



# Security Council

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## Implementation of resolution [2631 \(2022\)](#)

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2631 \(2022\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every four months on progress made towards fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The report covers key developments relating to Iraq and provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq since his previous report of 25 January 2023 ([S/2023/58](#)) and the briefing to the Security Council by the Special Representative for Iraq and Head of UNAMI on 2 February 2023.

#### II. Summary of key political developments

##### A. Political situation

2. On 4 February, the Government of Iraq led by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani marked its first 100 days in office. At a press conference on 7 February, the Prime Minister provided an update on the status of the implementation of government priorities, highlighting, inter alia, efforts to fight corruption, create jobs and provide services. In addition, the Prime Minister announced that the federal Ministry of Oil and the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Kurdistan Regional Government had discussed the draft hydrocarbon law, and that further discussions would be held following the adoption of the federal budget law.

3. On 12 March, after extensive preparatory meetings and consultations with the Kurdistan Regional Government and members of the State Administration Coalition, the Minister of Finance announced that the draft budget had been finalized. It was approved by the Council of Ministers on 13 March and received by the Council of Representatives on 16 March.

4. At a press conference on 13 March, the Prime Minister provided further information on the draft federal budget, which the Council of Ministers had approved for the period 2023–2025. Regarding the three-year period, he noted the “possibility of modification by the Ministries of Finance and Planning, with the approval of the Council of Ministers and the Council of Representatives, if oil prices and numbers change”. Under the 2023 draft budget, total revenue is estimated at \$103.5 billion and expenditure at \$153.1 billion. The Prime Minister said that the proposed expenditures



were consistent with his government's priorities and noted that the draft budget enjoyed political support. The Prime Minister also stated that the budget share for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq had been set based on mutual "understanding and consensus" and a "comprehensive agreement on the outstanding problems and most of the issues related to the oil export budget and the method of management and supervision".

5. On 2 April, the First Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mohsen al-Mandalawi, announced in a statement that the draft budget had been referred to the parliamentary finance committee, which had been directed to expedite the review process. On 5 and 17 April, respectively, the Council of Representatives held the first and second readings of the draft federal budget law for fiscal years 2023, 2024 and 2025.

6. Budget preparations took place against the backdrop of unpredictable currency exchange rate fluctuations and a revaluation of the Iraqi dinar. On 7 February, the Council of Ministers agreed to set the official exchange rate at 1,300 Iraqi dinars per United States dollar, thereby increasing the value of the dinar against the dollar. The same day, the Central Bank of Iraq explained that the revaluation and other measures that had been taken would help it to achieve its goal of stabilizing prices in order to protect Iraqis' purchasing power.

7. During the reporting period, parliamentarians discussed the legal framework for future Council of Representatives and provincial council elections. On 13 February, the Council of Representatives concluded the first reading of a bill to amend the Provincial and District Council Elections Law (No. 12 of 2018). The bill included a proposal to repeal the Council of Representatives Election Law (No. 9 of 2020) and to regulate national and local elections under a single law. Several provisions of the proposed amendments, in particular the return to an open-list proportional representation system using a modified Sainte-Laguë method, drew criticism from civil society groups, independent members of parliament and some smaller political parties. On 13 February, the Imtidad Movement issued a statement describing the draft law as a "challenge to the will of the people", a reference to the demands made during the October 2019 protests that were subsequently reflected in the 2020 election law. On 27 March, despite opposition, legislators voted on the third amendment to the Provincial and District Council Elections Law (No. 12 of 2018), which includes provisions concerning Council of Representatives elections. Pursuant to the amendments, provincial council elections are to be held no later than 20 December 2023, with the date to be decided by the Council of Ministers in consultation with the Independent High Electoral Commission.

8. The Government of Iraq continued to highlight the need to address, as a matter of priority, the challenges of climate change and water scarcity. On 26 February, the President of Iraq, Abdullatif Jamal Rashid, chaired a meeting to discuss the water challenges facing his country. The meeting was attended by the Minister of Water Resources, representatives of the international community and other stakeholders. The President stressed the need to reach an agreement with neighbouring countries on water management. On 2 March, at a meeting of the Higher National Committee for Water that was chaired by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Water Resources, the Minister of Construction, Housing, Municipalities and Public Works and other government officials discussed the need for regional diplomatic outreach in this regard. On 12 March, in Basrah, the Prime Minister opened the two-day Iraq Climate Conference, the first conference on climate to be held in the country. Representatives of various Iraqi ministries, diplomatic missions and international organizations attended the conference, which was organized by the Government of Iraq with the support of the United Nations in Iraq. In his opening statement, the Prime Minister noted the adverse impact of climate change and highlighted the importance of implementing the vision of Iraq in respect of climate action, while calling for

international support to implement his country's nationally determined contributions in line with the Paris Agreement. He also outlined planned mitigation initiatives, including a target of generating one third of the country's energy from renewable sources by 2030.

9. Discussions concerning elections for the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region continued. On 28 February, representatives of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan announced in a joint statement that they had reached an agreement on some election-related issues, including with regard to the creation of multiple electoral constituencies and the use of the federal Independent High Electoral Commission biometric database for regional elections. This agreement was confirmed on 11 March in a statement released by representatives of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Gorran (Movement for Change), the Kurdistan Justice Group, the Islamic Union of Kurdistan, Komala (Toilers Party) and the Communist Party. The parties announced that they would continue consultations with representatives of the Region's minorities regarding the distribution of seats for minority groups.

10. On 15 March, the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region established a special committee to work towards reactivating the region's independent high electoral commission. Meanwhile, consultations continued regarding the distribution of parliamentary seats for minorities groups. On 26 March, the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq announced that the region's parliamentary elections would be held on 18 November 2023.

## **B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil**

11. The federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments continued to engage in dialogue on outstanding issues, including revenue sharing and the draft federal hydrocarbon law. On 13 March, the Prime Minister, in his remarks regarding the draft federal budget law, noted that, in addition to the share of the federal budget allocated to the Kurdistan Region, agreements had been reached with the Kurdistan Regional Government regarding issues related to oil production in the region that included a provision for the region's oil revenues to be deposited into a single bank account that is subject to federal oversight.

12. On the same day, the Ministry of Finance and Economy of the Kurdistan Regional Government announced that the federal Government had transferred 400 billion Iraqi dinars to pay November and December 2022 salaries as part of an agreement between the two sides. Kurdistan Regional Government officials said that those funds would help to pay the salaries of the region's civil servants.

13. On 14 and 15 March, the Prime Minister conducted his first official visit to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq since assuming office. He met with the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Masrour Barzani, and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Qubad Talabani, as well as leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, among other interlocutors. After meetings in Erbil on 14 March, the Prime emphasized the federal Government's willingness to communicate "with all political forces and to reach further agreements" to address outstanding issues between the two sides. After meetings in Sulaymaniyah on 15 March, the Prime Minister said that discussions had focused on "consolidating political understandings" between national forces in order to secure stability and economic prosperity. Kurdistan Regional Government officials issued statements in which they welcomed the visit of the Prime Minister and the decision by the Council

of Ministers on 13 March to recognize Halabja district as a governorate. On 2 April, the Council of Representatives completed a first reading of a law to enact that decision.

14. Consultations between Baghdad and Erbil intensified after an International Chamber of Commerce arbitration panel announced on 23 March that it had issued a decision in a case filed by the federal Government in 2014 regarding the use of the Iraq-Türkiye pipeline for oil exports from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. On 25 March, the federal Ministry of Oil welcomed the decision in a statement and announced that it would explore, with Kurdistan Region stakeholders and Turkish authorities, mechanisms to export oil through the Turkish port of Ceyhan in order to ensure the continuation of oil exports from all of Iraq. The Ministry of Natural Resources of the Kurdistan Regional Government stated on the same day that consultations with the federal Government on revenue-sharing and hydrocarbon management would continue, with a view to reaching a final agreement. The Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of Türkiye also released a statement regarding the issue on 28 March. At the end of March, a Kurdistan Regional Government delegation travelled to Baghdad to discuss the resumption of oil exports through the Iraq-Türkiye pipeline, which had been suspended following the issuance of the arbitration ruling.

15. On 4 April, following intensive negotiations under the auspices of the Prime Minister of the federal Government and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments signed an agreement in Baghdad to resume oil exports. Following the signing of the agreement, the Prime Minister of the federal Government, in a joint press conference with his counterpart from the Kurdistan Regional Government, announced that the agreement was “temporary”, adding that its principles would be reflected in the federal budget law and the hydrocarbon law and would help expedite the passage of the former. The Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government stressed that the agreement had created a “positive atmosphere” for the passage of the hydrocarbon law. Although the agreement has not been published, the spokesperson of the Government of Iraq informed the media that the federal State Oil Marketing Organization will now market oil from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The Kurdistan Regional Government, however, will maintain control of the revenues, but under the audit supervision of the federal Government. The implementation of the temporary agreement is pending and oil exports have been halted as the federal Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Government of Türkiye continue to negotiate the details of the agreement.

### **C. Security situation**

16. Da’esh continued to conduct asymmetric attacks, primarily in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates, while Iraqi security forces continued counter-terrorism operations in response to Da’esh activity. From 4 February to 19 April, 96 attacks were attributed to Da’esh, most of which targeted Iraqi security forces. A total of 92 attacks were attributed to Da’esh in the first quarter of 2023, compared with 188 attacks in the first quarter of 2022, which is the lowest quarterly figure reported since Iraq declared victory over Da’esh in December 2017 and is indicative of the overall decline in attacks that have been attributed to the group in recent years.

17. In the first quarter of 2023, attacks against convoys belonging to Iraqi companies contracted to carry supplies for the international counter-Da’esh coalition resumed for the first time since 22 August 2022, with nine attacks reported between 12 January and 19 April in Babil, Baghdad, Muthanna, Qadisiyah and Salah al-Din Governorates. No casualties were reported. Seven of the attacks were claimed by a

group calling itself the International Resistance Faction, while one was claimed by a group calling itself Revenge for Muhandis.

18. Throughout the reporting period, the Ministry of Defence of Türkiye reported ongoing ground and air operations against Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) targets in northern Iraq, including in Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah Governorates.

19. On 5 April, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye reported that his country had closed its airspace to aircraft travelling to or from Sulaymaniyah International Airport as of 3 April. He explained that the decision followed an "intensification" of PKK activities in Sulaymaniyah and an "infiltration by the terrorist organization into the airport" that threatened flight safety. The decision would remain valid until 3 July 2023 and then be re-evaluated in the light of further developments.

20. On 7 April, Sulaymaniyah Airport Directorate reported an explosion in the vicinity of Sulaymaniyah International Airport. In a statement issued on 8 April, the Presidency of Iraq condemned the incident and called for dialogue with the parties concerned. In a separate statement, the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq also condemned the incident. On the same day, the National Security Adviser, Qasim al-Araji, and an investigation team visited the site of the explosion site. Investigative teams comprising members of the Council of Representatives Security and Defence Committee and a committee formed by the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government visited the site on 10 and 19 April, respectively. Those teams have not yet released any official findings.

#### **D. Regional and international developments**

21. The Government of Iraq continued to promote a foreign policy focused on strengthening bilateral ties, including by fostering economic cooperation and increasing foreign investment, while underlining the need to respect the sovereignty of Iraq and promoting balanced regional and international relations. Other key aspects of the country's engagement at the regional and international levels were climate change and water-related issues.

22. After the earthquakes that struck southern Türkiye and the northern Syrian Arab Republic in February, Iraq provided humanitarian assistance to those affected in both countries. Between 8 and 11 February, the President and Prime Minister of Iraq each spoke by telephone with the Presidents of the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye to express their condolences and solidarity. An Iraqi parliamentary delegation led by the First Deputy Speaker visited the Syrian Arab Republic from 10 to 11 February and met with the country's Prime Minister and other officials. On 14 February, the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq travelled to areas in Türkiye that had been affected by the earthquakes and met with the President of Türkiye in Ankara.

23. On 8 February, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fuad Mohammad Hussein, travelled to the United States. He met separately with a number of United States officials, including the Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, the Special Envoy for Iran and the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development.

24. On 9 February, the Prime Minister travelled to the United Arab Emirates, where he met with senior officials, including the President, Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. In a joint statement, both countries underlined the importance that they attach to strengthening political, diplomatic, economic and trade ties.

25. On 17 February, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs attended the fifty-ninth Munich Security Conference. The Prime Minister, in his

address to the conferees, highlighted his country's priorities, including combating poverty, job creation, financial reform and climate change. He also met with counterparts from Armenia, Denmark and the State of Palestine, as well as with several other high-level officials, including from the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Kuwait and Yemen. The President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq also attended the conference.

26. On 25 February, Iraq hosted the thirty-fourth conference of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, which was attended by the speakers of parliaments of Arab countries. The Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mohammed al-Halbousi, who is the current President of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union, chaired the conference, which the President of Iraq also attended. The Speaker underlined the importance of the conference to strengthening relations between Arab countries and promoting regional security and stability. On 26 February, the Speaker led a delegation from the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union to Damascus to meet with the President of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Speaker of the Syrian People's Assembly.

27. On 2 March, the President addressed the summit-level meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement Contact Group in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) to discuss global post-pandemic recovery issues, which was hosted by Azerbaijan.

28. On 5 March, the Prime Minister held separate meetings in Cairo with the President and Prime Minister of Egypt, during which he conveyed the interest of Iraq in strengthening bilateral cooperation with Egypt. On 9 March, on the margins of the 159th session of the Council of the League of Arab States at the ministerial level, which was held in Cairo, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and his Jordanian counterpart discussed enhancing bilateral cooperation between Iraq and Jordan, and they reviewed the regional alliance between Egypt, Iraq and Jordan and tripartite coordination between those countries.

29. On 10 March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement welcoming the agreement signed in Beijing by the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia. In that connection, the Ministry highlighted the efforts of the Government of Iraq, which had hosted several rounds of talks between the two sides that established a "solid base" for further dialogue in Oman and China.

30. From 19 to 21 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs participated in a series of meetings in Brussels, including the third meeting of the European Union-Iraq Cooperation Council. The two sides issued a joint declaration outlining commitments made by the European Union and Iraq to increase cooperation in order to promote economic reforms and a sustainable green transition.

31. On 21 to 22 March, the Prime Minister visited Türkiye. During the visit, the Prime Minister met with the President of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as well as the Minister of Trade and business representatives, primarily in order to encourage investment in Iraq. Several joint projects were discussed, including a rail and road transport link from southern Iraq to the Iraq-Türkiye border. During a joint press conference, the Prime Minister thanked President Erdoğan for his "responsible and effective effort to relieve Iraq's urgent water distress" and reported that the Turkish President had ordered an increase in the amount of water released to Iraq for one month. President Erdoğan stated that although Türkiye was also going through an ever-worsening drought because of climate change, it had decided to increase the amount of water released "to the extent possible".

32. From 22 to 24 March, the President led a delegation from Iraq that attended the United Nations Water Conference in New York. The President, in his speech to

conferees, explained the urgency of addressing the water crisis in Iraq. On 24 March, Iraq became the forty-ninth State and the first country from the Middle East to become a party to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

33. During the reporting period, the Prime Minister received high-level visitors from, inter alia, the European Parliament, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Senior representatives of several multilateral bodies, including the Arab Monetary Fund, NATO, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and the World Bank also visited to Iraq.

34. On 14 April, the Minister for Foreign Affairs attended a consultative ministerial meeting in Jeddah that brought together ministers from the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, Iraq, Jordan and Egypt. The Minister met separately with his counterparts from Bahrain and Saudi Arabia on the margins of the meeting to discuss bilateral cooperation and regional stability.

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

#### **A. Political activities**

35. During the reporting period, the Special Representative engaged extensively with senior officials of the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments, political party leaders and women's groups. She continued to emphasize, inter alia, the need for good governance and transparency, robust and sustainable anti-corruption measures, systemic reform, the promotion of accountability and the protection of human rights, including the right to freedom of expression. She further stressed that inclusivity and equality, as well as a strong commitment from a wide variety of actors to place the national interest above all else, are essential elements for promoting reform and change. She also reiterated the need for an institutionalized dialogue to reach a comprehensive and durable resolution to all outstanding issues between the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments.

36. The Secretary-General visited Iraq on 1 and 2 March. During his visit, he met with the President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and political leaders, as well as representatives of women, youth and civil society. The Secretary-General, in his encounters, conveyed the solidarity of the United Nations and its commitment to supporting the Government and people of Iraq. In addition, he welcomed the Government's intention to prioritize reforms and continue its constructive regional engagement, while underlining the importance of strengthening democratic State institutions and delivering key services.

37. On 2 March, the Secretary-General visited Jad'ah 1 camp in Ninawa Governorate, which hosts Iraqi citizens repatriated from Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic. While there, he commended and encouraged the exemplary efforts of the Government of Iraq to repatriate and reintegrate those citizens.

38. He then travelled to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where he met with the President of the Kurdistan Region, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Speaker of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament. The Secretary-General underlined the importance of overcoming internal differences and that the united efforts of the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments to address outstanding issues are central to stability in Iraq.

39. The Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs visited Iraq from 22 to 24 January. In Baghdad, she met with the President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and commended the Government's efforts to implement vital reforms. In Erbil, she held constructive conversations with the President of the Kurdistan Region, the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Speaker of the Kurdistan Regional Parliament regarding Baghdad-Erbil relations and elections for the Kurdistan Regional Parliament. The Under-Secretary-General also held meetings with women leaders, youth groups and civil society representatives in Baghdad and Erbil, during which she listened to their concerns and stressed the important role of women and youth in building a prosperous and stable Iraq.

40. The Special Representative, in her address on the occasion of International Women's Day, emphasized, inter alia, the need to ensure the elimination of existing barriers to the realization by women of their political rights and to achieve a better gender balance in decision-making positions. She also stressed the necessity of further increasing much-needed protection for women, including those belonging to minority communities, in vulnerable situations and expediting the passage of the draft anti-domestic violence law.

41. On 12 March, the Special Representative addressed the Iraq Climate Conference in Basrah as part of her ongoing efforts to help Iraq address the challenges emanating from climate change. She pointed out that the salinization of water and soils, desertification and the disappearance of arable land are existential environmental concerns. Describing climate change and water scarcity as threat multipliers, she warned of heightened risks of poverty, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, displacement, forced migration, instability and conflict as a possible result of these challenges. The Special Representative, while welcoming the Prime Minister's decision to prioritize climate change and water scarcity in his government's programme, highlighted associated opportunities with regard to resource efficiency and cost savings, and the development of new products and services. She affirmed the commitment of the United Nations to support regional water diplomacy, provide technical assistance on water negotiations or act as a convening partner for effective dialogue.

42. On 15 March, the Special Representative addressed the seventh annual Sulaymaniyah Forum, organized by the Institute of Regional and International Studies at the American University of Iraq in Sulaymaniyah. In her address, she emphasized that it was essential to focus on key priorities in view of the long list of outstanding challenges facing Iraq. She further pointed out that in order for the country to enjoy the stability that it needs to withstand future shocks, it was important to collectively learn from history and to avoid repeating it, because Iraq deserved to rise above the endless cycles of instability and fragility.

43. On 17 March, the Special Representative visited Samarra, in Salah al-Din Governorate, where she met with the Governor, local authorities and politicians to discuss the political, security and economic situation in the Governorate, as well as the importance of peaceful coexistence and thus the need for mutual understanding and consensus on the way forward. She also visited the Askari Shrine and the Malwiyah Minaret of the Great Mosque of Samarra.

44. On 7 and 8 February, the Deputy Special Representative for Political and Electoral Assistance visited Basrah Governorate, where he discussed with the Deputy Governor issues pertaining to provincial council elections and United Nations support. He also visited the Chibayish marshlands in Dhi Qar Governorate. On 25 and 26 February, he visited the Governorates of Babil, Karbala and Najaf, holding meetings with local government officials, religious authorities and civil society representatives to discuss political developments, the provincial council elections and



UNAMI support. On 29 March, the Deputy Special Representative visited Ba‘qubah in Diyala Governorate and met with the Governor, security officials and civil society representatives. The security situation in the Governorate and the forthcoming provincial council elections were among the main topics discussed.

45. During a visit to Kirkuk Governorate on 4 April, the Deputy Special Representative met with the Acting Governor and civil society representatives to discuss the overall situation in the Governorate and provincial council elections, including the participation of women and minorities in those elections. On 9 April, he visited Mosul and the Ninawa plains, where he had conversations with officials, civil society and religious leaders on security and electoral developments. On 10 April, the Deputy Special Representative visited Sinjar and discussed the status of implementation of the Sinjar Agreement with local representatives, including the from the Yazidi, Arab and Turkmen communities.

## **B. Electoral assistance**

46. UNAMI continued to engage with the federal and regional authorities of Iraq, officials from electoral institutions, representatives of political parties and civil society organizations on issues related to elections.

47. The Mission also continued to provide advisory support to the Independent High Electoral Commission with regard to electoral management, operational planning, inclusive electoral participation and enhancing the ongoing biometric voter registration process. Several specific training courses are being developed to improve further the technical capacity of Commission staff in relation to information technology and elections.

48. On 12 February, the Deputy Special Representative engaged with a group of minority representatives in Erbil on issues pertaining to elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The meeting was held in response to a request from political parties in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to assess the views of minority communities on their parliamentary representation. At the meeting, UNAMI presented a summary of the various consultations held in January and February 2023 with minority communities in Erbil, Dahuk and Sulaymaniyah on delimitation and the allocation of component seats for the upcoming regional parliamentary elections.

49. On 15 and 16 March, UNAMI, with operational support from the United Nations Office for Project Services, organized a workshop on enhancing electoral participation and voter education in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq that was attended by 40 civil society representatives.

## **C. Human rights and rule of law developments and activities**

50. From 1 January to 31 March, UNAMI documented 31 incidents resulting in at least 61 civilian casualties (31 dead, including 11 children and 4 women, and 30 injured, including 15 children and 2 women). The majority of civilian casualties were caused by explosive remnants of war, followed by small arms fire, complex attacks and improvised explosive devices.

51. During the same period, the country task force on monitoring and reporting grave violations against children in armed conflict verified 22 grave violations against 22 children (3 girls and 19 boys), including the killing of 6 children (1 girl and 5 boys), the maiming of 15 children (2 girls and 13 boys) and the abduction of 1 boy by Da‘esh.

52. On 30 March, the Government of Iraq, UNAMI and the United Nations Children’s Fund, the latter two in their capacity as co-chairs of the country task force on monitoring and reporting, signed an action plan to prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces. The action plan requires the Government to adopt the necessary legislative and administrative measures to enhance the protection of children from grave violations, in particular their recruitment and use by armed forces.

53. On 4 April, the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, at its twenty-fourth session, released its report on its first visit to Iraq. The visit was conducted in November 2022. In the report, the Committee outlines patterns and trends of enforced disappearances in Iraq from 1968 to present and highlights the lack of accountability for enforced disappearances, including for the most recent cases. The Committee makes several recommendations in its report to improve the prevention of enforced disappearances, including ending impunity, establishing a procedural framework to search for missing persons and enacting comprehensive legislation in accordance with the international human rights obligations of Iraq.

54. In January, the Ministry of the Interior launched an online platform to enable the public to submit complaints over so-called “derogatory or degrading” online content. As of 20 April, over 143,000 complaints had been submitted through this platform, resulting in 14 investigations and six convictions of social media users, including under provisions of the Penal Code prohibiting publications that offend public decency. Since the launch of the online platform, bloggers and social media activists have raised concerns over the lack of legal clarity on what is considered to be “derogatory or degrading” content. That lack of clarity has led to increasing online self-censorship.

55. On 27 February, the Council of Representatives, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights Law, announced the formation of a 15-member committee of experts that will select a new Board of Commissioners for the High Commission. The committee of experts held its first meeting on 19 March and published a call for candidates to submit their applications. The Board of Commissioners has not been active since the four-year term of the previous Board expired in July 2021. On 5 April, a group of Iraqi activists and human rights defenders launched a national campaign to support the appointment of independent and professional candidates as Commissioners, and called on the Committee of Experts to adhere to the standards of competence, professionalism and independence outlined in the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).

56. On 10 March, to commemorate the International Day of Women Judges, UNAMI, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Iraqi Association of Women Judges jointly organized an event in Baghdad to promote the full and equal participation of women at all levels of the judiciary. Currently, only 115 of the country’s 1,552 judges and prosecutors are women. The event was attended by women judges from across Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as well as by the President of the Supreme Judicial Council and representatives from diplomatic missions and the United Nations. Addressing the attendees, the Deputy Special Representative, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator commended “the establishment of a dedicated women judges’ association in Iraq as an encouraging step to building gender equality within the Iraqi judiciary”.

57. During the reporting period, the federal Government distributed the first payments to survivors eligible for compensation under the Yazidi Female Survivors Law. On 1 March, 24 survivors (21 women and 3 men, all Yazidis) received the first of their regular monthly financial instalments. Each survivor will receive

7 million Iraqi dinars (approximately \$5,000). Of the over 1,641 applications for compensation submitted to date, 490 have been approved by the committee for verification of applications established to consider requests under the law. Salaries were given to 242 Yazidi survivors (women and men) and credit cards were given to 252 people. The Committee requires survivors to submit a criminal complaint before a local court in order for the application to be approved. This requirement is not in line with the Yazidi Female Survivors Law and related by-laws, which stipulate that court case files are a type of evidence, but are not mandatory.

#### **D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development**

58. In February, the humanitarian country team finalized a report that provides an overview of the transition from humanitarian to development aid in Iraq. According to the team, an estimated 990,000 people (internally displaced persons and returnees) remain in acute need of humanitarian assistance. The report will help agencies and donors define their priorities for 2023. Donors have funded \$336 million out of the \$400 million requested under the 2022 humanitarian response plan. Although the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is scaling down its operations in Iraq, it continues to contribute to United Nations efforts aimed at supporting the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments as they strive to integrate internally displaced persons into the national service and protection system.

59. While the overall humanitarian situation in Iraq has improved, the pace of returns to areas of origin remains slow owing to poor basic services, lack of physical safety and security, and limited livelihood opportunities. Humanitarian partners reported 11 access-related incidents, of which 60 per cent involved interference in the implementation of activities, while the other 40 per cent were related to administrative restrictions. All incidents were resolved at the local level through the advocacy efforts of the humanitarian community.

60. Approximately 1.17 million persons remain internally displaced in Iraq, including 180,000 people who live in 25 camps administered by the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and in the Jad'ah 1 camp in Ninawa Governorate. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) supports approximately 103,000 displaced persons in 477 informal sites, including through risk reduction, referrals and advocacy, capacity-building and coordination of services. IOM also supports ongoing efforts by the Government of Iraq to return its nationals from Hawl camp in the Syrian Arab Republic. During the reporting period, 154 households consisting of 581 individuals (359 women and 222 men) relocated to Jad'ah 1 camp. Since May 2021, a total of 1,210 households consisting of 4,903 individuals (2,823 women and 2,080 men) have returned to Iraq from Hawl camp.

61. On 18 April, the Ministry of Migration and Displaced Persons announced the closure of the Jad'ah 5 camp in Ninawa Governorate as part of the government programme to "close the displacement file". In response, the Deputy Special Representative, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator issued a statement the following day expressing his concern about the effect of the closure on the camp's 1,566 residents, two thirds of whom were children. Noting that the closure had taken place "without adequate notification and preparation for the internally displaced persons and the receiving communities", he called on the Government of Iraq to ensure the safety and well-being of the camp's residents and underlined the commitment of the United Nations to work with the Iraqi authorities to ensure the residents' sustainable reintegration.

62. The United Nations country team and government authorities in Iraq, including in the Kurdistan Region, continued to expand ways for displaced persons in situations

of protracted displacement to make sustainable returns and to facilitate local integration and relocation in line with the Government's national plan and the durable solutions framework for Iraq, which is one of the countries that are piloting the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement of the Secretary-General. Under the leadership of the Deputy Special Representative, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, the United Nations country team is working closely with the Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement in developing a durable solutions strategy, bringing together humanitarian, development and political actors.

63. From 10 to 11 April, the Government of Iraq and the United Nations country team conducted the midterm review of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the period 2020–2024. The aim of the review was to assess implementation of the Framework, review joint workplans and ensure that the strategic priorities of the Framework are aligned with the Government's programme. The relevant federal Government ministries co-chaired the working groups on the five strategic priority areas, in order to ensure joint commitments and efforts with regard to the implementation of the Framework. The outcomes of the review will be summarized for the next meeting of the Framework's Joint Steering Committee.

64. The Deputy Special Representative, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, and the United Nations country team continued to engage the Government of Iraq with regard to taking greater ownership of the country's development goals, accepting that, while Iraq is making progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, it continues to struggle with poverty, unemployment, the provision of clean drinking water and energy. In that connection, a forum entitled "Towards effective and efficient management of official development assistance" was held on 19 March. The forum, which was jointly organized with the Ministry of Planning, was attended by representatives of the donor community. Dialogue also continued with the Ministry of Planning to promote cost-sharing of development activities, given that humanitarian efforts are being scaled down and development solutions need to include the needs of internally displaced persons.

65. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) supported improved access to education, distributing 10,023 school kits to children who have either not enrolled or have dropped out of school. UNESCO also provided vocational training to 1,568 vulnerable young people, including 275 girls and young women, as part of the project to revive the Old Cities of Mosul and Basrah. Some 122 of the women who received training found jobs in the reconstruction and rehabilitation sectors.

66. Food security remains a concern. Owing to a gap in funding, the World Food Programme (WFP) was forced to stop food assistance for 137,000 in-camp internally displaced persons in April, and it will be forced to stop food assistance for 38,000 in-camp refugees in August unless new funds are secured. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs announced that it had facilitated access to social safety nets for in-camp internally displaced persons and enabled widows and persons with disabilities to apply for benefits. However, other vulnerable families remain excluded from the social safety nets. WFP is seeking \$9 million in order to be able to assist internally displaced persons until 30 June 2023 and refugees until December 2023.

67. During the reporting period, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, together with the European Union, launched the "Farmer Field Day" programme in Ninawa to train women-headed households and promote sustainable land management practices in order to improve the livelihoods of farmers in degraded areas.

68. In the first quarter of 2023, UNDP and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime trained over 250 judges and law enforcement personnel on countering money-laundering.

69. On 22 March, the Government of Iraq ratified the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), and the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Iraq is the second country in the region to ratify the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention. The Government of Iraq, with technical support from ILO, revised its social security legislation in order to expand the social benefits available to citizens, including maternity and unemployment benefits, and extend legal coverage to informal workers.

70. Amid declining water security in Iraq, UNDP initiated the digitalization of data collection and analysis of water quality and volume of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and it established a national platform to monitor and plan the use of the water resources of Iraq. Meanwhile, the United Nations Population Fund is collaborating with the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Planning and the Directorate for Empowering Women to ensure gender mainstreaming in climate change initiatives in Iraq. A research programme was conducted in January and February that was focused on the potential impacts of climate change on Iraqi women and girls.

71. The demining process continued in Iraq. The Mine Action Service cleared 1.16 million m<sup>2</sup> and rendered safe 2,681 items of explosive ordnance in Basrah and Ninawa Governorates. The Service continued the capacity enhancement of two national demining organizations as part of the effort to support sustained national and localized mine action in Iraq.

## **IV. Security and operational issues**

### **A. Update on security arrangements**

72. In order to enable United Nations operations, the Department of Safety and Security continued to carry out its monitoring activities, adjust security measures and contingency plans, and liaise with host Government authorities. Regular safety and security alerts and advisories continued to be disseminated to inform staff of emerging threats or developments and changes in the security environment.

73. The Department supported an average of 46 field missions per day across the country, all at risk levels assessed as medium or high, and it continued to ensure necessary security support for United Nations operations through close coordination with the host Government.

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

74. UNAMI started a project to rehabilitate the Tigris riverfront adjoining the UNAMI integrated compound in Baghdad. The aim of the project is to improve the riverfront environment while creating space for recreation.

75. The Mission completed work on the reverse osmosis water treatment plant at the Kirkuk compound, providing staff in Kirkuk with uninterrupted access to potable water.

76. An engineering assessment of the structural integrity of the main building in the Kheitan compound in Kuwait, which accommodates the Kuwait Joint Support Office, was conducted. The building was found to be safe but in need of refurbishment and structural strengthening. To that end, the Mission engaged with the Government of

Kuwait to discuss the way forward and it will coordinate with the Department of Operational Support before launching the project.

## V. Observations

77. I am grateful to the Government of Iraq for facilitating my visit on 1 and 2 March. The visit allowed me to express my solidarity with the Government and the people of Iraq. It also offered an excellent opportunity to discuss the Government's reform agenda, efforts to address climate change and water scarcity, the humanitarian, human rights and development situation, and the role of Iraq in promoting regional stability, among other important issues.

78. I am encouraged by the commitment of the Government of Iraq to building a peaceful, stable and prosperous future for all Iraqis. Continued strong and inclusive leadership, as well as a determination to work together for the benefit of all Iraqis, will be essential to overcoming the challenges that remain. In this regard, the Government's reform agenda that seeks to tackle corruption, improve public services, diversify the economy and address the needs of vulnerable groups, including internally displaced persons and returnees, deserves strong support. This should include support of inclusive sustainable development that leaves no one behind and that contributes to comprehensively addressing the drivers of insecurity and vulnerability. My meetings with civil society representatives, including women and youth, clearly demonstrated that they have an essential role to play in making these reforms a reality.

79. One of the main instruments for delivering on the reforms is the federal budget. I welcome the approval of a draft federal budget law by the Council of Ministers and note that the law is currently under consideration in the Council of Representatives. I hope the Council of Representatives will soon agree on an effective budget, while fulfilling its oversight role, to ensure that the Government has a stable financial footing and is able to implement its programme expeditiously.

80. Inclusive political and electoral processes are vital elements of a peaceful and stable democratic environment. I therefore welcome the Government's intention to hold provincial council elections before the end of 2023. With electoral preparations soon to commence, it is essential to ensure that the Independent High Electoral Commission retains its independence and is provided with a realistic budget and timeframe to organize the elections. To sustain public trust in the electoral process and in the accountability of elected officials, transparency and inclusivity are critical.

81. Regarding the planned elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, I call on the Region's political parties to continue to seek common ground on matters of disagreement, including the electoral framework. The United Nations stands ready to support the federal and regional electoral institutions of Iraq, in line with the technical electoral assistance mandate of UNAMI.

82. A solid relationship between Baghdad and Erbil is crucial to the political stability and economic progress of Iraq. I therefore welcome the recent steps taken by the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to address a number of outstanding issues between them and encourage them to move towards institutionalized, regular and structured dialogue in order to reach durable and constitutionally based agreements on all outstanding issues.

83. I commend the commitment of the Government of Iraq to advancing regional stability through dialogue and diplomacy. Full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and good neighbourliness is essential for fostering regional stability. I urge all stakeholders to exercise maximum restraint and to take

concrete confidence-building steps towards lowering tensions, including by making use of the various instruments for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

84. I also welcome the continuing engagement of the Government of Iraq with both UNAMI and the United Nations treaty body mechanisms on the issue of enforced disappearances. I urge the Government to put in place the necessary legislative and policy measures to prohibit and prevent enforced disappearances and to provide accountability and redress for victims. This would include implementing the comprehensive recommendations made by the Committee on Enforced Disappearances in the final report of its first country visit to Iraq, which the Committee adopted and shared with the Government in April.

85. I welcome the steps taken by the Council of Representatives to begin the process of selecting and appointing a new Board of Commissioners for the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights. I encourage the Council of Representatives, through the Committee of Experts established for this purpose, to ensure that the selection of Commissioners is carried out in accordance with the relevant provisions of domestic law and in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles), according to which the Board of Commissioners must in particular be independent and provide a pluralist representation of the social forces involved in the promotion and protection of human rights in Iraq.

86. The efforts of the Government of Iraq to repatriate its citizens from Hawl camp demonstrates that responsible repatriation is possible. I urge Member States with nationals in the same situation to take similar steps to support dignified repatriation in accordance with relevant international laws. In addition, I encourage the Government of Iraq to continue efforts to repatriate its citizens and beyond that, to accelerate the community-based reintegration of returnees.

87. The United Nations remains committed to providing support to address residual humanitarian needs and to continue working to find durable solutions to assist internally displaced persons. In this regard, I welcome the commitment of the Government of Iraq to working with my Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement on advancing solutions for internally displaced persons. However, this is being done in a landscape of diminished funding. I urge the international community to remain committed to Iraq and its people, while encouraging the Government of Iraq to ensure that all humanitarian needs are being met.

88. Iraq is acutely vulnerable to climate change and water scarcity. I call for increasing support from the international community for Iraqi efforts to mitigate, adapt to and seize opportunities to address these issues. As these challenges do not recognize borders, I also encourage efforts to boost regional cooperation. In this light, I am encouraged by the recent steps taken by the Government of Iraq, noting that Iraq is the first country in the Middle East to accede to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

89. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative for Iraq and Head of UNAMI, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and the United Nations staff in Iraq for their continued dedication to implementing the Organization's mandate in the country.