



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8676th meeting

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Provisional

President: Mrs. Craft (United States of America)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
China	Mr. Wu Haitao
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
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Germany	Mr. Schulz
Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
Peru	Mr. Popolizio Bardales
Poland	Ms. Wronecka
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
South Africa	Mr. Ntsoane
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Twenty-fourth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2019/865)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) (S/2019/903)

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

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: As this is the first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of December, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to Her Excellency Ms. Karen Pierce, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for her service in the presidency of the Security Council for the month of November. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing our deep appreciation to Ambassador Pierce and her team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Twenty-fourth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2019/865)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2470 (2019) (S/2019/903)

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq; Mr. Robert Mardini, Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the United Nations; and Monsignor Bashar Matti Warda, Archbishop of Erbil.

Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Baghdad.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2019/865, which contains the twenty-fourth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation

of paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013), and document S/2019/903, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2470 (2019).

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

Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert: In recent months, I have consistently referred to urgent, unfinished domestic business in Iraq. Today, perhaps inevitably, I will brief the Security Council on protests and civil unrest. These protests, which were initially driven by young people in particular, have given voice to their frustration with poor economic, social and political prospects, and to their hopes for better times, free from corruption, partisan interests and foreign interference. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis from all walks of life have taken to the streets out of the love for their homeland, emphasizing their Iraqi identity. All they are asking for is a country that can reach its full potential for the benefit of all its citizens.

However, they are paying an unimaginable price for their voices to be heard. Since early October, more than 400 people have been killed and more than 19,000 have been injured. As we commemorate the fallen and pay our respects, their ideals and demands remain more alive than ever. One of the protesters told me in the clearest of terms that he would rather not live at all than live without dignity and freedom. That is what the protests are all about. Last week, I visited a hospital in Baghdad and met with a 16-year-old boy who had been heavily injured by shrapnel. His mother said that the lack of all prospects makes our teenagers desperate and that it makes them think and act at least twice their age. Her son is only 16 years old, but 16 years is a very long time if one is waiting for political leaders to live up to their promises.

These young people have no recollection of how horrific life was for many Iraqis in the time of Saddam Hussein. However, they are very much aware of the life that was promised after Saddam Hussein, and through the power of connectivity, they know perfectly well that a better future is possible. I have often said that the current situation cannot be judged without putting it in the context of Iraq's past, and that is true. What we are witnessing is an accumulation of frustration over the lack of progress for so many years.

After years, even decades, of sectarian strife and conflict, a renewed sense of patriotism has taken hold, symbolized by the 16-year-old boy I met in the

hospital, as well as his countless brothers and sisters demonstrating in Iraq. Some well-known Iraqis refer to it as the battle of a nation. Let me underline that any successful nation needs to warmly embrace the potential of its young people. That is all the more important in Iraq, with its remarkably young population.

Events spun out of control on the very first night of the demonstrations, with authorities immediately resorting to excessive force. The high loss of life, the many injuries and the violence, combined with a long period of undelivered promises, all resulted in a huge crisis of confidence. Although the Government has announced various reform packages addressing issues such as housing, unemployment, financial support and education, those are often perceived as unrealistic or too little, too late.

Additionally, the Government's investigation into the violence of early October is seen as incomplete, although it was a positive step. Who is smashing media outlets, gunning down peaceful protesters and abducting civil activists? Who are those masked men and unidentified snipers? I note that a number of arrest warrants have been issued, but I would like to emphasize that perpetrators must be brought to full account. There can be no justification for the many killings and heavy injuries among peaceful protesters. Yet that is precisely what we have been documenting since 1 October. The rules of engagement were reviewed by the Government to minimize the use of lethal force, and indeed, more restraint was observed at the start of the second wave of demonstrations, in Baghdad in particular.

Yet the harsh reality is that the use of live fire has not been abandoned; that non-lethal devices, such as tear gas canisters, continue to be used improperly, causing horrific injuries or death; and that unlawful arrests and detentions continue to take place, as do abductions, threats and intimidation. The recent events in Nasiriyah and Najaf are a case in point. I therefore wish to reiterate the importance of guaranteeing fundamental rights — above all the right to life, but also the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. Additionally, I wish to again stress the critical importance of full accountability and justice at all levels. Also, important to note is the shutdown of media outlets, internet and social media, which adds to the public perception that the authorities have something to hide. Addressing hate speech does not mean limiting or prohibiting freedom of speech.

Another grave concern is the encroachment of power dynamics that is trying to hijack the peaceful protests. Acts of violence that are politically motivated, gang-driven or arising from external loyalties risk placing Iraq on a dangerous trajectory, sowing chaos and confusion, including the further loss of life and the destruction of public and private property. That gravely undermines the rightful demands of the Iraqi people. It complicates the work of the security forces, and it provides a cynical excuse for political inaction or, worse, an excuse for all kinds of conspiracies to justify violent crackdowns on peaceful demonstrations.

To be perfectly clear, the vast majority of protesters are evidently peaceful — everyday men and women seeking a better life. Let me emphasize that it is the primary responsibility of the State to protect its people. In other words, any and all forms of violence are intolerable and must not distract from the rightful demands for reform. That would compromise the State even further and only harm an already gravely eroded public trust, further narrowing the Government's ability to reform. That ability, sadly, grows weaker every time a peaceful protester is killed or injured.

The weight of Iraq's past and the immensity of current issues would surely be challenging to any Government's ability to act and to act fast. However, the shortcomings are long-standing. The following are a few examples.

First, the call for electoral reform reverberates all over Iraq. Iraqis are calling for independent and impartial electoral management and changes in the electoral system to bring voters closer to their candidates and make their elected representatives duly accountable.

Secondly, with respect to pervasive corruption, we have heard plenty of words and gestures, but have seen fewer concrete outcomes. The political class will need to lead by example, for instance by publicly disclosing their assets and abolishing their so-called economic offices. I cannot overstate that anti-corruption efforts will be key to unlocking immense social, economic and political potential. Without meaningful progress, we risk treading water on nearly every other front. A related key demand of the demonstrators is an environment conducive to employment and growth. While that is one of the best remedies against unrest and conflict, we have seen precious little in terms of implementation.

Some three weeks ago, following consultations with a wide range of Iraqis, including protesters and authorities, we proposed a number of steps as a way forward and further initiatives to foster dialogue are ongoing or on their way. But if that dialogue — that peaceful attempt — is to succeed, the protesters' conditions are clear — there must be an end to the bloodshed, abductions and unlawful arrests. Also, it must be understood that without full accountability and justice, it would be nearly impossible to convince the people that political leaders are sincerely willing to engage in substantial reform. While I acknowledge that a collective protest movement does not necessarily recognize central leadership, some structure and coordination on the part of the peaceful protesters will prove to be of great importance as well.

The Prime Minister's resignation was accepted by Parliament last Sunday. Today, the Speaker is expected to ask the President to designate a new Prime Minister. The President will have 15 days to do so. In turn, the Prime Minister-designate will have 30 days to form a Government. While talks about the Prime Minister-designate are ongoing among political leaders, I would like to emphasize the urgency of the current circumstances. Political leaders do not have the luxury of time and must rise to the moment. Moreover, they will have to come clean in public and advance real solutions, instead of leaving it to a Prime Minister with little or no support. I have always emphasized, and I will continue to do so, that a Government cannot go it alone. It is the collective responsibility of the political class as a whole.

With permission, I will now briefly turn to Baghdad-Erbil relations, which is another critical file. As I have said in earlier briefings, relations are surely on an upswing, and that is good news. But I must repeat that, to date, this has not materialized in the form of tangible breakthroughs on the ground. In Sinjar, sadly, we continue to face major restrictions to our humanitarian action. Erbil and Baghdad are duty-bound to establish a single Administration and stable security structures. Their ongoing failure to agree can no longer be explained or tolerated.

Another concern is the situation in Duhok governorate. Over 16,000 Syrian refugees have arrived so far, and more continue to arrive on a daily basis. Nine years into the Syrian conflict, we did not expect to open new refugee camps in Iraq. Let us not forget that

they are joining the quarter of a million Syrians already being hosted in the Kurdish region.

While the protests dominate our attention, we should not forget the legacy of yesterday's fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. As we speak, a new disaster is in the making. On many occasions, I have stated that the situation in camps such as Al-Hol is not sustainable. Transnational threats demand collective action, but instead we are seeing a frankly shocking lack of international long-term thinking.

I would now like to turn to the issue of missing third-country Kuwaiti nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives. Despite the domestic crisis, I am pleased to report that, on 27 October, Iraq handed over approximately 200,000 books belonging to the National Library of Kuwait and Kuwait University. I would also like to commend the difficult work carried out by Kuwaiti forensic experts in the ongoing identification process of the human remains that were found earlier this year in the Samawah desert. I truly hope that those efforts can soon be completed in order to deliver some closure to relatives.

I would like to say a final word on the ongoing demonstrations in Iraq. The country is as at a crossroads. In my meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, he expressed concern that the relevant actors might not be serious enough to implement any meaningful reform. He added that the situation could not continue as it was before the demonstrations, which is very true. Meanwhile, the protesters appear determined to persevere as long as their demands remain unheeded. The situation cannot and will not be resolved by buying time with band-aid solutions and coercive measures — such an approach will only further fuel public anger and distrust. Pursuing partisan interests, muddling through or brutally cracking down on peaceful protesters are not strategies at all. Nothing is more damaging than a climate of anger and fear.

We must not let history repeat itself. Out of any crisis, new and great opportunities can emerge. Iraq is definitely not a lost cause — far from it. It has immense potential. The challenge is to seize this opportunity and to build a sovereign, stable, inclusive and prosperous Iraq. Now is the time to act. The great hopes of so many Iraqis call for bold and forward thinking.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Mardini.

Mr. Mardini: I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council today. We also thank Kuwait for its efforts to ensure that the issue of missing persons is a topic of importance in the Council, as well as in drafting the first resolution on missing persons in armed conflict, adopted in June (resolution 2474 (2019)).

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has chaired the Tripartite Commission since its founding in 1991. Following the end of the Gulf War, Iraq, Kuwait and coalition members Saudi Arabia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States created the Commission to search for missing persons. Today the Commission and its Technical Subcommittee, with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq serving as an observer and the ICRC as the Chair, aim to trace persons still unaccounted for and provide answers for families.

Just over a year ago the ICRC provided the Council with an update on the workings of the Tripartite Commission and the Technical Subcommittee (see S/PV.8324). We reported that, since the founding of the Tripartite Commission, we had helped repatriate more than 75,000 citizens, civilian internees and prisoners of war. Since 2003, once the search for burial sites began in Iraq, and later in Kuwait, the remains of 275 persons in Iraq and 98 persons in Kuwait have been recovered. A total of 1,080 cases of missing persons remain open to date within the framework of the mechanism. Of those cases 371 were reported missing by Kuwait, 700 by Iraq and nine by Saudi Arabia.

Today I am pleased to confirm that, for the first time in 14 years, Kuwaiti remains were recovered. Those remains were recovered in Al-Muthanna, Iraq, in March. The members of the mechanism, with the support of the ICRC, have been conducting excavations since 2003 in both Iraq and Kuwait. Prior to this year, the latest successful exhumation of human remains took place in 2011, which were Iraqi remains found in Kuwait. No remains or burials sites were found for eight years, and it has been 14 years since the most recent recovery of Kuwaiti remains.

We had a breakthrough early this year with new information leading to the identification of two mass graves of alleged Kuwaiti citizens. That breakthrough came about in part due to the recommendations and findings from the ICRC's review project that was

completed in July 2017. The project took stock of the situation, involved experts and forensic specialists and proposed recommendations for future work. The review project report and its recommendations were adopted by the Tripartite Commission in December 2018 and have since been used to guide desk- and field-based work deployed to make progress in the search and recovery of further remains of missing persons.

Witness information, analysis of satellite imagery and several previous exploration missions led us to Samawah in Al-Muthanna governorate. That is where the breakthrough happened and where human remains were exhumed in March. In August the Iraqi authorities handed over 46 boxes and two bags containing those remains, which are currently being processed by the Kuwaiti authorities at their national forensic laboratories. It is a time-consuming process that is expected to last into next year. If a match is found, the remains will be returned to their families.

This year, with the support of the ICRC, the human rights directorate of the Iraqi Ministry of Defence carried out further extensive exploration and excavation missions across the southern deserts of Iraq. Based on new and previously available witness information, comparisons with archival records and analyses of satellite imagery, several exploration and excavation missions were carried out in the governorates of Karbala, Dhi Qar and Al-Anbar, in addition to those in Al-Muthanna. Unfortunately, no human remains were found in the former three locations.

There is a lesson to be learned in this breakthrough. The wounds of the missing are deep and long-lasting. When persons go missing, their absence affects the family, the community and the society as a whole. To solve these cases takes time, patience and cooperation among Governments, humanitarian organizations and the families of the missing. But, most important, work on missing persons requires perseverance and determination. It can take years of work to uncover answers and address the cases of the missing. Each one of those individuals is important. We have to stay the course on each one, no matter the time or commitment it might take.

The Tripartite Mechanism hopes to continue identifying further remains in future. The members of the Mechanism agreed to update existing protocols for the transfer of human remains between Iraq and Kuwait to bring them in line with the respective domestic legal

frameworks and best practices. Field missions are being organized by Iraq regularly to explore and excavate sites of interest. Other members of the Mechanism, namely, the United Kingdom, France and the United States, have made significant efforts to provide relevant information in the hope that further research will help identify more grave sites in Iraq and Kuwait.

As Chair of the Tripartite Commission, the ICRC is committed to upholding the right of families to receive answers about the fate of their missing loved ones. To that end, we shall spare no effort in searching for and recovering human remains wherever conflict or other situations of violence might have left an open wound. We hope that Member States will join us on this mission by upholding their obligation under international law to prevent people from going missing in the first place and by clarifying the fates of those who have.

The President: I thank Mr. Mardini for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Archbishop Warda.

Archbishop Warda: The current protests in Iraq demonstrate the rejection by the majority of the Iraqi people of the post-2003 structure and Government of the country. It is a rejection of a sectarian-based Constitution, which has divided Iraq and prevented it from becoming a unified and functioning country. Instead of bringing hope and prosperity, the current Government structure has brought continued corruption and despair, especially for Iraq's youth. It is very significant that young Iraqis have been the leaders in the protests. Those young people have made it clear that they want Iraq to be independent of foreign interference, and to be a place where all can live together as equal citizens in a country of legitimate pluralism and respect for all.

It is important to understand that Christians have not only sided with the protesters openly, but also that the Christians and other minorities, including Yazidis, have been welcomed into the protest movement by Iraqi Muslims. In a real sense, the protests have demonstrated the true richness of the historical Iraq. This opening of reconciliation among all Iraqis demonstrates real hope for positive changes in which a new Government in Iraq, if there is a new Government, will be much more positive towards a genuinely multi-religious Iraq, with full citizenship for all and an end to the sectarian disease that has so violently harmed and degraded us all.

In contrast, the non-violence of the protesters must not be overlooked by the international community. Those courageous protestors have been committed to non-violence from the very beginning of the movement, even though there have been daily instances of extreme violence directed towards the protesters from militia forces, which have continually attempted to provoke confrontation. Over 400 innocent protesters have now been murdered, and many thousands seriously injured. Yet the protesters still remain non-violent.

What is at stake? At stake is whether Iraq will finally emerge from the trauma of Saddam and the past 16 years to become a legitimate, independent and functioning country, or whether it will become a permanently lawless region, open to proxy wars between other countries and movements, and a servant to the sectarian demands of those outside Iraq.

If, God willing, the protest movement is successful in creating a new Government, with a new civil constitution, respecting the diversity of its religions, ethnicities and cultures — one based not on Sharia but on the fundamental concepts of freedom for all enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written by this Organization where we meet today — then a time of hope can still exist for the long-suffering Iraqi people.

Despite everything, the Iraqi people love their country, and they want it back. If the protest movement is not successful, if the international community stands by and allows the murder of innocents to continue, Iraq will likely soon fall into civil war, the result of which will send millions of young Iraqis, including most Christians and Yazidis, into the diaspora. In the crisis and the genocide of 2014, over 4 million Iraqis — Muslims, Yazidis and Christians — fled to the Kurdistan region seeking refuge from the evil of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, but remained within the country. In another major conflict, we are likely to see the people flee from Iraq for good. We are indeed perhaps confronting the last chance for our country.

What can and should the international community do to help? The international community must not be satisfied with false changes in leadership that do not represent real change. It is clear that the ruling power groups do not intend to give up control, and that they will make every effort to fundamentally keep the existing power structures in place. The international community must clearly understand that the protesters will not

accept this, and the international community must not take part in supporting any type of false change. That is not to say that certain groups do not have legitimate concerns regarding their proper representation in any new Government. However, such concerns must be addressed in a way that reflects the reality of the current broken nature of Iraq's Government, and its fundamental need for change and replacement.

The first step must be the initiation of early elections. The protesters insist on this, and the international community must fully support it. Unlike the very limited participation of past elections, these elections must involve the country's youth — those who have stood up so courageously against corruption during the protests over the past weeks.

In the period before and during the elections, the press, both Iraqi and international, must be completely free to report on and discuss all the issues that need to be addressed by the elections. For that to happen, the current blocking of news reporting, the Internet and social media must end immediately.

Finally, elections must be fully monitored by the United Nations and observed by all major parties in Iraq so that the elections are legitimate, free and fair. Only in that way can a new Government set a course for the future of an Iraq that is free of corruption and where there is full citizenship and opportunity for all.

The young Christians of Iraq have participated in the protests every day. They have been there because the protests have given them hope for a future — a future in which they belong as equal contributors and Iraqi citizens. Along with the millions of other marginalized Iraqis, they look now to the international community for action and support. Iraq, a country so often harmed, now looks to all those in the international community for help. We hold all in the international community accountable for that. We believe we have a future. We ask the international community not to turn away from us.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of the United States of America.

It is noteworthy that the political mission we are here to discuss today — the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) — enjoys widespread support. I therefore want to thank the Special Representative for her briefing but even more

so for her leadership. Our appreciation is with all of UNAMI and the entire United Nations country team for their work supporting Iraq's security, stability and prosperity. I also thank the Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to the United Nations, Mr. Mardini, for his briefing. The United States strongly supports the efforts of UNAMI, the Tripartite Commission and the ICRC to address the unresolved issue of Kuwaiti and third-country missing persons, property and archives from the first Gulf War.

We are also very glad that Archbishop Warda is with us today. His presence is a poignant reminder of the strength that Iraq draws from its diverse religious traditions, which are central to Iraq's identity as the cradle of civilization. The United States recognizes the continued need to defend religious freedom in Iraq, and we join Archbishop Warda in voicing support for the right of all people to freely practice their faith.

It is clear that Iraq now stands at a crossroads. In recent weeks, the world has witnessed Iraqis from all walks of life — Sunni, Shia, Turkmen, Christian and Yazidi — chant in unison, "We are all one Iraq". Those chants reveal a hope for a nation that is governed without sectarian intention, corruption or foreign influence, and that delivers on its basic responsibilities to all of its people, including electricity, water, health care and education.

The United States hears the cries of hope and firmly supports the people of Iraq as they strive to build a country of prosperity for every citizen. That will mean embracing electoral reform, promoting good governance, addressing corruption and expanding economic opportunity, but, most important, it will require Iraq's leaders to be responsive and accountable to all citizens. As the Special Representative said earlier, it is the primary responsibility of the State to protect its people.

At this critical moment, UNAMI has an indispensable role to play. It has been tasked by the Council with promoting inclusive political dialogue, assisting with constitutional and electoral reform efforts, protecting human rights and promoting judicial accountability. Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert and her team have already coordinated dialogue among diverse political, religious and community leaders. Those conversations, held in response to legitimate public demands echoing across Iraq, demonstrate UNAMI's

potential to shepherd the country peacefully through the critical weeks and months ahead.

We encourage Iraq's current and future leaders to carefully consider UNAMI's suggested road map for addressing the legitimate grievances of citizens. From the very start, the United States has made clear that Iraqis have the right to the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, in accordance with Iraq's own constitutional values. We are deeply alarmed by the use of lethal force against peaceful demonstrators by Iraqi authorities and armed groups not under State control. We condemn that violence and we urge others to do the same. We mourn those who have lost their lives.

At this moment, all sides must use maximum restraint. Acts of violence, the destruction of property and looting only exasperate tensions and should be avoided at all costs. Attempts to restrict free expression, the press and Internet access should be abandoned. Outside the country, Iraq's neighbours must not meddle in its affairs. The Iraqi people have loudly rejected such behaviour by Iran. The United States remains a steadfast partner for Iraq to ensure that the sovereignty and independence of its institutions are protected from those who would undermine them.

In accordance with our theme for the month, I want to conclude today by looking at where UNAMI has been in the past year and where it should go in the coming year. One important success of the past year came six months ago when the Council embarked on a historic first-ever visit to Iraq, co-sponsored by the United States and Kuwait and facilitated by UNAMI. The visit demonstrated the widespread goodwill in Iraq earned by the Mission and stands as a testament to the progress that UNAMI has made in establishing itself as a trustworthy and honest broker in Iraq since it was created by the Council in 2003. But in the coming year, progress will mean building on that goodwill.

We hope that, as current events in Iraq unfold, UNAMI will work with Iraq on further developing electoral and constitutional reform, mediating dialogue and promoting accountability. Those would be successes that would genuinely contribute to international peace and security. In the same way that the Council continues to seek meaningful progress, we hope that the Iraqi people and their Government will do the same. Indeed, they have come too far to reverse course now. The United States is confident that the Iraqi people will chart a course that ultimately leads Iraq to stability,

sovereignty, independence and prosperity. May we do all we can to assist them along the way.

I resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

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

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate your country, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and wish you every success. We also commend Ambassador Karen Pierce and the United Kingdom delegation on its presidency of the Council last month.

We thank Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Mr. Robert Mardini, Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to the United Nations; and Archbishop Warda for their briefings. We wish Mr. Mardini every success in his future role as Director-General of the ICRC. The State of Kuwait reiterates its appreciation and support for the work of the briefers in carrying out their respective mandates.

As a neighbouring country, Kuwait is following developments in Iraq very closely after the protests that began several weeks ago in a number of governorates. We regret the casualties that have occurred among civilians and security forces, and we extend our condolences to the families of the victims. In that context, we call for non-violence, restraint and calm. We should not provide those seeking to harm Iraq and the Iraqi people with the opportunity to sow strife, instability and insecurity by using live ammunition and attacking innocent protesters and public and private property. We hope that Iraq will be able to overcome those exceptional circumstances and normalize the situation.

The recent past has shown the unity of the Iraqi people, regardless of their political, ethnic and religious affiliations, by eliminating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and overcoming the darkest and most challenging chapters in its history. We wish the entire Iraqi people lasting stability and prosperity. At the same time, we welcome the steps taken by the Iraqi Government to meet the demands of the Iraqi people and to defuse the situation, including the establishment of a committee to investigate the use of force against protesters and holding accountable those responsible for violations against them.

The next stage in Iraq will be important to the country's recovery, and we are aware of the considerable challenges it will face. It is important to address them through a constructive and peaceful dialogue, which requires the support and assistance of the international community and the United Nations, while respecting the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq and avoiding any form of interference in its internal affairs.

The State of Kuwait is aware of the difficult phase facing Iraq. We will spare no effort in supporting Iraq and its people in accordance with their needs and those of the Iraqi Government as they strive to address their internal challenges. We welcome the vital role played by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq to enhance those efforts, in line with its mandate, including its proposal, in consultation with the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament, to set up a reform road map that is in accordance with the legal and constitutional framework and takes into consideration the basic demands of the Iraqi people.

The question of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals, which has been an item on the Security Council agenda for three decades, is an important and sensitive issue for the Kuwaitis and the families of the victims, who have been eagerly waiting any information on the fate of their loved ones for the past 29 years. This is a humanitarian issue, and we hope it will be resolved as soon as possible.

We call on the members of the Council to continue their support and their serious endeavours to find a solution that can end the suffering of the families of the missing persons, determine their fate and locate their remains. In that connection, we highlight the efforts of the United Kingdom, France and the United States to contribute to the work of the Tripartite Commission, including by providing maps and archives from 1990 and 1991, which we hope will yield further positive results, since we have now located the remains of a number of missing Kuwaitis that are being analysed to determine their identities. We also appreciate the Government of Iraq's constructive contribution as part of the Tripartite Commission and its Technical Subcommittee, under the leadership of the ICRC. We commend the ICRC for its role in determining the fate of the remaining missing Kuwaitis and third-country nationals in the past few years. This cooperation has enabled us to determine the fate of 236 of 605 missing persons. We hope it will continue and be stepped up in its next phase in order to make substantive progress

in implementing the plans and programmes of action agreed by the member States of the Commission.

With regard to the issue of Kuwaiti property, I commend the efforts of the Iraqi authorities and all the parties that have helped to facilitate the return of Kuwaiti property, including most recently 200,000 books, as Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert mentioned in her briefing. This is a positive step and part of Iraq's efforts to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. We hope that Iraq will continue working to ensure the return of all Kuwaiti property, including the national archives. What has been returned is only a small part of what is missing. The national archives that the Secretary-General mentions in his report (S/2019/865) have been missing since 1991 and are valuable to the State of Kuwait for historical reasons. We previously provided many lists of the archives that have not yet been returned, most notably those of the Amiri Diwan, the Office of the Crown Prince, the Office of the Prime Minister and the Office of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, all of which were looted during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. They are priceless and some of them date back to the nineteenth century.

In conclusion, while we commend Iraq's efforts to fulfil all of its remaining international obligations to the State of Kuwait, as stated in the relevant Council resolutions, we hope that those outstanding commitments will be honoured. Kuwait was one of the first to support Iraq in overcoming the obstacles to its stability and security and in fulfilling its remaining commitments since the liberation of the State of Kuwait in 1991. We are certain that Iraq's implementation of its remaining commitments, under the supervision of the United Nations, will strengthen the relationship between our two countries on a basis of respect for the relevant Council resolutions.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Council for this month. You have the United Kingdom's full support. I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross and His Grace the Archbishop of Erbil for their briefings.

Today we very clearly heard how significant the challenges facing Iraq are. The United Kingdom supports the Iraqi people's right to peaceful protest as enshrined in their Constitution, and as Britain's Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has made clear, we are deeply

saddened and shocked by the loss of life since the protests started at the beginning of October. We call on the security forces to respond proportionately, and we are deeply concerned about the use of live ammunition and the lethal use of tear gas and baton rounds. We call on the Government of Iraq to ensure that credible investigations into the violence are carried out and that those responsible are held to account. We are also concerned about the attacks on the Iranian consulates in Najaf and Karbala. Diplomatic premises should not be a target of violence.

We welcome the work that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General has done to facilitate dialogue between the protesters, Government officials and the Council of Representatives. As we look ahead to 2020, the United Kingdom calls for an inclusive and transparent reform process that responds to the challenges that Iraq is facing and to the legitimate demands of the protesters. In particular, we encourage the Government of Iraq to work with the United Nations on credible electoral reform that ensures that the views of the Iraqi people are heard and their representatives held accountable. I was struck by what the Special Representative of the Secretary-General said about a better future. We agree with her that stopping hate speech does not mean stopping freedom of expression.

We are also encouraged by the steadily improving relations between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government, including the recent ministerial engagements to discuss the draft 2020 federal budget law, but we note what the Special Representative had to say about those relations. We urge for continued cooperation and progress in this area in order to resolve outstanding issues in line with Iraq's Constitution.

It is clear that Da'esh continues to pose a threat to the peace and security of Iraq. The United Kingdom, along with other members of the Global Coalition against Da'esh, is committed to supporting Iraq in addressing that threat. As we discussed a week ago (see S/PV.8675), the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) continues to make progress. In that regard, we welcome the logistical support that United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has been able to provide to UNITAD. We must not forget the 1.4 million people who have been the recipients of humanitarian assistance so far in 2019. They should be treated with generosity

and respect. The reports of forced returns of vulnerable internally displaced persons are deeply troubling.

We welcome the significant progress in the implementation of resolution 2107 (2013). We hope that the return on 8 August of the remains of some of the missing Kuwaitis will provide closure to their families once they have been fully identified. In that connection, I thank the representative of Kuwait for the additional information that he has provided. This is a very important issue. Continued senior engagement on both sides is key and serves as a reminder of how important both Kuwait and Iraq consider this file.

I think that we in the Council will be united in our concern about the number of fatalities and casualties there have been since the beginning of the protests and in our desire to see credible investigations to hold to account those responsible for the excessive use of force. I think we will also be united in hoping to see Iraq, supported by UNAMI, take forward significant reforms to address the popular concerns and deliver stability and prosperity for their people.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We congratulate you, Madam President, on your accession to the presidency of the Security Council, and thank the United Kingdom for its presidency last month. We also want to thank Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda and Mr. Mardini, Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the United Nations, for their briefings.

The Russian Federation has consistently advocated for maintaining the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq and ensuring its internal stability and security. We are closely following the developing situation in this Arab country. We understand that the underlying reasons for the current protests that have engulfed it are socioeconomic in nature. Clearly, the layers of problems that have been accumulating for years cannot be dealt with overnight. That is why it is important for the international community to support Baghdad in establishing comprehensive measures to restore its economy and improve the situation in the social arena. Our hope is that the leading parliamentary factions will be able to select a new consensus candidate for Prime Minister within the timelines set by Iraq's Constitution and prevent the emergence of a power vacuum in the country that could seriously exacerbate

its domestic political crisis. It would help to overcome internal disagreements and restore stability to Iraq, which is of key significance to the whole of the Middle East. In the context of the national dialogue, is it important to continue dialogue in the efforts to restore mutual understanding between Baghdad and Erbil. We are positive that improving relations between them will help Iraq to improve its security.

We are troubled by the fact that the terrorist threat in Iraq remains high. The situation has been compounded by the flood of terrorists leaving Syria in the wake of the military defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) there. We believe that the only way to effectively counter this challenge is by coordinating counter-terrorism efforts as fully as possible. It is also essential to ensure that all the stakeholders involved in combating terrorism in Iraq respect the sovereignty of the Iraqi State and coordinate their actions with Baghdad.

Having listened attentively to the statement delivered by His Grace the Archbishop, we would like to underscore the importance of maintaining the ethnic and religious diversity that has characterized the region for millennia both in Iraq and in the Middle East as a whole. However, that hard-won balance of the peoples of the region has been disrupted by the heinous crimes of pseudo-Muslim terrorist groups. As a result, Christians and other religious minorities who were to a large extent a stabilizing factor have been forced into exile. Immediate measures must be taken to halt the mass exodus of Christians and other minorities from the countries of the Middle East and to maintain the unique balance in their coexistence. In that connection, we feel compelled to remind the Council of the recent tragedy in Qamishli, Syria, in which ISIL terrorists murdered Hovsep Bedoyan, an Armenian Catholic priest, and his father. Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus', has condemned the crime and expressed his condolences. We also continue to focus on determining the fate of two Christian metropolitans of Aleppo, Yohanna Ibrahim and Paul.

We are concerned about the potential negative influence that the artificial fomenting of events around Iran could have on the domestic political situation in Iraq. The attempts to drag Iraq into a regional confrontation are destabilizing its internal environment. Iraq has the right to build and develop normal relations with its neighbours, and no one has the right to undermine those relations. Once again we

stress the importance of launching mechanisms for dialogue in the region instead of imposing sanctions and making threats. In that connection we would like to point out that the Secretary-General has a mandate to develop security- and confidence-building measures in the region, pursuant to resolution 598 (1987). We are open to cooperation on such a basis with all regional and international partners in the framework of the concept we have proposed for collective security in the Persian Gulf region.

In conclusion, we would like to note the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. We believe that its efforts should facilitate national reconciliation processes and the achievement of long-term stabilization in the country. For our part, through our contacts with all Iraqi political forces we are urging them to unite their efforts in order to settle all the issues on Iraq's domestic agenda through a national dialogue and by arriving at mutually acceptable agreements that take account of the interests of all of this Arab republic's ethnic and religious groups.

Mr. Popolizio Bardales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank and commend the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom for the important contributions she made to the work of the Security Council last month. I wish also to congratulate you, Madam President, and the delegation of the United States on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of December and wish to convey to you the full support of Peru. I wish also to express my gratitude for the enlightening briefings delivered by the Special Representative, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert; Mr. Robert Mardini; and Monsignor Bashar Matti Warda, Archbishop of Erbil.

Peru has noted with concern the social instability and protests in Iraq and the fact that they are not being successfully brought under control or redirected towards efforts to promote the necessary political dialogue and ease tensions. We deplore the fact that, on the contrary, the people's right to peacefully express themselves is being denied and countered through the excessive use of force and through attacks against several cities in which lethal force was used, leading to a number of deaths and injuries and fostering a vicious circle of violence and mistrust.

Peru agrees with the Iraqi authorities that it is necessary to urgently address the legitimate requests to tackle corruption, promote employment and ensure

better services for the people. However, we believe that such endeavours must go hand in hand with measures aimed at ensuring moderation and respect for human rights as well as at bringing those responsible to justice, which would contribute to fostering unity, stability and reconciliation in the country. Such measures must also go hand in hand with a deep-seated structural reform process, including in the area of security, so as to allow for the 2020 provincial elections to be held peacefully and in a transparent manner. To that end, the international community must lend its firm support.

In that context, we deem positive the fact that in recent weeks, the Government has allocated resources and adopted emergency measures aimed at protecting the most vulnerable segments of the population and promoting positive contributions by Iraqi young people in order to prevent them from being recruited by extremist groups, which could view them as a sounding board for their messages of hatred and destruction.

As set out in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/903), we must not play down the terrorist threat posed by Da'esh and its influence in new arenas. The same can be said of other armed groups, which continue to pose a latent threat to national and regional security. We would also underline the efforts made by the Iraqi Government to foster a peaceful and cooperative environment and also point to the efforts made within the country, in particular the rapprochement with the Erbil authorities as a prerequisite for the achievement of lasting peace.

We also commend the fact that women are playing an increasingly prominent role in the political life of the country, with the appointment of Ms. Suha Ali Bek as Minister of Education. As we have already indicated, the participation of women, as well as that of young people and minorities, can only be good news when it comes to strengthening Iraqi democracy.

We would not wish to conclude without stressing the need to find a timely solution to the situation of internally displaced persons and refugees and of those of the more than 30,000 Iraqis who are allegedly affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, on the basis of their orderly, voluntary, safe and dignified return.

I conclude by commending the work being carried out by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq in that context, as well as the Special Representative, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and her team for their

tireless efforts and dedication to the implementation of the Mission's mandate, including in a context of pressing humanitarian needs in a highly volatile and complex situation.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish every success to the United States as it discharges its mandate as President of the Security Council for this month. We also congratulate the United Kingdom on the outstanding manner in which it steered the work of the Council during the month of November. We also thank the briefers for their presentations and for their commendable efforts to promote stability, sustainable development and peace in Iraq.

We would first express our concern at the volatile situation and escalation of violence in south and central Iraq since early October, which has claimed hundreds of lives and injured thousands of people. We regret that this situation has arisen barely a year after the current Government was installed.

After years of conflict and a vigorous fight against terrorism, the Iraqi people yearn to lead normal lives in a functional and inclusive society, where young people have opportunities for employment and sustainable development and where impunity and corruption do not prevail. Accordingly, we support their legitimate right to peaceful protest, but we condemn the use of violence by some demonstrators, as well as the destruction of public and private property. Similarly, we call on the authorities to respect the rights to freedom of expression and protest and to refrain from using lethal weapons and force against demonstrators. We strongly condemn the acts of violence that have taken place, the excessive use of force and the deliberate killing of demonstrators, who did not represent a threat to the lives of others. We also call for the integrity and protection of journalists to be guaranteed, for their rights to be respected in the performance of their duties and for the various media, which are responsible for informing the nation and the rest of the world of developments, to be permitted to do their work.

We welcome the fact that, prior to the announcement of Prime Minister Al-Mahdi's resignation, steps were taken to address the demands of protesters, including the creation of employment and housing opportunities and the establishment of a high commission of inquiry to identify and bring to justice perpetrators of violence during demonstrations, which we see as the initial

step towards accountability. Furthermore, we support the Government's proposal for structural reform that includes, among other things, economic and legislative measures, the appointment of new ministers, including more women and young people, and the establishment of a central court to combat corruption. We hope that the appointment of the first woman Cabinet member as Minister of Education will be the first step towards the inclusion of more women in decision-making and leadership positions in the country.

With regard to the unresolved issues with Kuwait, we commend the efforts made by members of the Tripartite Mechanism to move forward on the search for prisoners and missing persons reported by Kuwait and the return of human remains, assets and national archives. We hope that the parties will continue to strengthen their cooperation until the matter is resolved and to provide the families of missing persons with as much information as possible on the whereabouts of their loved ones.

In conclusion, we underscore the need to respect the sovereignty and integrity of Iraq. The primary tool to resolve the current situation is dialogue, exclusively between the Government, other political actors and all segments of Iraqi society, a process we believe should be supported by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.

Mr. Ntsoane (South Africa): Let me first congratulate the United States for assuming the presidency of the Security Council for December and pledge my delegation's support during its presidency. In addition, we would like to thank the United Kingdom for successfully presiding the Security Council in November.

I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the United Nations, Mr. Robert Mardini, and the Archbishop of Erbil, Monsignor Bashar Warda, for their briefings.

I would like to address the following two points in my intervention this morning, namely, the political and security situations.

First, on the political situation, South Africa supports the mandate of UNAMI as the Mission promotes the strengthening of the Government of Iraq

and subsequent electoral processes. We welcome the appointment of Iraq's first female minister, Ms. Suha Ali Bek, as a positive step towards the inclusion of more women in Government and higher decision-making structures. Furthermore, we applaud the positive progress in reaching an agreement between the Iraqi Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government on dividing oil revenues.

We note with concern the large-scale public protests of past months, which have spread and escalated across Baghdad. We hope that the Government of Iraq can take concrete action to address the concerns of its citizens, launch investigations into the violence and loss of life resulting from the protests and ensure accountability for any human rights violations. South Africa welcomes the reforms proposed by the Government to improve governance structures and the implementation of service delivery. We also support the drive for an inclusive Government that will bring together all diverse elements of Iraqi society in governance structures.

We believe national reconciliation and unity in Iraq are vital to avoiding future challenges resulting from the fracturing of Government policies and actions. South Africa encourages further cooperation between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan autonomous region in order to strengthen and maintain the prevailing peace throughout Iraq. We also encourage Iraq to continue engaging with its neighbours with a view to maintaining peace and stability in the region and diversifying its regional economic partnerships. In that regard, we welcome the efforts by the Iraqi leadership to promote a balanced regional policy, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's report (A/2019/903).

Secondly, on the security situation, we believe that peace and security are fundamental for Iraq to develop its infrastructure, grow its economy and provide basic services to all of its citizens. In that regard, South Africa supports the full consolidation of Iraqi army control over Iraqi territories and the efforts of the Government to eradicate the threat posed by Da'esh. The issue of the return of internally displaced persons to their areas of origin should also be given priority to ensure that their return is safe, dignified and voluntary. South Africa would further like to propose involving the Peacebuilding Commission to support the efforts of the Government to promote inclusivity, specifically in institution-building and post-reconstruction development in Iraq.

In conclusion, we are encouraged by the sustained joint efforts of the Governments of Kuwait and Iraq to locate the missing Kuwaiti and other nationals and missing Kuwaiti property. We are also encouraged by other positive developments, including Iraq's handing over of books belonging to the Kuwaiti National Library and Kuwait University to the Government of Kuwait. We hope that both countries can work together with the relevant United Nations institutions to resolve any outstanding issues.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): At the outset, let me congratulate the United States on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of December. Please be assured of my delegation's full support, Madam President. Allow me also to thank Ambassador Karen Pierce, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom, and her team for their excellent work presiding over the Council in the month of November.

I would also like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Mr. Robert Mardini and Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda for their important briefings. Indonesia would like to underscore the following points.

First, with regard to the recent political turmoil across Iraq, we fully support Iraq's journey towards democracy and prosperity for its people and are deeply concerned by the demonstrations that have turned violent. The path to democracy is never easy, but peaceful assembly, demonstrations and peaceful protest are central to it. We therefore call on all the parties to act with maximum restraint and resolve the people's demands through peaceful and inclusive dialogue. We support the people's right to peaceful assembly, in line with Iraq's Constitution, and call on the Government, particularly the security forces, to respect fundamental human rights. We further urge the Government to continue the measures it is taking to meet the public's demands and to investigate the violence that has caused deaths and injuries in the demonstrations.

Secondly, with regard to post-conflict recovery and national reconciliation, we reiterate our firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. In that connection, we stress that elements such as combating corruption, strengthening the environment for investment, respecting the rule of law, reforming the security sector and creating an environment that enables women and young people to participate in

nation-building are crucial to post-conflict recovery and reconciliation. Protecting the rights of minorities, regardless of their religion, ethnicity or cultural background, is equally important. We would also like to encourage the inclusion of more women in senior decision-making positions in Iraq, and in that regard we welcome Ms. Suha Ali Bek's appointment as Minister of Education, which is an important step towards responding to the calls of the international community. We also applaud the Government's effort to establish stronger relations with its neighbouring countries, as consolidated efforts are crucial to promoting security and stability in the region and strengthening economic relations.

Thirdly, with regard to the repatriation and return of all Kuwaiti and third-country nationals or their remains, as well as the return of Kuwaiti property, we are very encouraged by the persistent efforts of the Governments of Iraq and of Kuwait and the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Tripartite Commission. Collectively, those efforts have yielded significant progress. We are pleased to learn, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General said, that approximately 200,000 books belonging to the Government of Kuwait have been handed over by the Iraqi Ministry for Foreign Affairs. We would also like to echo the Secretary-General, whose report (S/2019/865) encourages the Iraqi Government to build on those successful efforts and to take all steps necessary to promote further progress. Indonesia will continue to monitor progress on this file, particularly with regard to the missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals or their remains. It is our responsibility to help their families receive closure.

In conclusion, we once again thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Hennis-Plasschaert and her team at the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq for their diligent support to the efforts of the Iraqi people and the Government to achieve a stable and prosperous country.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to congratulate the United States on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council this month and to assure it of our support. We also congratulate the United Kingdom on its successful presidency in November and appreciate all of the work it accomplished. We thank Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert and Mr. Robert Mardini, Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red

Cross, for their briefings. We also listened attentively to the statement by Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda of Erbil.

The current situation in Iraq has drawn international attention. Maintaining stability and restoring order there are top priorities. The Iraqi Government has taken a number of measures to respond to the demands of the Iraqi people, with positive results. We believe that Iraq has the ability and wisdom to find an appropriate solution to the current crisis and defuse the situation as soon as possible. During its visit to the country in June, the Security Council reiterated its firm support for Iraq's efforts to achieve economic recovery, peace and stability, national reconciliation and reconstruction. The Council should continue to demonstrate support for Iraq in a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation on an equal footing, with a view to benefiting all concerned and achieving a win-win outcome. Iraq has been developing friendly relations with neighbouring countries and working to reduce regional tensions, and China appreciates those efforts. At the same time, Iraq is still at a critical stage in consolidating the outcomes of its counter-terrorism efforts, achieving peace and stability and advancing national reconstruction. All parties should fully respect Iraq's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity and continue to support its efforts.

First, we should firmly support the inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation process in Iraq. In recent years, with the support of the international community, Iraq has worked hard to ensure national security and stability, establish the Kurdistan Regional Government, promote communication and dialogue and steadily advance national reconciliation and reconstruction. In the current circumstances it is more important than ever for the international community to maintain its support for Iraq's efforts to achieve inclusive reconciliation and harmonious coexistence and support all the parties in Iraq in engaging in peaceful and meaningful dialogue, with the fundamental interests and needs of the Iraqi people in mind. China welcomes the improved relations between the central Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and looks forward to seeing them reach an agreement on oil-revenue distribution and security arrangements as soon as possible. We welcome the constructive role of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in that regard.

Secondly, we should continue to support Iraq in consolidating the results of its counter-terrorism efforts and safeguarding national security. Iraq has made huge sacrifices in the international fight against terrorism, which nonetheless remains a threat to its security and stability. Considering Iraq's national situation and the progress of its national reconstruction, steady efforts should be made to resolve the issue of internally displaced persons in Iraq and to provide it with robust support in addressing the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and their families. The international community should fully respect Iraq's sovereignty and jurisdiction and support it in bringing terrorists to justice in accordance with its relevant domestic laws. The United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant should engage in close consultations with the Government and carry out its work in accordance with its mandate.

Thirdly, we should actively promote Iraq's economic recovery and expedite its reconstruction. The Iraqi Government has adopted an integrated approach in order to actively attract foreign investment, improve the business environment and promote youth employment — examples of some of the many goals it has set in response to public demands concerning development and people's livelihoods — and these efforts deserve international recognition. In strict accordance with its mandate, UNAMI should support the Iraqi Government in its efforts to promote stability and development and respect Iraq's leadership in handling its internal affairs. The international community should fulfil its commitments effectively, continue to provide support and aid to Iraq and assist it in finding a development pathway suited to its national conditions.

China firmly supports Iraq in its efforts to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its nationally owned endeavour to handle its internal affairs and challenges, and opposes any external interference in its internal affairs. China is ready to work with the international community in support of Iraq's efforts to maintain peace and stability and combat terrorism. We will continue our active participation in the reconstruction of Iraq's energy infrastructure and other sectors, and will assist in Iraq's economic and social development to the best of our abilities in order to help it achieve stability and development.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your

presidency of the Security Council this month, and to assure you of our support. I also warmly congratulate Ambassador Karen Pierce on the United Kingdom's excellent presidency last month. And I thank Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Mr. Robert Mardini and Archbishop Warda for their very informative briefings.

Iraq, a country that has suffered so much, is going through a period that is critical to its democratic future. Since 1 October, the Iraqi people have been making legitimate demands — demands for a life in dignity and freedom, as Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert has just pointed out — in the context of demonstrations that have remained essentially peaceful. The systematic crackdown on demonstrators and the excessive and disproportionate use of force against them, which has led to the deaths of more than 400 Iraqis, is unacceptable. France strongly condemns them. We extend our condolences to the families of the victims and our support to the injured. The circumstances of such repression must be fully brought to light, and those responsible must be brought to justice. We call on the Iraqi authorities to guarantee the freedom of expression, assembly and demonstration, as provided for in the country's Constitution. Threats against health workers, the intimidation of journalists and human rights defenders and the arbitrary arrests of demonstrators must stop. All parties must refrain from using violence.

Given that crisis, which is unprecedented since the military victory against Da'esh, inaction is not an option. Without a swift and credible response, further violence and deterioration of the economic and social situation could plunge Iraq into chaos. Such a tipping point would bring about consequences not only for Iraq but also for the stability of the Middle East and international security. Da'esh cannot but benefit from the destabilization of Iraq. We are aware of the scale of the challenges facing the country: the threat of a Da'esh resurgence; the consequences of the war in Syria, further aggravated by the Turkish offensive in the north-east of the country; the worrisome situation of refugees and displaced persons; a social fabric weakened by years of conflict; and an economy in need of rebuilding.

Real progress has been made in recent years. It must be preserved, especially with regard to the strides made in the fight against Da'esh. We recalled that point at the meeting of the Global Coalition against Da'esh held at France's initiative in Washington, D.C.,

on 14 November. Iraqis know that they are not alone against Da'esh and that they can count on the support of the international community.

At the same time, however, it is important to provide a credible response to the aspirations expressed by Iraqis in recent weeks. That hinges on genuine and democratic dialogue, which, as Archbishop Warda mentioned, is the only way to safeguard Iraq's stability over the long term. To create the conditions for such a dialogue, Iraq must quickly form a Government capable of adopting the necessary emergency measures. I would mention in particular the electoral law reform, the effective reintegration of paramilitary groups under the authority of the Prime Minister and the adoption of robust anti-corruption measures.

France fully supports the efforts of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Hennis-Plasschaert in that regard. I would like to commend here her firm commitment to overcoming the crisis in a concerted manner. Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian met with her yesterday and expressed his support.

We also support the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), in particular its efforts to promote reconciliation among the various components of Iraqi society, stabilization, especially in disputed territories, and the political process. UNAMI's efforts to support the dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil and its commitment to contribute to the resolution of the issue of the missing persons of the Gulf War are also crucial. We recall the importance of the work being carried out in consultation with all segments of civil society, in particular with regard to strengthening women's participation in public life. UNAMI's action will also be instrumental in helping Iraq adopt needed economic and social reforms.

On the path to democratic dialogue and the reform necessary to avoid the twin pitfalls of communitarianism and corruption, Iraq must be able to count on the resolute support of the international community, and the Council must remain mobilized alongside Iraq in the years ahead. For its part, France will remain a steadfast partner to support Iraq's imperatives. Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Le Drian visited Iraq in October to recall the importance of the strategic partnership between our two countries and express France's support in the fight against Da'esh and beyond. We intend to remain partners in the stabilization and

reconstruction of the country and lend our support to Iraqis at this crucial time for the future of the country.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buyswerwe (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and reassure you of our full support. I would also like to thank the British delegation for the efficiency with which it conducted its presidency last month.

I would furthermore like to thank Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her briefing this morning and for the outstanding work that she carried out last week. I would also like to thank the observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Archbishop of Erbil.

Iraq faces unique challenges today. The country, emerging from the conflict, has embarked on the long road towards reconciliation and reconstruction. The institutions working towards that goal, however, are fragile. The process takes time. In the meantime, the authorities must respond, in the short term and in a difficult context, to the aspirations of their people — aspirations for a better life and better opportunities for all.

The freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly are fundamental rights that must be respected. They are crucial to the progress of democracy. Belgium is deeply concerned by the fact that some of the demonstrations resulted in acts of violence, including the use of live ammunition by the security forces, leading to numerous deaths and injuries. Also troubling is the presence reported of elements who could derail peaceful demonstrations. Those developments put Iraq on a dangerous trajectory. How can we overcome that situation?

First, we call on all actors, especially the security forces, to follow the President's instructions to act with the utmost restraint at all times. Secondly, every abuse must be investigated, and the perpetrators must be held to account. Thirdly, all parties should engage in constructive dialogue. Fourthly, we encourage the authorities to expedite their efforts to meet the demands of the demonstrators, namely, combating corruption, starting economic recovery, creating jobs, providing basic services to the population and bringing about tangible improvements in people's lives. Electoral reform has also been a central demand

of many peaceful demonstrators, and we encourage the Iraqi authorities to implement legislative solutions that respond to public calls for credible, free and fair elections. Lastly, we support the important role that the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq has played in recent weeks. In order to ensure the country's long-term stability, we encourage the continuation of efforts in the following areas.

First, as Archbishop Warda mentioned, reconciliation is of paramount importance. Looking at the painful past, acknowledging and understanding it, and especially transcending it together, is the best way to ensure that it does not happen again. Such reconciliation must continue and allow families to return to their communities. The importance of such reconciliation cannot be underestimated, especially to avoid creating new space for Da'esh to take advantage of.

Secondly, the Government has already taken important and courageous initiatives on security sector reform. We must keep them going. Moreover, although the Islamic State is militarily defeated, the causes that allowed Da'esh to arise remain. Everything possible must be done to avoid its resurgence.

Lastly, we encourage Iraq to continue its policy of constructive engagement with its neighbours. The fundamental principles of respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity should guide the actions of all actors. We call for a joint commitment from the region and the international community to that end.

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like to extend my warm congratulations to you, Madam President, and your team on the convening of this first public meeting in December, devoted to the situation in Iraq, which marks the beginning of the United States presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to express my thanks to Ambassador Karen Pierce and her entire team for their flawless conduct of the work of the Council in November, as well as for the relevance of the issues placed on the agenda during the presidency of the United Kingdom.

Finally, I wish to congratulate Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General; Monsignor Bashar Matti Warda, Archbishop of Erbil; and Mr. Robert Mardini, Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the United Nations, for their excellent briefings. I also congratulate Mr. Mardini on his important new assignment and wish him every success.

Côte d'Ivoire notes with grave concern that, for several months now, Iraq has been shaken by a political crisis marked by violent clashes between the law-enforcement authorities and peaceful protesters. The crisis does not show any signs of letting up, despite the recently announced resignation of Prime Minister Adil Abd Al-Mahdi. The clashes, which have led to a serious deterioration in the security situation, have resulted in the deaths of several hundred people and more than a thousand wounded, in addition to extensive material damage. My country regrets this spiral of violence, which seriously undermines Iraq's democratic and political gains and leaves the country vulnerable to a great risk of instability. That is why we must implore the rigorous implementation of the principle of accountability by identifying those who have perpetrated criminal acts. It is equally important that the unity, independence and sovereignty of the country be fully respected, as must the principle of non-interference in its internal affairs.

Given the gravity of the situation and echoing the call of the Secretary-General, my country urges the Iraqi authorities to refrain from disproportionate use of force and calls on all parties to exercise restraint. It is indeed vital that the Iraqi parties work together with the support of the international community for the immediate cessation of violence, with a view to peacefully resolving their differences and meeting the deepest aspirations of the population. In this regard, my delegation supports the recommendations issued on 11 November following consultations between the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Iraqi authorities and the protesters, which call for short-, medium- and long-term measures to bring about an end to the crisis. Côte d'Ivoire would therefore call on the Government of Iraq to undertake the necessary reforms and urgent measures to avoid the risk of tensions erupting across the country, which, let us recall, continues to face challenges related to the presence of the terrorist group Da'esh on its territory.

Recent developments in the region have seen military operations on the Turkish-Syrian border that have resulted in the escape of several Da'esh fighters from their detention centres, magnifying the fear of a resurgence of the acts of the terrorist movement in Iraq. In this regard, our meeting on 26 November concerning the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) highlighted the constructive cooperation between the

United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), UNITAD and the Iraqi Government in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (see S/PV.8675). My country commends the progress made in this regard and stresses the urgent need to uphold the principle of accountability for the crimes committed by Da'esh, pursuant the provisions of resolution 2379 (2017) to guarantee victims the right to justice in the framework of a fair trial.

In view of the multifaceted challenges facing Iraq, it is more necessary than ever before that the international community support the country's reconstruction and development efforts in order to help build the observably precarious peace, as is also the case with subregional and international peace and security. Furthermore, with regard to the alarming humanitarian situation that persists in certain regions of Iraq, Côte d'Ivoire also urges the international community to continue its efforts to mobilize the resources needed to finance the United Nations humanitarian response plan for 2019 in an amount of \$611.7 million.

With regard to the Kurdistan region, Côte d'Ivoire calls for continued cooperation between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government. The dialogue must be maintained in order to find mutually satisfactory solutions to outstanding issues, particularly with regard to the sharing of oil resources and the Kurdistan debt.

At the regional level, my delegation welcomes the continued cooperation between the Governments of Iraq and Kuwait so as to provide a definitive solution to the issue of missing Kuwaiti nationals, as well as to matters relating to the restitution of seized assets.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its full support for UNAMI and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in their continued commitment to peace, stability and sustainable development in Iraq.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I wish to congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of December. We are very pleased to offer you, Madam, our full support, and I wish you good luck. Allow me also to congratulate Ambassador Karen Pierce on her able leadership and thank the United Kingdom team for their commitment.

I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert; the Archbishop of Erbil, Monsignor Bashar Matti

Warda; and the Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Robert Mardini, for their comprehensive briefings.

It is with deep concern that Poland is following the current developments in Iraq, where the people have exercised their fundamental right to express their concerns. We are alarmed by the high number of deaths and injuries during the demonstrations and by the continued use of ammunition against protesters, which has led to further loss of life. We strongly condemn all acts of violence, including the reported attacks by armed entities against demonstrators, which undermine the expression of legitimate demands. We call on all actors to exercise maximum restraint and urge the Iraqi authorities and security forces to protect the lives of demonstrators, respect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and swiftly conduct independent and credible investigations in order to ensure accountability for all acts of violence.

Developments over the past two months are a stark reminder that the legitimate aspirations of Iraqi citizens for an efficient and accountable Administration, better job opportunities and the delivery of basic public services remain unfulfilled. It is therefore paramount, in our view, to step up efforts to address those legitimate concerns through peaceful and inclusive dialogue that would yield tangible benefits for all Iraqis. Providing good governance, creating job opportunities, improving living conditions for the population, fighting corruption and promoting economic development should be given the highest priority. We take note of the measures undertaken by the Iraqi authorities to meet the demands of the protesters, including efforts to find legislative solutions that address public calls for credible, free and fair elections, and we encourage the political class of Iraq to come together to ensure the swift implementation of much-needed reforms. We also welcome the appointment of the first female member of the Iraqi Government, Ms. Suha Khalil, as Education Minister.

A key factor in ensuring long-term stability in Iraq is promoting national reconciliation and social cohesion. We encourage the Iraqi authorities to continue to work towards addressing this important issue, including through ensuring accountability for human rights violations and providing protection for vulnerable groups, including religious and ethnic minorities.

Advancing the stabilization and reconstruction of areas recaptured from Da'esh is also of critical importance. Rebuilding damaged infrastructure and restoring effective administration, security and public services are indispensable for creating the conditions for the voluntary, dignified and safe return of internally displaced persons, as well as their local reintegration and resettlement.

What Iraq needs now more than ever is calm and stability in order to overcome challenges and pave the way for sustainable peace, development and prosperity. I would like to commend the efforts of the Iraqi leadership aimed at promoting a balanced regional policy and a constructive engagement with all its neighbours. In that context, we welcome the significant progress achieved to date on the issue of Kuwaiti missing persons and property.

In conclusion, we reiterate our steadfast support for Iraq's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity and express our appreciation for the tremendous work that the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in particular, have been doing in assisting the Iraqi authorities.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): At the outset, I join others in congratulating you, Madam President, on assuming the Council presidency for December, and thanking you for holding today's meeting in the sunlight.

I should like first to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Robert Mardini and Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda, for their insightful briefings.

As many speakers before me have underlined, Iraq is today at a crossroads, and it is deeply troubling to note that protests that began with peaceful demonstrations have now led to the killing of more than 400 people and thousands more being injured as a result of violent clashes between protestors and security forces. I wish to repeat in this context what we have said many times: the right to peaceful protest as enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution must be guaranteed. We therefore call on all sides to exercise restraint and to refrain from violence.

As a friend of Iraq, Germany is deeply saddened to see that so many lives have been lost. We deplore the excessive use of force by security forces against protesters. The principles of necessity and

proportionality must be respected, and all incidents in which the actions of security forces have resulted in death or injury should be promptly and transparently investigated. We are also deeply concerned by reports indicating unlawful arrests, killings and kidnappings, and we want to emphasize that any attempts to threaten and prevent people from exercising their fundamental rights to peaceful assembly and to freedom of expression are inexcusable.

The same holds true for reports of the targeting and abduction of medical personnel in the context of the protests. If such acts have indeed occurred, then they are clear violations of international humanitarian law and numerous resolutions of the Security Council.

The last item on a long list of concerns that we see and express as a friend is that we note with concern reports about calls for the temporary closure of several television and radio stations. Together with repeated attacks on journalists by unidentified perpetrators, this represents a worrying deterioration in the freedom of the press in Iraq in the context of the ongoing protests. In our view, a free press forms the basis of an open, public debate and exchange of views, which is also a precondition for lasting stability and development.

Turning to the most recent events, I wish to say that we respect Prime Minister Adil Abd Al-Mahdi's decision to offer his resignation as a step towards overcoming the current crisis. As a new Government is formed, it is vital that key reforms are swiftly implemented in order for State institutions to regain public trust and to address a climate of anger and disillusionment. This new Government must, while following constitutional processes, be formed rapidly. Time is of the essence, as we have heard today time and again.

We must not forget the hundreds of thousands of peacefully protesting Iraqis who continue to raise serious and legitimate demands: the end of corruption, the stimulation of economic growth and employment, the provision of reliable public services, prudent and impartial governance, credible elections, and a broader reform of the political system, including amendments to the electoral law and the Constitution. Germany welcomes in particular the initial steps taken in the fight against corruption. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General said in her briefing, anti-corruption measures will be key, and we urge all relevant parties to continue their efforts. The fight against corruption

is crucial to building viable and responsive State institutions and to reviving public trust.

Germany stands ready to support Iraq in its work to address necessary reforms. We are already engaged in key sectors to enhance infrastructure, for example in the area of electricity supply, and to tackle issues like youth unemployment and administrative reform. Since 2014, we have contributed €2.2 billion to assist the country in its development. Stabilization, recovery and reconstruction can only succeed if all actors, including the Government of Iraq, intensify their efforts and expand their financial support.

We welcome the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq to engage with a wide range of Iraqi stakeholders to discuss the different aspects of the reforms needed and the draft of a road map proposing concrete steps as a start for reforms based on these discussions. We join the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in her call for immediate action, and we call on all Iraqi parties to engage in constructive dialogue.

Most of the protesters are young people demanding a better future and the overcoming of unemployment, the unequal provision of basic services and corruption. We urge State authorities not only to allow them to express their grievances in a peaceful way but to seize this opportunity to engage with the next generation in order to create a brighter future for the country.

Before concluding, I wish to refer briefly to three other important questions.

First is the issue of relations between Baghdad and Erbil, as mentioned by many other speakers. We strongly encourage both sides to continue their intensive dialogue in order to further improve relations between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and to find sustainable solutions for outstanding unresolved issues, especially with regard to oil-revenue sharing and security arrangements.

Secondly, I wish to refer very briefly to our discussion last Tuesday on accountability (see S/PV.8675). We would like to reiterate our full support for the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Special Adviser Karim Asad Ahmad Khan and his team. Accountability is a prerequisite for reconciliation and for the return of

the remaining almost 1.5 million internally displaced persons in Iraq.

Thirdly, and finally, we welcome the efforts by Iraq, Kuwait, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Tripartite Commission and hope that further progress will be achieved on the important file of missing Kuwaiti nationals and property.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Madam President, I would like to thank you and your delegation for having organized this important meeting during the United States presidency of the Security Council this month. We wish you, Madam, the greatest of success. We also congratulate the delegation of the United Kingdom for the excellent way it conducted the business of the Council during its presidency in November.

We welcome the excellent briefings by Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq; Mr. Robert Martini, Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the United Nations; and Monsignor Bashar Matti Warda, Archbishop of Erbil. The information they have just provided us help us better grasp the prevailing situation in Iraq.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is deeply concerned about the recent events in Iraq. On 1 December, the Iraqi Parliament met in extraordinary session and accepted the resignation of outgoing Prime Minister Adil Abd Al-Mahdi as a result of the tense protests in Baghdad's Tahrir Square since early October that resulted in more than 400 deaths, no less than 6,000 injured, including several members of the security forces, as well as extensive material damage. We offer our condolences to the Iraqi Government and all the families afflicted by the tragic loss of life. We regret that the protests have taken on such proportions. We therefore call on all parties to refrain from taking unnecessary actions such as those that aggravated the situation. Citizens have the right to demonstrate peacefully. The security forces must shoulder the responsibility of protecting all people and their property.

We are sensitive to the concerns of those demanding effective governance that is able to respond to the needs of citizens and to function in manner that instils trust. It is therefore time for all political parties in Iraq to set aside their personal differences, prioritize the national interests and avoid impediments to the normal

operations of the institutions responsible for resolving the issues facing the population.

We cannot allow Iraq to boil over once again. All parties must fight to safeguard the significant gains that they have made in recent years, such as the territorial victory over the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the subsequent successful outcome of the national and regional electoral processes in the country. Those achievements are extremely important and serve as a foundation for the future development of the country.

The delegation of Equatorial Guinea notes with satisfaction the recent broad consultations held between the executive branch and the political leadership, which this year helped to overcome the months-long stalemate that prevented the complete formation of the Government, thereby underscoring the importance of peaceful and inclusive dialogue among the parties to move forward in the reconciliation process and in building the Iraqi State.

We agree with the report of the Secretary-General that “[t]he Government’s agreement on an initial package of measures and its commitment to dialogue are steps in the right direction, but swift implementation is essential to meeting the legitimate and long-standing demands of the Iraqi people” (*S/2019/903, para. 90*).

We welcome the high-level bilateral meetings between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, which are in the process of negotiations to resolve, inter alia, outstanding issues involving oil, revenue-sharing and security arrangements. We encourage them to continue working to reach mutually beneficial agreements.

We commend the Iraqi security forces for their persistent efforts to eradicate once and for all the ISIL cells that continue to carry out frequent asymmetric attacks against the population. The development of political events in Iraq demonstrates that the country’s institutions are functioning normally and that democratic principles are being upheld. The next step must therefore involve the appointment of a new Prime Minister to fill that important vacancy.

Before concluding, I would like to express our satisfaction with the efforts by the Government of Iraq with regard to issues concerning its neighbour Kuwait. We appreciate the recent handover of books,

and we hope that the parties will continue to work in that direction.

While my country condemns any initiative that would undermine the process under way in Iraq, Equatorial Guinea pays tribute to Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq for their outstanding work in supporting the Iraqi people and authorities in their arduous and complicated task of rebuilding the country.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate the Permanent Representative of the United States on her country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and I wish her every success. I also thank the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom for her efforts at the helm of the Council in November.

I am grateful to Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for her briefing on the situation in Iraq for the period from July to October. I welcome the briefing by Mr. Mardini, Permanent Observer of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the United Nations. I am also grateful for the presence of Archbishop Warda and for his briefing, with a few reservations on some of its paragraphs.

Following the casualties incurred in the course of the peaceful protests that occurred in my country, I extend my condolences to the families of the martyrs — may they rest in peace — and wish those who were injured a speedy recovery.

It has been more than a month since popular demonstrations began in Baghdad and cities in the southern part of the country. The Iraqi people eloquently expressed their opinion of the political and electoral system in the country, the performance of the Government and the needed reforms in the political, legal and public sectors. Those brilliant demonstrations were marred by the presence of illegal groups that attacked demonstrators and security forces, leading to a number of casualties. Those groups have nothing to do with the protests. They have used the demonstrations as cover and the demonstrators as human shields to block roads, commit acts of looting and arson and attack security forces with Molotov cocktails, hand grenades,

firearms and knives. They have also disrupted the operation of schools and ports. In that regard, I take this opportunity to clarify some substantive points.

The Iraqi Government fully recognizes the right to demonstrate as a right guaranteed by the Constitution of Iraq, as set out in the statement made by the Prime Minister on 4 November. The Government is committed to providing the Iraqi people with the opportunity to express themselves and their demands without undermining public order or destroying public or private property.

We will spare no effort to meet all the legitimate demands of the demonstrators, especially those calling for vital economic and political reforms through the relevant constitutional mechanisms. In that connection, the Government of Iraq is conducting investigations, with follow up at the highest levels, to identify the illegal groups that infiltrated the protests. Those groups are rioting against both demonstrators and security forces. They have also attacked public facilities, the Central Bank, publishing and press houses, and recently set ablaze a number of stores on Al-Rasheed Street, Al-Khulani Square and the vicinity, claiming 300 martyrs and injuring more than 1,500 individuals among the demonstrators and security forces.

In that connection, the Secretary-General's report on the situation in Iraq (S/2019/903) addresses the recent developments and demonstrations in Iraq, referring to a number of violations related to the use of violence against demonstrators. We stress that the Iraqi Government has dealt with those demonstrators in accordance with the Constitution by protecting them and deterring any attack against them. Strict instructions against the use of live ammunition and lethal weapons remain in place. The security forces are not engaging with the demonstrators or attacking them. They have instead adopted a defensive posture even though the illegal groups that have infiltrated the demonstrators have stormed the checkpoints on Al-Sinak and Al-Jumhuriya bridges and attacked the public and Government facilities.

The Prime Minister has ordered the establishment of special committees to conduct duly transparent investigations, bring persons at fault to account and refer these cases to competent judicial authorities to carry out the investigations in those violations and identify those who have targeted the demonstrators. The Government has also decided to cover the expenses

of the treatment of all injured people, both among the security forces and the peaceful demonstrators.

I would like to quote a statement made by Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi regarding the temporary ban of Internet services,

“The digital world is a contemporary reality and a right for all. However, when defending the rights of the public, the authorities are obliged to restrict that right when they see it being used to promote hatred and violence and disrupt public life.”

Internet services have now been restored. The Iraqi Government has also rejected all attempts to put the security of Iraq at risk or harm the Iraqi people, including kidnappings and attacks against demonstrators carried out by illegal groups. The Government will take the necessary measures to place all weapons under the authority of the State, in line with previous relevant efforts. In response to demonstrators’ demands and the call by the Supreme Religious Authority in Najaf — which has issued a number of statements in support of the demands of the demonstrators and the Government in fulfilling its responsibility to protect the demonstrators’ lives, and has called on the Government and the Parliament to take the necessary measures to fast-track the reform process while condemning external interference that seeks to derail the demonstrations and achieve goals that do not serve the interests of Iraq and its people — the Government of Iraq has launched wide-ranging reform packages in consultation with relevant parties, including the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Those actions are in keeping with the relevant Government decisions, namely, those numbered 340,341, 363 and 364, which include enacting laws that promote social justice and support the anti-corruption efforts of the Supreme Judicial Council.

For example, the Government has adopted a law to eliminate the financial privileges granted to Iraqi officials, as well as a new retirement law that would provide 300,000 job opportunities. The Government has also presented a new electoral draft law, in addition to a draft law on the establishment of the Independent High Electoral Commission to the Parliament. The first reading of those two draft laws took place in Parliament on 19 November. The Iraqi Parliament has also established the Constitutional Review Committee that in turn has called on all relevant parties in Iraq, including academia, journalists, activists and civil

society, to contribute to constitutional amendments in order to meet society’s needs and the demands of the demonstrators. That was done in cooperation with United Nations experts.

In that context, I stress the guiding role played by UNAMI, in line with its mandate, by holding and strengthening dialogues with the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of Parliament to discuss the necessary measures to be taken to meet the demands of the protesters. We urge UNAMI to comply with the mechanisms of its mandate, in line with resolution 2470 (2019).

In accordance with the sermon of the High Religious Authority in Najaf on Friday, 29 November, and in line with the demands of the protesters, Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi submitted his resignation to Parliament on the same day in order to give it the opportunity to form a new Cabinet. Parliament accepted the resignation on 1 December and we are waiting for the President of the Republic to choose a new candidate from the largest parliamentary bloc to form a new Cabinet.

The Iraqi Government has responded to the demonstrators in a number of ways. In addition to the aforementioned laws, a number of decisions have been taken to support employment by providing grants to implement small projects, hiring post-graduates in Iraqi Ministries and accepting volunteers to join the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior, as well as facilitating the distribution of land and the allocation of loans to build new houses in the most impoverished governorates.

We have also implemented a new social protection system, a new social security system and a health insurance system. At the administrative level, the Cabinet has established the new Federal Service Council, which will ensure transparency in the hiring of all Iraqi public servants.

The Government continues to implement its reforms to kick-start the economy by increasing non-oil revenues, encouraging domestic investment and drafting the new law on the reconstruction Council, while reviewing and facilitating the current investment laws and removing obstacles to attract foreign investment, in cooperation with all friendly States such as the United States, Russia and China, the European Union and others.

Most recently, the Government has been able to achieve the successful repatriation of nearly 80 per cent of internally displaced persons, thanks to its tremendous efforts to ensure that the requirements of voluntary return are in place at three important levels: the provision of services; security, judicial and criminal scrutiny; and meeting community peace requirements, concerning which the Government has signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to implement projects valued at \$33 million to restore stability in the affected areas.

My government is keen to accelerate the submission of the draft budget for 2020 by giving priority to increasing non-oil revenues in order to enhance the proportion of the investment budget to provide a suitable economic environment for job creation and to support the new reform packages in response to the demands of the demonstrators.

My government is also keen to strengthen and intensify efforts to address the legacy of Islamic State terrorist gangs and to create an action plan to deal with children recruited by the terrorist organization, foreign terrorist fighters, the wives and widows of terrorists and their children, and the survivors and rape victims of terrorists, as well as to strengthen efforts to stabilize the liberated areas and address security concerns related to human rights upon the return of terrorist elements and their families to Iraq. We commend the efforts of States that have taken responsibility for their nationals and their transfer to their countries, and urge others to receive their nationals, women and children who have served their sentences, and children under the legal age of criminal liability.

The Government of Iraq affirms that the stability and prosperity of Iraq are a common regional interest. Based on this vision, we affirm Iraq's commitment to the important principle of its foreign policy, stipulated in the Iraqi Constitution, that its territory should not be the starting point for any threat to the security and safety of neighbouring countries. Iraq is keen not to engage in any form in conflicts or ongoing conflicts in the region, given the magnitude of its responsibility and its belief in the importance of formulating a policy based on creating a state of balance that contributes to the maintenance of regional security and prevents conflicts from developing into direct military confrontations.

To that end, and in order to maintain international peace and security, Iraq affirms the need for concerted

efforts and enhanced consultation to avoid escalation and tensions in the region, and we call on all States to spare Iraq regional tensions and their adverse effects on the security of the region. The Government of my country is also keen to develop Iraq's relations with its neighbours, underscoring the democratic Iraq's adoption of firm positions in its foreign policy that seek to build regional peace.

Cooperation with our sister State of Kuwait occupies a privileged position among Iraq's priorities and through cooperation with the United Nations, where we affirm the readiness of my Government to abide by the relevant Security Council resolutions and to make the utmost efforts to meet them. In this regard, I am pleased to brief members of the Security Council on recent developments related to this file, particularly with regard to the content of paragraph 4 of the resolution 2107 (2013), including extradition of the remains of 47 missing Kuwaitis who were found in mass graves that date back to the time of the previous political system; Iraqi finalization of return of all Kuwaiti property, the last batch of which was returned to the Kuwaiti authorities on 27 October 2019; and the continuation of outstanding payments owed by Iraq to Kuwait through the United Nations Compensation Commission, which amount to \$3.5 billion. It is hoped that it will be fully paid in 2020.

Bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries have also witnessed positive milestones, including the regular convening of the Joint Commission — most recently in May — which has contributed to significant progress on topics of joint cooperation. In that context, we extend our sincere appreciation for the efforts of the sisterly State of Kuwait and its Permanent Representative and Permanent Delegation in advocating Arab questions wisely and responsibly through its membership of the Security Council, which clearly benefited the consolidation of international peace and security.

The current political dynamics on the Iraqi street are an expression of the evolution in the nature of a collective and individual political culture that respects the peaceful transfer of power through constitutional mechanisms. Iraq is still at the beginning of its democratic journey, which will mature over time and through broad popular participation in political life, with the consolidation of the role of institutions and rule of law. The current demonstrations highlight the positive, enabling atmosphere that motivates the

political system to review and reform the laws and public regulations in the country, and the Government to complete its efforts, in cooperation with Parliament, to find better solutions to speed up reforms.

The recent political developments in my country, Iraq, are evidence of an increasing political maturity encouraged by the Government by respecting the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, including the freedom of demonstration and the expression of opinion. The young people participating in the demonstrations have grown up in a democratic environment encouraging these rights, in contrast to the situation under the former regime, which was dominated by fear resulting from the brutal suppression of freedoms. The future of the political process will therefore witness positive developments that will complement the efforts that have laid the foundations of a new, democratic, stable and secure Iraq that

respects international law and enshrines cooperation and openness as the two guiding principles for its external relations.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate my country's commitment to building a prosperous Iraq, in coordination and cooperation with the international community, with a view to eliminating the ravages of terrorism, expediting the reconstruction processes and meeting the legitimate demands of the protesters so as to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and implement the Government programme decisions, in accordance with national laws in effect.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.