by conflict in order to provide civil documentation for families who are missing different types of documents, including birth registration.

77. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continued to support the Ministry of Education in broadcasting lessons to students who are unable to physically attend school because of COVID-19 restrictions. On 22 August, UNESCO also trained 52 staff of the Communications and Media Commission on combating misinformation amid the pandemic. On 20 September,

UNESCO trained 80 teachers (50 men and 30 women) in the production of televised classes.

78. The COVID-19 crisis also negatively affected the economic security of Iraqis and the delivery of basic services. In order to respond to these secondary effects, the United Nations country team completed a socioeconomic response plan for Iraq to bridge the gap between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. The plan, estimated at \$1.4 billion (currently funded at 40 per cent), presents an integrated support package to address the most pertinent needs and protect people who risk being left behind, including women and girls.

79. In addition to strengthening the response to the COVID-19 crisis, the United Nations country team continued to work on regular projects. Between 9 and 16 September, IOM supported the return of 120 families to Ninawa and rehabilitated 27 shelters in Anbar following returns in July. In addition, IOM rehabilitated 960 war-damaged houses, benefiting almost 10,000 returnees directly. IOM also continued to provide mental health and psychosocial support services, reaching 970 women, 667 men, 212 girls and 184 boys. A national implementation review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, supported by IOM, noted that Iraq was the first country in the region to complete a migration governance indicator assessment and a national migration profile with national interministerial oversight.

80. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) completed the rehabilitation of a 4.3 km-long irrigation canal in Salah al-Din Governorate on 11 August. The canal brought 18,000 acres of agricultural lands back into full production. The waterway will benefit approximately 13,000 people, many of whom are recent returnees.

81. The Mine Action Service cleared 74,088 m² of contaminated land in Anbar and Ninawa Governorates of 199 improvised explosive devices. For those operations, the Service deployed an explosive ordnance search team made up entirely of women. After in-person interventions were suspended owing to COVID-19 restrictions, remote technical support was provided to the Directorate of Mine Action and online risk education training was delivered to humanitarian and stabilization actors. In addition, the Service delivered mine-awareness information to approximately 280,000 Iraqis through a social media campaign, “Safe Steps”.

82. The International Labour Organization and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq signed an agreement on 10 August to boost employment opportunities for internally displaced persons and refugees and their host communities. The agreement facilitates the establishment of employment service centres.

IV. Security and operational issues

A. Update on security arrangements

83. The Department of Safety and Security in Iraq continuously monitored developments throughout the country and implemented risk management measures to enable United Nations operations. United Nations missions to Ninawa Governorate were suspended on 26 August after an improvised explosive device impacted a United Nations vehicle, resuming on 10 September after appropriate security assessments had been conducted and measures approved by the United Nations senior management team. Regular security advisories and alerts, including broadcasts related to the outbreak of COVID-19, continued to be disseminated to keep United Nations personnel informed of precautionary measures.

84. The Department of Safety and Security supported an average of two field missions per day across the country, with assessed risk levels ranging from medium to high. Close coordination and engagement with the host Government continues to ensure the proper flow of information and the necessary security support for United Nations operations, in particular as regards movements and access authorizations to regions still affected by COVID-19 containment restrictions.

B. Mission facilities, logistics, aviation, financial and legal issues

85. The Mission continues to implement all necessary protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its risks within United Nations compounds and offices. In this respect, UNAMI further developed its COVID-19 sensitization campaigns for United Nations personnel; enhanced its medical isolation ward and its preparedness to deal with cases; implemented signage for physical distancing within compound common facilities; and strengthened its contingency planning, medical evacuation capabilities and overall positioning in line with emerging guidelines from WHO and the Division of Health-care Management and Occupational Safety and Health.

86. The Mission continued to provide logistical 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 (UNITAD) in the delivery of its mandate, as requested by the Security Council in its resolution [2522 \(2020\)](#).

V. Observations

87. I welcome the Government of Iraq's continued efforts to address the various crises the country is facing, as well as steps taken for the preparation of the early elections. It is essential to create a conducive environment that allows electoral preparations to be conducted in an effective and transparent way so as to enable the holding of free, credible and inclusive elections.

88. Amid ongoing electoral preparations, UNAMI is stepping up its technical assistance to advise and assist the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission, including through addressing urgent capacity requirements.

89. Cooperation between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government is essential to address the challenges Iraq faces in safeguarding the country's stability and the well-being of its citizens. I call upon all actors to step up mutual dialogue efforts in order to reach a long-term, sustainable agreement on the issues of mutual concern.

90. More broadly, I reiterate my call upon all parties, domestic and external, to pursue de-escalation and solve problems through dialogue and on the basis of mutual respect. I am encouraged by the Government's continued efforts to build balanced and mutually beneficial relations, at the national, regional and global levels.

91. I acknowledge the efforts of the Government of Iraq to enhance State authority and to bring all weapons under State control. However, the continued presence of armed groups operating outside of State control remains of great concern; it significantly hinders domestic stability. It is incumbent on all security actors to cooperate with the Government of Iraq in its efforts to strengthen State control and reintegrate former members of armed groups.

92. The continued attacks against diplomatic missions and convoys remain a concern. I call for further concerted efforts by the Government of Iraq, working with

all influential actors, to ensure the protection of all diplomatic missions and personnel in Iraq, to deal with such security breaches in a firm and swift manner and to hold accountable before the law those responsible for these attacks.

93. The recent establishment of a permanent committee to investigate corruption demonstrates firm political will to fight endemic corruption in Iraq. Against this backdrop, I would like to emphasize the importance of the independence and impartiality of such a body, which must also be adequately staffed and funded and report to an appropriate oversight mechanism.

94. The establishment of an independent fact-finding body to examine all demonstration-related human rights violations was one of the earliest commitments made by this Government. Compensation payments for deaths and injuries have been made, but concrete steps to provide truth and accountability remain insufficient. Accountability is essential to promote respect for democratic values and strengthen public trust in State authority.

95. I remain deeply concerned about the enforced disappearances in Iraq. Enforced disappearances and uncertainty about the fate of missing persons not only perpetuate fear and resentment in society, but also erode citizens' trust in the ability of their Government to protect them.

96. Gaps in the funding of the 2020 humanitarian response plan and the socioeconomic response plan for Iraq make it increasingly difficult to provide longer-term support to vulnerable people and to save lives, mitigate poverty and build the capacity of government institutions. I reiterate my calls for continued international financial support despite current global economic constraints.

97. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my Special Representative, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and the United Nations staff in Iraq for their continued dedication to implementing the Organization's mandate during extraordinary times and under challenging circumstances.
