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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 8 February 2021 ([S/2021/120](#)) and the briefing to the Security Council by the Special Representative for Iraq and Head of UNAMI on 16 February 2021.

II. Summary of key political developments

A. Political situation

2. The Government of Iraq continued preparations to hold legislative elections scheduled for 10 October 2021. On 18 March, the Council of Representatives passed the First Amendment Law to Federal Supreme Court Law No. 30 of 2005. During legislative sessions in March, the Council of Representatives debated and voted on elements of a new and expanded Federal Supreme Court Law which was intended to strengthen compliance with constitutional principles. However, parliament did not reach consensus on issues including the role of Islamic jurisprudence experts in the court. Instead, it adopted the First Amendment Law, which enables the membership of the Federal Supreme Court to be completed, which is necessary for the certification of electoral results. The addition of an upper age limit for judges, now set at 72 years, required the selection of a new court. On 29 March, the judges charged with the selection announced the completion of the selection of the new Federal Supreme Court judges and that a list of the nominees had been sent to the President, Barham Salih, for his approval. On 10 April, President Salih issued a presidential decree appointing the President and members of the Federal Supreme Court. The amendment law requires representation of the regions and of the “components of the Iraqi people” in the Federal Supreme Court. To date, minority components and women have not been represented. On 31 March, the Council of Representatives also voted to dissolve itself on 7 October ahead of the elections scheduled for 10 October.

3. On 2 March, the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers established a higher committee to promote and monitor women’s electoral participation and propose



measures to prevent and address violence against women candidates. Committee members will represent the Ministry of Interior, the Independent High Electoral Commission, other governmental bodies, professional bodies, academia and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

4. Following lengthy negotiations between political parties and the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments, the Council of Representatives approved the 2021 Federal Budget Law on 31 March during a legislative session attended by 215 out of 329 members. The 2021 budget was approved at 129 trillion Iraqi dinars, approximately \$89 billion, with a deficit estimated at 28.7 trillion Iraqi dinars, approximately \$19.79 billion, with an oil price of \$45 per barrel. Article 11 of the budget law, which governs the share of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, was passed, setting its share at 12.67 per cent. Under article 11, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq will receive this share in monthly increments, inter alia in return for submitting 250,000 barrels of crude oil per day, or their monetary equivalent, to the State Oil Marketing Organization. On 31 March, the Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, and President Salih welcomed the approval of the 2021 budget via their social media accounts.

5. On 15 February, the Government announced its preparations to implement the white paper for economic and financial reform. Planned reforms include: the establishment of government oversight and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness of the reform process; and coordination between government institutions. To fulfil this objective, the Council of Ministers decided on 10 February to form a Higher Committee for Reform, chaired by the Prime Minister, which would oversee the reform programme. In its statement of 15 February, the Government also noted the international community's support for reforms, reflecting on the assistance of the Iraq Economic Contact Group in the process. On 2 March, a Director-level meeting was held between the Government of Iraq and Contact Group partners to review reform progress, to begin outlining and aligning international support for the process and to prepare for a high-level Contact Group meeting in late spring 2021.

6. The Government also continued its anti-corruption efforts. The e-Governance Committee met on 22 February to assess ongoing progress on electronic services to modernize government administration and aid anti-corruption efforts. Chairing the meeting, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of automating electronic governance procedures in all State departments and institutions. He also briefed the participants on electronic mechanisms implemented by the Border Ports Authority, which he stated had helped reduce smuggling and corruption, maximized government revenues and protected local producers and consumer rights.

7. Further measures were taken by the Government to address a rise in coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases. Public health directives issued on 13 February reimposed a full curfew during weekends and a partial curfew on the remaining weekdays from 18 February to 8 March. Other measures included the closing of public facilities and halving civil servants' working hours, except for those working at the Ministry of Health. The curfew order was later extended until 22 March. During Ramadan, the Iraqi authorities extended a partial curfew from Sundays to Thursdays and a full curfew on Fridays and Saturdays. On 9 March, the President ratified the Law on the Provision and Use of Corona Pandemic Vaccines, aimed at accelerating vaccine acquisition. The same day, the cabinet spokesperson announced that procedures had been completed for Iraq to receive 20 million doses of different vaccines and encouraged Iraqis to register online for vaccination. On 25 March, 336,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccines were delivered to Iraq through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility programme. Iraq has also received donated vaccines from COVAX partners.

8. On 1 March, the Council of Representatives passed the Yazidi Female Survivors Law. The legislation constitutes the first legal recognition by the Government of Iraq of the crimes committed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) against the Christians, Shabaks, Turkmens and Yazidis as genocide and crimes against humanity. The law provides for assistance and reparations for survivors and excludes future amnesty for perpetrators of the listed crimes. The law places Iraq among the first countries in the Arab world to recognize women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The three presidencies and the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, welcomed the adoption of the law. President Salih hailed it as “a victory for the victims...who have been subjected to the most heinous violations and crimes of ISIL genocide”. The Prime Minister described the law as “a step to achieve justice [which] reflects the values of equality and citizenship”. He pledged that the Government of Iraq will “use all its efforts to implement the law, provide a decent life for all survivors, free the remaining prisoners, and restore life to the liberated areas and return internally displaced persons to their home areas”.

9. Demonstrations took place in Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Governorate, from 22 to 27 February, during which protesters called for the resignation of Governor Nadhim al-Waeli. Clashes occurred between protesters and security forces. On 26 February, Governor Waeli resigned and was temporarily replaced by the head of the National Security Service, Abdul Ghani al-Asadi, pursuant to an order by the Prime Minister. On 27 February, the Prime Minister announced further measures for the Governorate, including the establishment of an advisory council for provincial reconstruction and the formation of a committee to investigate recent violence. Protesters subsequently announced a suspension of demonstrations to allow time for the Government to implement their demands. During the Council of Ministers session on 9 March, the Prime Minister affirmed that progress had been made to identify perpetrators of violence and announced that ministers would travel to Nasiriyah weekly to supervise relevant departments within the Governorate. On 6 April, at the Council of Ministers session, the Prime Minister formally appointed Dr. Ahmad al-Khafaji as Governor of Dhi Qar.

10. From 5 to 8 March, Pope Francis conducted a historic visit to Iraq devoted to promoting interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. During his visit, he met government officials, religious leaders and Iraqis of all faiths. On 6 March, he met with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf. The two religious leaders discussed global and regional conflicts and the role of religious and spiritual authorities in curbing oppression, poverty, religious and ideological persecution, and the suppression of basic freedoms. To mark the occasion, the Prime Minister announced that 6 March would henceforth be observed as “National Day of Tolerance and Coexistence”.

11. Pope Francis also visited religious and symbolic sites, including the ancient city of Ur, considered to be the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham in Christian, Islamic and Judaic traditions, where he hosted an interfaith service with Christians, Muslims, Sabeans, Yazidis and other Iraqi religious groups and minorities. In Mosul, he prayed at the ruins of churches destroyed by ISIL. He also travelled to Erbil, where he was received by officials from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and held an open-air mass.

12. Following the Pope’s visit, the Prime Minister addressed the nation on 8 March, calling for an inclusive national dialogue to restore Iraqi unity. He highlighted early elections, security and sovereignty and relations between Baghdad and Erbil as key issues to be addressed through this dialogue. The following day, in the regular session of the Council of Ministers, the Prime Minister stressed that his Government was prepared to start a dialogue with “political forces, social and civil society activists, protesters and opponents of the Government” for the future of Iraq.

13. The implementation of the Sinjar agreement has continued. Representatives of the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments continued to engage on the security provisions of the agreement, and a joint committee has been formed to identify potential recruits for the local police. However, provisions of the agreement, such as the full withdrawal of all armed actors and their replacement with Iraqi federal forces and local police, have not yet been fully implemented. Additionally, progress on administrative and reconstruction provisions has also been limited.

B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil

14. Prior to the approval by the Council of Representatives of the 2021 federal budget on 31 March, Kurdistan Regional Government delegations, led by its Deputy Prime Minister, Qubad Talabani, visited Baghdad from 1 to 3 February, 14 and 15 February, 15 to 21 March and on 27 March, in an attempt to resolve differences between Baghdad and Erbil over resource- and revenue-sharing in the Budget Law. The Kurdistan Regional Government delegations met with President Salih, the Speaker, Mohammed al-Halbousi, and other officials in Baghdad.

15. In a statement on 31 March, the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, described the passage of the Budget Law as a “positive beginning that paves the way for a resolution of differences” between Baghdad and Erbil. He also stressed the importance of the implementation of the agreement and improved coordination between both sides, highlighted Prime Minister Kadhimi’s efforts to ease political tensions ahead of the legislative vote and thanked the Kurdistan Regional Government negotiating team.

16. The Prime Minister’s call of 8 March for an inclusive national dialogue, including on relations between Baghdad and Erbil, was positively received by the Kurdistan Regional Government. The President and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government issued supportive statements that called, respectively, for dialogue to “develop radical solutions” to outstanding issues and to “solve all problems and conflicts”.

C. Security situation

17. Attacks by ISIL continued, primarily in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates. In response, the Iraqi security forces continued their counter-terrorism operations.

18. On 15 February, rockets landed in the vicinity of Erbil international airport, where international counter-ISIL coalition troops are co-located. The coalition’s spokesperson subsequently reported that 14 rockets had been launched and that three had struck the base, killing one civilian contractor. A further eight contractors and one United States of America service member were reported injured. A group calling itself the “Guardians of Blood Brigades” claimed responsibility for the attack.

19. On 16 February, the Prime Minister established a joint investigation committee with the authorities of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to identify the perpetrators of the Erbil attack. The President, the Speaker and the President and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq condemned the incident, describing it as a “terrorist attack”. On 3 March, security authorities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq announced the arrest of one suspected perpetrator and stated that further suspects remained at large. The attack was broadly condemned by the international community.

20. On 20 February, rockets struck Balad airbase, north of Baghdad. On 22 February, the Security Media Cell under the Office of the Prime Minister reported

that two rockets had landed within the former International Zone in Baghdad, without casualties. From 17 February to 21 March, reportedly, more than 30 attacks with improvised explosive devices targeted trucks contracted to carry supplies for the international counter-ISIL coalition, in Anbar, Babil, Baghdad, Basrah, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, Qadisiyah and Salah al-Din Governorates. On 15 March, the Security Media Cell reported that two rockets had fallen outside of Balad airbase, causing damage to nearby houses.

21. On 3 March, the United States Department of Defense issued a statement reporting that approximately 10 missiles had been launched against the Ayn al-Asad airbase and that an American contractor “had suffered a cardiac episode while sheltering from the attack and ... passed away”. The base, in the west of Anbar Governorate, hosts forces from the international counter-ISIL coalition. The spokesperson for the coalition noted the same day that Iraqi security forces were investigating the incident. No claims of responsibility were made.

22. On 3 March, the Prime Minister chaired a meeting of the National Security Council, during which he stated that such attacks were conducted “by groups that have no true affiliation with Iraq” and that there was “no justification for targeting military bases”. He ordered security forces to “take decisive action against these groups”. The Prime Minister also referred to the ongoing strategic dialogue with the United States and the resulting reduction by 60 per cent of troops in the country. He noted that “it is imperative for Iraq to extricate itself from regional and international conflicts” and called “on all political forces to take declared and clear positions to support the Government’s approach in this regard and to protect the people and the State”.

23. The Ministry of National Defence of Turkey reported continued operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) targets in northern Iraq. On 10, the Ministry of National Defence of Turkey issued a statement that “Operation Claw-Eagle 2” had been conducted in the Garah Mountain area of Dahuk Governorate. The Ministry stated that the operation was consistent with the “right of self-defence arising from international law” of Turkey. In a speech on 11 February, the Minister of National Defence of Turkey, Hulusi Akar, stressed respect for “Iraq’s territorial integrity and political unity”. On 14 February, Mr. Akar announced the conclusion of the operation. On 16 February, he informed the Grand National Assembly of Turkey that Turkish armed forces had found the bodies of 12 Turkish citizens and 1 Iraqi national who had been detained by PKK and, according to captured PKK members, had been killed by PKK. In a statement published on 14 February, PKK denied responsibility for the incident.

D. Regional and international developments

24. Security and economic cooperation were a focus of regional and international engagement by the Government of Iraq. On 16 February, the Prime Minister spoke with the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Jens Stoltenberg, prior to the meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence on 17 and 18 February. According to a readout from the Prime Minister’s Office, their discussions focused on NATO “support to Iraqi security and military institutions”. In a press conference after the ministerial meeting, Mr. Stoltenberg announced that, following a request by the Government of Iraq, the defence ministers had agreed to expand the NATO training mission in Iraq to “support the Iraqi forces as they fight terrorism and ensure that ISIL does not return”. He stated that this would include an “incremental” expansion of the NATO mission in Iraq “from 500 personnel to around 4,000”, and a broadening of training activities to “more Iraqi security institutions, and areas beyond Baghdad”. In response, on 19 February, the National Security Adviser,

Qasim al-Araji, confirmed in a statement that NATO was present in Iraq with the approval of the Government, with an advisory and training, rather than combat, role. A NATO press statement, issued after a workshop attended by Government representatives and the Commander of NATO Mission Iraq on 26 February, noted that the mission aimed to increase its current strength by “a few hundred support staff and advisers” during 2021.

25. On 23 February, the President of the United States, Joseph Biden, spoke to the Prime Minister. According to a White House press statement, President Biden affirmed “United States support for Iraq’s sovereignty and independence” and discussed with the Prime Minister the recent rocket attacks against Iraqi and international coalition personnel. Both leaders agreed on the need to hold “those responsible for such attacks ... to account”, according to the statement.

26. A strategic dialogue between Iraq and the United States was launched virtually on 7 April. On the same day, the United States and the Government of Iraq issued a joint statement, noting that “discussions covered security and counterterrorism, economics and energy and the environment, political issues and cultural relations.” In the statement, the United States “reaffirmed its respect for Iraq’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and relevant decisions of the Iraqi legislative and executive authorities”. Both parties also reiterated their “strong economic partnership”, “greater cooperation to combat the COVID-19 pandemic” and “mutual intent to address the climate emergency”. Iraq also welcomed the support of the Government of the United States for parliamentary elections through funding for UNAMI. On security issues, both countries reaffirmed that “United States forces are in Iraq at the invitation of [the] Iraqi Government to support the Iraqi Security Forces ... in their fight against ISIS” and that the mission of United States and the international counter-ISIL coalition forces has now transitioned to one focused on “training and advisory tasks, thereby allowing for the redeployment of any remaining combat forces from Iraq, with the timing to be established in upcoming technical talks”. The Government of Iraq reaffirmed its commitment to protect the international counter-ISIL coalition personnel, convoys and diplomatic facilities.

27. On 24 February, the Prime Minister received a Jordanian delegation headed by Yahya Musa Kisbi, the Minister of Public Works and Housing. The parties emphasized their shared desire to expand bilateral relations on political, economic and security issues, while the Prime Minister also highlighted the importance of tripartite cooperation with Egypt, Iraq and Jordan on these matters.

28. On 6 March, the Prime Minister spoke by telephone with the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hassan Rouhani. The Prime Minister’s Office stated that bilateral relations and regional security were discussed, with both parties agreeing on the need for regional actors to maintain calm in addressing challenges. An Iranian presidential statement on the same day noted that both sides emphasized the importance of developing “economic cooperation alongside political relations”.

29. Prime Minister Kadhimi undertook official visits to Gulf countries to further deepen the bilateral ties of Iraq with its Arab neighbours, including to strengthen economic cooperation. On 31 March, he led a ministerial delegation to Riyadh, where he met, among others, with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to discuss the strengthening of bilateral cooperation. According to a joint statement, the two sides concluded five agreements covering economic and cultural fields, including the establishment of an Iraqi-Saudi investment fund, with capital of approximately \$3 billion to promote investment in Iraq, with the participation of both countries’ private sectors. Both sides further emphasized their willingness to enhance cooperation in the energy domain and to implement the joint action plan within the framework of the Saudi-Iraqi Coordination Council. Prior to the visit, the Prime

Minister and King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud met virtually on 25 March. In a joint statement, they praised bilateral ties and emphasized the importance of the Coordination Council.

30. On 4 April, the Prime Minister paid an official visit to Abu Dhabi, where he met the Vice-President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the United Arab Emirates Armed Forces, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. According to a joint statement, the two sides agreed to establish the Iraqi-Emirati Business Council. The United Arab Emirates also announced the investment of \$3 billion in Iraq “to strengthen economic and investment relations and advance economic growth to support the Iraqi people”. The Minister for Foreign Affairs also embarked on official visits to neighbouring countries. He met with his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, in Saudi Arabia on 22 February. They reviewed regional security developments and discussed bilateral relations and means of activating existing memorandums of understanding and facilitating the work of the Saudi-Iraqi Coordination Council. The Minister for Foreign Affairs also visited the Islamic Republic of Iran on 27 February, meeting separately with his counterpart, Javad Zarif, and the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani. According to a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq published on 27 February, in-depth talks were held on bilateral issues. According to the statement, in both meetings, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq thanked the Foreign Ministry of Iran for its “position in condemning the strikes that affected multiple sites in Iraq”.

31. On 3 March, the Minister of Defence received a delegation from NATO Mission Iraq, including its advisers on training and on women and peace and security. During the meeting, the Minister of Defence pledged to improve the placement of women in higher-ranking posts. Discussion also covered training programmes for women ministerial staff and the second national plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#).

32. During a video address at the opening of the first Baghdad International Water Conference on 13 March, the Turkish presidential envoy for Iraqi water issues, Veysel Eroğlu, noted that the Parliament of Turkey had recently approved a memorandum of understanding on bilateral water cooperation (signed in December 2014). The Minister of Water Resources of Iraq stated that Iraq welcomed the approval of the memorandum and cooperation in this field. The Ambassador of Turkey to Iraq informed the media that the memorandum would soon enter into force.

33. On 24 March, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani, visited Baghdad, where he met separately with the President, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Discussions focused on strengthening bilateral cooperation, including activation of the joint Iraqi-Qatari committee. On the same day, Sheikh Al-Thani visited Erbil, where he met separately with the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Masoud Barzani, to discuss strengthening relations between Qatar and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the planned opening of a Qatari consulate in Erbil.

34. On 31 March, the United States granted Iraq a 120-day extension of its energy waiver, to allow Iraq to continue importing electricity and gas from the Islamic Republic of Iran, critical to meeting the country’s energy needs.

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

A. Political activities

35. The Special Representative continued regular engagement with the three presidencies, political party leaders, parliamentarians, the Independent High Electoral Commission and religious and community leaders, with particular focus on electoral preparations. She stressed the importance of creating a conducive environment for technical preparations to proceed effectively and without delay. She also reiterated the need to hold elections in a free and safe environment away from threats and intimidation.

36. The Special Representative closely followed the demonstrations and related violence in southern Iraq, deploring the loss of innocent lives. She cautioned that continued impunity feeds public anger and encouraged the Government to transparently take the necessary measures to ensure accountability for violations.

37. The Special Representative continued to engage with and support the Government of Iraq on anti-corruption efforts. While acknowledging the importance of these efforts and the associated challenges, she underlined the need for strict adherence to criminal procedures, with due process, fairness and transparency, as essential requirements in a just and democratic system.

38. During her visits to Erbil, the Special Representative met with the President and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, among others, to discuss the political situation in the region, as well as the outstanding issues between the federal and the Kurdistan Regional Governments, in particular, budget negotiations. She also urged all relevant authorities of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to ensure the protection of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and the rule of law.

39. On International Women's Day, the Special Representative attended a commemorative event at the Council of Representatives organized by the Iraqi Women Parliamentarians Caucus under the auspices of the Speaker. In a speech broadcast at the event, she stressed that "strong women make a strong society" and that greater political participation, including in elections, empowers women to reach their full potential, leading their communities to peace and prosperity.

40. On 15 March, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance, Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, who assumed her official functions on 7 March 2021, represented UNAMI at an online International Women's Day event, which drew on the findings and recommendations of research undertaken in 2020 on the needs and challenges facing Iraqi women entering politics. She emphasized that the next elections were an important opportunity to promote women's participation in public life. She also highlighted the challenges faced by women candidates and noted the support of UNAMI for a gender-responsive electoral process.

41. The Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance met with the Chair of the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission on 17 March. She also continued her engagement with the international community in the context of enhanced electoral technical assistance to the Commission.

B. Electoral assistance

42. UNAMI continued to provide advice, technical support and assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission as it prepares for the early Council of Representatives elections scheduled for 10 October 2021. Twenty-five United Nations international electoral advisers have arrived in Iraq, while the recruitment of national electoral officers is on schedule. These electoral advisers provide technical support to electoral commission counterparts in Baghdad. Electoral teams have also been deployed to all UNAMI regional hubs (Basrah, Erbil, Kirkuk and Mosul), where they have commenced visits to governorate electoral offices to assess their readiness for the elections.

43. UNAMI provided support to the Independent High Electoral Commission in the review of electoral regulations and procedures, including for the process and adjudication of electoral complaints and appeals, and the nomination and registration of candidates. On 21 February, UNAMI shared an advisory paper with the Commission containing recommendations for processing election-related complaints and appeals. UNAMI continued to support the Commission in identifying the governorates that have historically had the highest incidence of election-related complaints to anticipate and proactively address potential cases that may arise during the electoral process. Pursuant to UNAMI technical advice, the Commission adopted recommendations on 24 February to biometrically register internally displaced persons in their current locations and to reduce the registration fee for candidates from 2 million to 1 million Iraqi dinars. Additionally, the Commission decided on 25 February to further extend the deadline for the registration of candidates and political coalitions until 17 April and 1 May, respectively.

44. The voter registration update period was extended until 31 March. As at 24 March, the Independent High Electoral Commission's biometric registration coverage has reached 63 per cent, with biometric data collected for 15,729,394 out of a total of 25,139,375 voters. A total of 13,425,781 voter cards have been distributed. COVID-19 restrictions continued to have an impact on the Commission's voter registration drive and the distribution of cards. Relatively low registration turnout remains a concern. UNAMI continued to support the Commission in improving its public outreach and engagement with media and national leaders to raise the level of overall awareness and interest in the election. UNAMI continued to support the Commission in updating the voter registry database and in developing appropriate procedures, in line with the electoral law, to ensure that all eligible Iraqis, including internally displaced persons, can cast their ballots.

45. On 17 February, the Independent High Electoral Commission organized a meeting with representatives of political parties to update them on the mechanisms for the registration of alliances, parties and candidates. UNAMI also supported efforts to strengthen interaction between the Commission and political parties, academia, media and civil society organizations aimed at enhancing engagement with electoral stakeholders, increasing the participation of women and promoting initiatives to counter hate speech during the electoral period.

46. UNAMI continued to advise the Independent High Electoral Commission on the results management system (including the transmission and communication of results), audit of information technology systems and on the feasibility of implementing decentralized publication of results, starting from the polling station level. UNAMI encouraged further discussions within the Commission on measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 at all stages of the electoral process, supporting its engagements with national authorities for the provision of COVID-19 protective items to polling staff and the sanitation of polling facilities.

C. Human rights and rule of law developments and activities

47. UNAMI continued to document concerns about the rights of freedom of expression and to peaceful assembly, protection of journalists and the lack of fair trial guarantees. From 22 to 27 February, the use of live ammunition by security forces against protesters in Nasiriyah resulted in the deaths of six male protesters, including a 16-year-old boy, and injuries to over 130 other males, according to information verified by UNAMI. In response, the Prime Minister established an investigative committee, reportedly leading to the arrest of nine police officers and a senior commander. On 2 and 3 March, according to information verified by UNAMI, 17 demonstrators and 5 members of the security forces were injured during clashes in Diwaniyah, Qadisiyah Governorate.

48. Activists, anti-Government protesters and persons who openly express criticism of armed groups operating outside of State control continued to face violence, intimidation and harassment. Amid increasing calls for criminal accountability for violations linked to the demonstrations of October 2019 and violence targeting activists, journalists and protesters, on 13 February, security forces in Basrah arrested four persons accused of several targeted killings in the Governorate. There has been no official confirmation of their affiliation with any political parties or armed groups.

49. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, following a two-day trial, on 15 and 16 February, an Erbil court convicted three journalists and two activists of threatening State security and sentenced each to six years' imprisonment. The trial raised serious concerns regarding procedural guarantees, in particular on the right to adequate time and facilities in the preparation of a defence. On 16 February, the Appeals Court in Erbil issued an arrest warrant against a journalist for criticizing these convictions and sentences. A group of approximately 100 journalists, activists and members of the public held a peaceful gathering in front of the court in Sulaymaniyah on 17 February. They protested the sentences, described the trial as unfair and demanded the release of those convicted. In an apparent attempt to influence the appeal hearing, on 4 March, a television channel screened a video showing the five defendants apparently confessing to committing the crimes for which they were convicted.

50. On 3 March, prison authorities executed three male adult prisoners in the central prison of Nasiriyah. They had been sentenced to death after conviction for terrorism-related offences. UNAMI has documented at least 12 executions since the beginning of 2021.

51. With a reported increase in COVID-19 infections in Iraq and the announcement of new preventive measures by the Government, UNAMI continued its social media awareness campaign illustrating the human rights impact of COVID-19 and conveys instructions by health authorities to increase compliance with the measures to contain its spread.

52. On 2 March, UNAMI launched a short film entitled *Breaking the Silence*, an advocacy initiative to encourage efforts to criminalize domestic violence in Iraq, formalize an effective support system for survivors and hold perpetrators accountable for crimes committed inside the home. The film was launched in a joint virtual event with the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights, with 32 attendees, including senior Government representatives, parliamentarians and members of civil society organizations.

53. To mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the 2021 theme "Youth standing up against racism", on 21 March UNAMI and the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights co-facilitated a virtual meeting of 50 youth activists from across Iraq. Four short films produced by UNAMI were screened to

frame the discussion on youth initiatives against discrimination in Iraq. On 10 February, UNAMI facilitated a virtual meeting of the Minority Rights Working Group in Iraq.

54. The ongoing insecurity continued to impact civilians. From 1 January to 31 March, UNAMI documented 66 incidents involving body-borne and roadside improvised explosive devices, indirect fire (rockets and mortar rounds), small arms fire, explosive remnants of war, and unexploded ordnance, which resulted in at least 247 civilian casualties (78 deaths, including 12 children and 3 women, and 169 injured, including 15 children and 20 women). A total of 147 civilian casualties (52 deaths and 95 injuries) were attributed to ISIL and 91 civilian casualties (25 deaths and 66 injuries) to unidentified armed groups operating outside State control. Attacks claimed by ISIL included a twin suicide bomber attack on 21 January at a marketplace in Tayran Square, Baghdad, which resulted in at least 31 civilian deaths and 110 injured (all men) and the killing of eight members of an extended family in Tikrit District, Salah al-Din Governorate, on 12 March. Operations by Turkish forces targeting PKK locations continued.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

55. During 2020, the humanitarian community in Iraq reached 1.4 million people with some form of humanitarian assistance. This represents 81 per cent of the 1.8 million people targeted for assistance in the 2020 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan. In the 2021 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan \$607 million will be sought to address the needs of 1.5 million internally displaced persons both in camps and in out-of-camp locations, as well as acutely vulnerable returnees. In early March 2021, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix recorded that 1.2 million people are still living in displacement in Iraq; 4.9 million have returned home since the first wave of displacement in 2014.

56. The Government of Iraq has paused the closure of camps for internally displaced persons, which had started in October 2020. Between October 2020 and March 2021, the cumulative number of departures from camps to non-camp settings in federal Iraq was 9,443 households (46,940 individuals). Twenty-five camps now remain open in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and four camps remain open in other governorates.

57. On 16 March, the Government's national plan for the return of displaced people and reconstruction was endorsed by the Council of Ministers. It was developed jointly by the United Nations Durable Solutions Task Force, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement and the Ministry of Planning. An area-based coordination mechanism is being piloted in seven target areas through the collaboration of humanitarian, stabilization and development agencies. This multisectoral assistance is based on location, rather than on the objectives of a specific cluster or sector.

58. The United Nations in Iraq continued to provide essential humanitarian assistance, including mental health and psychosocial support services, to internally displaced persons in and out of camps. IOM tracked internally displaced persons in secondary displacement, while supporting them through the provision of infrastructure, awareness-related activities and emergency cash assistance.

59. The World Food Programme continued to provide aid to 195,287 internally displaced persons and 71,582 Syrian refugees in camps in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. An initial rapid assessment of internally displaced persons who have returned, relocated or are secondarily displaced revealed that 41 per cent of out-of-camp households had poor and borderline food consumption, while 33 per cent of households who left camps were food insecure, and 48 per cent were vulnerable to food insecurity.

60. Facilitating returns to areas of origins, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Funding Facility for Stabilization continued to implement infrastructure rehabilitation and livelihood projects in Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din. UNDP continued to work on community readiness and reintegration to facilitate the return of internally displaced persons, including more than 2,000 families perceived as affiliated with ISIL, by supporting community dialogue and through an action plan for sustainable reintegration. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) rehabilitated houses damaged from the conflict with ISIL, completing rehabilitation of 473 houses in Dahuk, Erbil, Mosul, Sinjar and Sumil. In Sinjar, it issued occupancy certificates to Yazidi returnees, allowing Yazidis to officially claim and register land rights for the first time.

61. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provided gender-based violence services to 183,469 women and girls in Iraq and continued to support 70 safe spaces for women, 14 mobile teams and five shelters for women.

62. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNDP completed rehabilitation of 11 health-care facilities in 10 governorates, creating space for 220 isolation rooms, with work ongoing in four additional health-care facilities in other governorates. To strengthen hygiene in urban settings, UN-Habitat connected 218 houses to water in Anbar Governorate and 315 houses in Dahuk Governorate. Since 15 February, IOM has reached a total of 2,764 households in Anbar, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din Governorates with COVID-19 prevention kits.

63. The World Health Organization (WHO) continued to work with the Ministry of Health to ensure that COVID-19 risk-mitigation measures are in place. WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, will be instrumental in the immediate roll-out of the Government of Iraq self-financed COVAX vaccine programme.

64. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) continued to run the Iraq Information Centre, which provided critical information to beneficiaries to help address basic needs on behalf of the humanitarian country team. During the reporting period, the Centre received 11,000 calls (82 per cent male callers and 18 per cent female callers, with over 50 per cent of calls from those in the 26–35 age group). The majority sought assistance on protection (53 per cent), mainly refugees with concerns over registration and residency renewal, resettlement and cash assistance. Other concerns included financial insecurity (31 per cent), food insecurity (9 per cent) and COVID-19 (7.7 per cent).

65. Addressing the urgent need to create youth employment opportunities in Iraq, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) completed the distribution of school furniture and supplies, including COVID-19 risk-mitigation items, for 10 rehabilitated schools in Erbil. UNESCO further supported the Ministry of Education by providing interactive online training for trainers in distance learning and e-learning methods to 34 teachers selected from Basrah, Qadisiyah and Dhi Qar Governorates. They will train approximately 4,000 teachers in their respective governorates. Additionally, UNESCO produced 284 lessons covering all grades and subjects for the Ministry of Education television channel, provided technical and vocational education and training courses in construction to 150 young people in Ninawa Governorate and 50 in Basrah Governorate and supported the enrolment of 1,298 students in catch-up classes, transportation support for 80 students, psychosocial support for 8,437 students and case management for 471 students. In collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, UNFPA conducted an adolescent and youth qualitative survey in Iraq, the results of which informed development of the national youth vision 2030. For its part, the International Labour Organization (ILO), through

its Start and Improve Your Business programme, targeted youth and women entrepreneurs with assistance and training courses.

66. As part of efforts to help the Government of Iraq boost private sector employment, IOM continued to support the private sector through its Enterprise Development Fund, which as at 7 March has supported 753 small and medium-sized businesses, creating an estimated 4,097 new jobs. ILO recently introduced its Employment Intensive Investment Programme in public works to support immediate job creation while investing in infrastructure rehabilitation. The Programme assists in moving from emergency, cash-based activities towards more productive and sustainable job creation.

67. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) launched a project to enable poor smallholder farmers and landless, rural households in Basrah, Dhi Qar and Maysan Governorates to improve agricultural productivity and livelihoods, while maintaining or improving natural resources (land and water) and biodiversity. The project targets youth, women and female-headed households. Additionally, FAO has supported governmental land degradation reversal processes by restoring at least 6,000 hectares of degraded agricultural lands and 4,000 hectares of wetlands, directly benefiting an estimated 2,500 smallholders (50 per cent women).

68. Under its Security Sector programme, UNDP conducted specialized virtual courses to improve the effectiveness of local policing for a total of 40 police officers. In addition, the Ministry of Interior and UNDP launched an e-learning platform for Iraqi police to facilitate easy access and enrolment of police officers, the first of its kind for the Ministry.

69. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) conducted a series of training courses and workshops in February and March on psychological recovery for a group of victims of terrorism in Iraq. The training introduced best practices for supporting victims and strengthened the capabilities of criminal justice and law enforcement officials who are in direct contact with victims of terrorism. UNODC also delivered training courses on the inspection of shipping containers and combating corruption for officials in Baghdad and in Anbar Governorate.

70. The Mine Action Service cleared more than 110,000 m² of agricultural land in areas of Anbar and Ninawa Governorates that had been contaminated with improvised explosive devices during the ISIL occupation. The Mine Action Service provided explosive ordnance risk education to 1,377 individuals, including 1,051 children. Additionally, 35 police officers (10 women) from the Ministry of Interior were trained as explosive hazard first responders.

71. Under its Countering Terrorist Travel Programme, the Office of Counter-Terrorism held an initial coordination meeting with the Government of Iraq on 4 March to identify national needs and priorities to support the country's readiness and capability to use passenger data in preventing, detecting, investigating and prosecuting terrorist offences and other serious crimes, in line with Security Council resolutions [2178 \(2014\)](#), [2396 \(2017\)](#) and [2482 \(2019\)](#). As part of the project to enhance preparedness and response against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear terrorism, the Office conducted virtual training from 5 to 8 April on "Outbreak containment for law enforcement", which was focused on the bioterrorism threat and the role of law enforcement in responding to related public health emergencies.

72. The UNESCO "Revive the spirit of Mosul" initiative, a project to rebuild historical landmarks, was spotlighted by the visit of Pope Francis to Al-Tahera Church, one of three sites covered by the project.

IV. Security and operational issues

A. Update on security arrangements

73. The Department of Safety and Security monitored developments throughout Iraq and implemented risk management measures to enable United Nations operations. Regular security advisories and alerts, including broadcasts related to COVID-19, continued to be disseminated to keep United Nations personnel informed of the precautionary measures in place.

74. The Department of Safety and Security supported an average of 26 field missions per day across the country, with assessed risk levels ranging from medium to high. Its close coordination and engagement with the host Government continued to ensure the proper flow of information and the necessary security support for United Nations operations, in particular movements and access authorizations to regions still affected by COVID-19 containment restrictions.

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

75. The Mission was able to resume construction and refurbishment projects in the United Nations Integrated Compound in Baghdad while maintaining strict health and safety protocols. This included office development and security enhancement due to be completed on 1 May 2021.

76. UNAMI 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 in the delivery of its mandate.

V. Observations

77. I welcome Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi's call for a comprehensive national dialogue. Open discourse and mutual understanding among all Iraqi communities are vital for building a resilient society. The recent visit of Pope Francis to Iraq, which sought to promote religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, highlighted the strength of Iraqi diversity. It is my hope that Iraq will capitalize on this historic visit to promote reconciliation and healing among its diverse communities towards a stable and unified Iraq.

78. Thorough and effective preparations are essential for the success of the planned parliamentary elections on 10 October 2021. I encourage all stakeholders to play their part by ensuring that the legislative process and technical preparations can proceed methodically and without delay. The passage of an amendment to the Federal Supreme Court law that allows for the membership of the court to be completed, which is necessary for the certification of election results, is a welcome development. It is equally important that stakeholders also ensure a safe environment for voters, candidates, campaigners and electoral officials. I call upon all political parties to come together and agree on a code of conduct to allow a credible, inclusive and peaceful democratic contest in an atmosphere free from intimidation and harassment. The establishment of a higher committee to promote and monitor women's participation and propose measures to prevent and address violence against women candidates is a welcome first step.

79. The passage of the 2021 Federal Budget Law is a testament to the importance of political compromise through dialogue at times of severe economic hardship. It is my sincere hope that the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments will build on

this positive development to faithfully implement the budget agreement and to continue discussions in earnest to reach a durable agreement on outstanding issues between them.

80. International cooperation remains key to addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, regional instability, climate change and other issues. Joint challenges are an opportunity to put differences aside and to focus on the way forward towards a stable and secure future, with full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference.

81. I welcome the engagement of the Government of Iraq with its international and regional partners and call upon actors concerned to implement partnership agreements aimed at bringing peace and prosperity to Iraq and stability in the region. However, continued security challenges threaten the stability of Iraq and weaken State control. I therefore call upon all parties concerned to exercise restraint and take concrete measures towards de-escalating tensions.

82. The Government's response to calls for accountability for demonstration-related violations, including the prosecution of those responsible for the killing, serious injury, abduction and disappearance of demonstrators, has produced limited results to date, with the majority of investigations failing to move beyond the investigation phase. While some cases are technically challenging, State institutions should redouble efforts to pursue criminal accountability for these acts.

83. I emphasize the importance of respecting the lawful and legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and of observing fair trial standards for all accused.

84. The enactment of the Yazidi Female Survivors Law is a major step towards addressing the needs of survivors of atrocities committed by ISIL. The Law's recognition of crimes committed by ISIL against the Christians, Shabaks, Turkmens and Yazidis as crimes against humanity and genocide also underscores the need to hold perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence accountable and to provide reparations and redress measures for survivors.

85. The dedicated collective efforts of the health-care workers and government officials of Iraq to address the COVID-19 pandemic are commendable. Against the backdrop of the continuing pandemic, vulnerabilities have increased. I therefore call upon Member States to ensure that the 2021 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan is funded so that the needs of 1.5 million internally displaced persons both in camp and in out-of-camp settings, as well as acutely vulnerable returnees, can be met.

86. Finally, I would like to thank 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.