



# Security Council

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## Implementation of resolution [2682 \(2023\)](#)

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2682 \(2023\)](#), 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 26 September 2023 ([S/2023/700](#)) and the briefing to the Security Council by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and Head of UNAMI on 10 October 2023.

#### II. Summary of key political developments

##### A. Political situation

2. On 18 December, Iraq held Governorate Council elections in 15 federal provinces for the first time in 10 years. In Kirkuk Governorate, the Governorate Council elections were the first held since 2005. The Independent High Electoral Commission opened a total of 38,043 polling stations in 7,766 polling centres for general voting on 18 December, and for special voting for Iraqi security forces personnel and internally displaced persons on 16 December. After casting his vote on 18 December, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani, congratulated the Iraqi people for the “significant national day” which witnessed “the realization of a constitutional right that had been postponed for a decade”. He also commended the security forces and the Commission for their efforts and described the elections as a “crucial pillar for implementing administrative decentralization and ensuring the representation of the people” within the governorates.

3. Media reports indicated an orderly and peaceful voting process with a small number of security incidents between the opening of polls ahead of special voting on 16 December and the closure of polls after general voting on 18 December. Isolated instances of stun grenades and small arms fire were reported near a small number of polling centres, with no reports of serious injuries. An office of the Independent High Electoral Commission was reportedly targeted by a rocket-propelled grenade in Najaf before polling opened on 18 December. Only minor damage was reported. During a press conference on 18 December broadcast by the Prime Minister's Office Security



Media Cell after the polls had closed, the Deputy Commander of Joint Operations and Head of the Supreme Security Committee for Elections, Lieutenant General Qais al-Muhammadawi, said “no security breaches” had occurred during the voting process.

4. The Independent High Electoral Commission released preliminary results on 19 December and final uncertified results on 28 December. According to the Commission, official voter turnout reached 41 per cent, with 6.6 million out of 16.1 million registered voters participating in the elections. Of the 285 seats across the 15 governorates holding elections, 76 were won by women, just above the minimum quota of 75. Of the 76 women, 17 were elected independently of the quota mechanism. On 29 December, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) announced that it was challenging the official results of the provincial elections.

5. Preparations for the Governorate Council elections had continued in the weeks before the vote, with the official campaign period commencing on 1 November. The Prime Minister repeatedly stressed the importance of holding the elections as scheduled, as well as his Government’s commitment to safeguarding the electoral process. In a meeting with the Prime Minister on 27 November, the Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission, Judge Omar Ahmed Mohammed, confirmed that all prerequisites were met to “conduct fair and transparent elections”. As in previous elections, the Accountability and Justice Procedure, formerly known as de-Baathification, resulted in the disqualification of some electoral candidates, including the incumbent Governor of Ninawa.

6. Several political actors encouraged voter participation and called upon citizens to exercise their right to vote. These calls were made following a public statement by Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr on 13 November through his aide Salih al-Iraqi, in which he supported a boycott of the elections, which he stated would “undermine [their] legitimacy internationally and domestically”. Following Al-Sadr’s statement and again on the eve of early voting on 15 December, the Iraqi media reported that Sadrist supporters had held small-scale protests against the elections, particularly in the southern governorates and in the Sadr City neighbourhood of Baghdad. In turn, political leaders affiliated with the Coordination Framework emphasized the significance of the Governorate Council elections as a means to restore critical local government mechanisms, in accordance with the Constitution of Iraq.

7. During the electoral campaign period, instances of vandalism of campaign materials were reported in several governorates, as were isolated incidents involving direct threats or violence against candidates or their relatives. In early December, offices of the State of Law Coalition, a member of the Coordination Framework, were reportedly targeted by grenade and rocket-propelled grenade attacks in Basrah, Najaf and Diyala Governorates, and National Wisdom Trend (Hikma) offices were reportedly vandalized in Diyala Governorate. On 13 December, Al-Sadr issued a statement reiterating his support for a boycott but called upon his supporters “not to attack” the elections.

8. On 14 November, the Federal Supreme Court issued a ruling to terminate the parliamentary membership of two members of the Council of Representatives, including Speaker and Taqaddum party leader Mohammed al-Halbousi, citing “constitutional and parliamentary oath violations”. A parliamentary order was later issued on 20 November, confirming that Al-Halbousi’s parliamentary membership had ended on 14 November in accordance with the Federal Supreme Court ruling. In a video statement released on 14 November, Al-Halbousi stated that political actors were attempting to “dismantle” political and social components of Iraq and suggested that the ruling had not been made in accordance with the Constitution. On 15 November, the Prime Minister met with Al-Halbousi. According to the former

Speaker's office, discussions were focused on efforts to sustain political stability and the importance of dialogue to "resolve emerging issues".

9. On 14 November, Taqaddum announced its intention to withdraw its three ministers from the Cabinet. According to a statement issued by his office on 20 November, the Prime Minister rejected the resignations in the name of preserving "political representation". Taqaddum members of the parliament also boycotted sessions of the Council of Representatives, convened on 15, 18 and 22 November. Consultations continued within and between political blocs to reach consensus on a new Speaker. On 22 November, the Council of Representatives voted to postpone the election of a new Speaker until such time that a "political balance is achieved". Another session of the Council of Representatives scheduled on 13 December to elect the Speaker was postponed until further notice.

10. On 22 November, the Council of Representatives adopted an amendment to Independent High Electoral Commission Law No. 31 of 2019, which extended the mandate of the Commission's Board of Commissioners, due to expire on 7 January 2024, by six months. The amendment was adopted with the aim of allowing the work of the Board of Commissioners to continue until the certification of the results of the Governorate Council elections and the Kurdistan Region parliamentary elections.

11. In Kirkuk Governorate, the voter registry was subject to judicial consideration ahead of the Governorate Council elections. The electoral law, as amended in March 2023, required an audit of the voters' list. On 12 December, the Federal Supreme Court adjudicated hearings on two lawsuits related to the issue, one requesting that the audit be completed before the election in Kirkuk, and the other requesting that the election in Kirkuk be postponed until the audit was completed. The Court rejected the cases and confirmed that the election would be held in Kirkuk at the same time as in the other governorates. Of the 454 electoral complaints received by the Independent High Electoral Commission, 273 were filed in Kirkuk; a majority of them were reviewed by the Commission and slated for dismissal.

12. On several occasions during the reporting period, the Federal Supreme Court postponed rulings on pending cases on important provisions of the electoral law of the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, including specific provisions relating to minority representation and the number of electoral constituencies. On 27 December, the Court postponed its ruling on the cases to 21 January. Meanwhile, the Independent High Electoral Commission continued to prepare to conduct, to the extent possible, the Region's delayed parliamentary elections, which were originally scheduled to be held in October 2022.

13. As part of the Government's efforts to implement its ministerial programme, the Prime Minister chaired the inaugural meeting of the Board of Directors of the Iraq Development Fund on 22 October. With initial funding of \$700 million from the triennial federal budget, the Fund aims to improve the investment environment in the country and stimulate sustainable economic and social development, with a focus on the governorates not organized in a region. On 26 November, the Prime Minister inaugurated the five-year national development plan conference, during which he emphasized the Government's commitment to socioeconomic progress in Iraq, including to economic diversification, financial reforms, social protection and strategic projects aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

14. On 31 October, the Government held a conference in Baghdad to mark the twenty-third anniversary of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), attended by senior government officials, civil society representatives and the international community. At the conference, the Government reviewed progress made on its second national action plan on women and peace and security.

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

15. Dialogue on outstanding issues, including revenue-sharing and the draft federal hydrocarbon law, remained a central focus between Baghdad and Erbil. The full implementation of the Federal Budget Law (2023–2025) remained incomplete, with the parties maintaining divergent views on the financial entitlements and obligations of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and on the conditions for the transfer of federal budgetary allocations from Baghdad to Erbil. As an interim measure, on 17 September the Council of Ministers announced the approval of a three-month “loan agreement” that would facilitate the transfer of funds to the Kurdistan Regional Government for the payment of civil servant salaries. In September, November and December, the Kurdistan Regional Government received the three tranches of the loan, totalling 2.1 trillion Iraqi dinars. These loans allowed the Kurdistan Regional Government to disburse to its civil servants their salary arrears for the months of July to September. The delays in salary payments led to peaceful protests and strikes in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

16. On 18 October, the parliamentary finance committee hosted Taif Sami and Awat Sheikh Janab, the Finance Ministers of the federal Government and of the Kurdistan Regional Government, respectively, to discuss financial matters between Baghdad and Erbil. The Kurdistan Regional Government stated on 25 October that it had provided the finance committee with information on its financial situation and its civil servants’ payroll, and called upon the federal Government to disburse financial entitlements to the region based on a joint audit report.

17. Oil exports from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq through the Iraq-Türkiye pipeline remained suspended. On 25 October, the Prime Minister stated that Iraq and Türkiye had expressed readiness to resume oil exports, but noted that concerns raised by oil companies in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq remained unaddressed. On 2 October, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources of Türkiye announced that the Turkish section of the pipeline was ready to resume operations. On 12 and 13 November, the Minister of Oil of Iraq, Hayan Abdul Ghani, visited Erbil to discuss mechanisms for the resumption of oil exports with officials of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, including the President, Nechirvan Barzani, the Prime Minister, Masrour Barzani, and the Acting Minister of Natural Resources, Kamal Mohammed Salih. The Kurdistan Region officials subsequently stressed the importance of swiftly resuming oil exports, with further discussions required on technical, financial and legal aspects.

18. On 9 November, the Prime Minister of Iraq visited Erbil for the second time since taking office and met with the President and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as well as the President of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. The Prime Minister’s Office reported that discussions were focused on the implementation of the government programme, political dynamics, and the regional security environment.

## **C. Security situation**

19. Da’esh continued to conduct asymmetrical 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 1 October to 31 December, 54 attacks were attributed to Da’esh, most of which targeted Iraqi security forces personnel or assets. This continues a steady pace of attacks attributed to Da’esh during the previous quarter, from 1 July to 30 September, which saw 49 attacks.

20. An attack against a convoy belonging to Iraqi companies contracted to transport supplies for the international counter-Da'esh coalition was reported in Qadisiyah Governorate on 1 November.

21. Since the attack by Hamas and other groups on Israel on 7 October and the ensuing hostilities between Israel and Hamas, multiple Iraqi non-State armed groups in various statements signalled their intention to target United States military personnel and assets in Iraq. Several armed groups, including those aligned with the self-proclaimed "Islamic Resistance in Iraq", as well as a number of political leaders, called for the departure of international coalition military personnel from Iraq. On the evening of 18 October, the Iraqi security forces deployed to prevent protesters from entering the International Zone in Baghdad, where they had reportedly intended to reach the Embassy of the United States.

22. Beginning on 18 October, indirect fire attacks targeting facilities hosting United States military and international counter-Da'esh coalition personnel in Iraq, primarily in Anbar and Erbil Governorates, resumed for the first time since May 2022. Most of the attacks, including similar attacks on United States military facilities in the Syrian Arab Republic, have been claimed by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which, in an 18 October statement, announced its intention "to engage in operations in support of the Hamas-led resistance operations in Gaza". In an editorial note to the transcript of a United States Department of Defense press briefing on 12 December, the United States noted that "there have been approximately 92 attacks" in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

23. On 23 October, the Prime Minister received phone calls from the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Antony Blinken, and the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin. According to the United States Department of State, the discussion with Mr. Blinken was focused on coordinating efforts to "ensure regional stability", with Mr. Blinken urging the Prime Minister to "pursue" the perpetrators of recent attacks targeting United States personnel in Iraq. According to the official read-out of the Prime Minister's Office dated 23 October, the Prime Minister "reaffirmed Iraq's commitment to protecting military advisers and diplomatic missions" in the country. Earlier on 23 October, the Prime Minister's military spokesperson affirmed the rejection by the Government of Iraq of the "attacks that target Iraqi bases, which include the headquarters of the international coalition advisers".

24. On 5 November, Mr. Blinken made an unannounced visit to Baghdad during an official visit to the region. According to the Prime Minister's Office, discussions were centred on the situation in Gaza, with the Prime Minister "emphasizing the need for an immediate ceasefire" and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In a statement issued on 5 November by the United States Department of State, it was noted that the Secretary of State "urged the Prime Minister to hold accountable those responsible for continuing attacks on United States personnel in Iraq and fulfil Iraq's commitments to protect all installations hosting United States personnel at the invitation of the Iraqi Government".

25. On 22 November, the United States Central Command issued a statement confirming that it had conducted "precision strikes against two facilities in Iraq ... in direct response to the attacks against United States and coalition forces", including the missile attack on 21 November against the Ayn al-Asad airbase. On 22 November, social media accounts associated with Kata'ib Hizbullah reported the loss of several of its members. Iraqi political leaders issued statements in which they strongly "condemned" the United States strikes in Jurf al-Nasr, in Babil Governorate. The Council of Representatives media office issued a statement after its session on 22 November calling upon the Government to implement the Council's 2020 "decision to remove United States military forces from Iraq". The spokesperson of

the Government of Iraq issued a statement calling upon “all parties to avoid unilateral actions and to respect Iraq’s sovereignty”.

26. On 1 December, the Prime Minister and Mr. Blinken spoke again by phone. According to the read-out of the Office of the Spokesperson of the United States Department of State, “the Secretary called on the Iraqi Government to fulfil its commitments to protect all installations hosting United States personnel at its invitation”. According to the Prime Minister’s Office, the Prime Minister stressed that the strikes in Jurf al-Nasr constituted a “violation of Iraqi sovereignty”, and reaffirmed his Government’s commitment to “ensuring the safety of international coalition advisers present in Iraq”.

27. On 3 December, according to the United States Central Command, the United States conducted a drone strike “in self-defence” in Kirkuk Governorate, “killing ... five militants and destroying the drone” which they were preparing to launch. According to the same statement, the Iraqi security forces were notified of the strike and its location and confirmed the death of the targeted individuals and the destruction of the drone. On the same date, Harakat Hizbullah al-Nujaba and the Islamic Resistance in Iraq issued statements confirming the loss of five of their members in the strike. The strike was condemned by political actors, including the former Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi and the former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s Islamic Dawa Party.

28. On 8 December, the Embassy of the United States, the Iraq National Security Service premises and a nearby residential building in Baghdad were struck by indirect fire. According to a statement released by the Office of the Prime Minister on the same day, the Prime Minister chaired a security meeting in which he announced an investigation into the incident and stressed that “attacks against any foreign mission or diplomatic headquarters constitute a terrorist crime”. On 8 December, the Prime Minister held another phone call with the United States Secretary of Defense. According to a Department of Defense read-out, the Secretary of Defense “condemned the attack” against the embassy as well as “the series of attacks on United States forces” in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic over recent weeks. According to a read-out published by the Prime Minister’s Office, the Prime Minister reiterated the Government’s “commitment to protecting diplomatic missions and workers within the international coalition mission and its facilities” and cautioned “against a direct response without the [Iraqi] Government’s approval”.

29. On 12 December, the Prime Minister held another phone call with Mr. Blinken. According to a Department of State read-out, the Secretary of State “condemned the attack on the United States Embassy in Baghdad as well as the series of attacks on United States personnel” in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic in recent weeks. In a statement released on 13 December by the Prime Minister’s Office, the Prime Minister emphasized his Government’s efforts to protect diplomatic missions and personnel and highlighted the capability of Iraqi security forces to pursue the perpetrators of the attacks “without any external interference”. On 14 December, the Prime Minister’s military spokesperson stated that such attacks “damage Iraq’s reputation and dignity” and announced the arrest of several perpetrators.

30. On the morning of 26 December, the United States conducted air strikes in Wasit and Babil Governorates, including Jurf al-Nasr, following an attack on Erbil airbase that injured three United States personnel. According to a statement by the United States Secretary of Defense, on the night of 25 December, the strikes targeted “three facilities used by Kata’ib Hizbullah and affiliated groups ... in response to a series of attacks against United States personnel” in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

31. The spokesperson of the Government of Iraq released a statement on 26 December asserting the country’s “security forces, constitutional institutions and

legal authorities” to respond to “unacceptable” and “hostile” attacks on diplomatic missions and “sites hosting military advisers from friendly nations”. In addition, the Government of Iraq “condemns” the strikes on “Iraqi military sites [which] were targeted by the [United States] justifying the act as a response” and which “resulted in the martyrdom of one [Iraqi] service member and injury of 18 others, including civilians”. The statement clarified that the “hostile act” represents “an unacceptable violation of Iraqi sovereignty” that “undermines bilateral relations”.

32. Throughout the reporting period, the Ministry of Defence of Türkiye reported ground and air operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) targets in northern Iraq, including in Dahuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah Governorates, and in the Sinjar district of Ninawa Governorate. On 7 and 13 October, a Turkish air strike reportedly targeted PKK in Makhmur camp. On 17 October, the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye extended by two years the mandate under which Turkish forces are conducting cross-border operations in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Between 19 and 23 December, the Ministry of Defence of Türkiye reported multiple ground and air operations “in line with its inherent right of self-defence as outlined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations”, according to a press release issued on 23 December by the Ministry. On 23 December, the Ministry reported the death of 12 of its personnel in northern Iraq in the hands of PKK. The Ministry later reported on the “neutralization” of PKK elements in both northern Iraq and the northern Syrian Arab Republic. In public remarks made in Istanbul on 23 December, the President of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, noted that “Türkiye will not allow a terrorist organization in northern Iraq or Syria at any cost”.

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

33. During the reporting period, the Government of Iraq continued to promote bilateral cooperation with regional and international partners and made efforts to identify joint opportunities for cooperation in combating climate change.

34. Amid the hostilities between Israel and Hamas and other armed groups, officials of the Government of Iraq stressed their support for the Palestinians’ rights and urged the international community to do its utmost to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. On and after 7 October, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fuad Hussein, engaged with regional leaders, including from Jordan, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the League of Arab States.

35. Iraqi leaders hosted or participated in several high-level diplomatic meetings on the situation in Gaza, including the League of Arab States emergency ministerial meeting held in Cairo on 11 October; the emergency meeting of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union held in Baghdad on 18 October; the Cairo Summit for Peace, held on 21 October; and the Joint Arab Islamic Extraordinary Summit on the Israeli Aggression against the Palestinian People, held in Riyadh on 11 November. Iraqi officials continued to articulate the country’s position on the crisis, including calls for an immediate ceasefire and the swift delivery of humanitarian aid. On the margins of the Cairo Summit, the Secretary-General met with the Prime Minister to discuss Iraqi initiatives to support the population of Gaza.

36. On 16 October, the Prime Minister of Iraq and the President of the United States, Joseph R. Biden, Jr., held a telephone call. Statements released by the Prime Minister’s Office and the White House indicated that the two leaders discussed efforts to prevent an “expansion” of the hostilities in Gaza and Israel. Between 7 and 21 November, the Prime Minister also spoke to the Heads of Government of Canada, Germany, Italy, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Spain. On 16 December, the Prime Minister led a governmental and parliamentary delegation to Kuwait to offer

condolences following the death of the Emir Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Saba. Iraqi leaders also extended wishes to Kuwait and its people under the leadership of the Emir Sheikh Mishal al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah.

37. Meanwhile, the Iraqi authorities continued to foster strengthened bilateral relations and cooperation with several countries, including on energy, economic development and investment, counter-terrorism and drug trafficking. On 2 October, the Prime Minister attended the opening ceremony of the Doha Expo 2023–2024, where Iraq advanced efforts to enhance international partnerships, attract foreign investment and identify joint opportunities to address the impact of climate change. On 7 October, the Prime Minister of Iraq and the Minister of State for Gas Affairs of Turkmenistan, Maksat Babayev, met in Baghdad and signed a memorandum of understanding to import gas from Turkmenistan.

38. On 10 October, the Prime Minister, accompanied by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, made his first official visit to the Russian Federation, where he met with the President, Vladimir Putin. The visit was focused on strengthening bilateral cooperation, including on energy matters, while the hostilities in Gaza and Israel were also discussed.

39. High-level bilateral engagement between Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran continued. On 12 October, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, visited Baghdad, where he met separately with the Prime Minister and the National Security Adviser, Qasim al-Araji, to discuss regional and bilateral issues. On 31 October and 13 November, respectively, the Prime Minister received the Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Abbas Aliabadi, to discuss enhanced cooperation, and the Chief of the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmad-Reza Radan, to discuss bilateral security cooperation and joint efforts to combat drug trafficking. The Prime Minister also received the Deputy Foreign Minister Mehdi Safari on 21 December in Baghdad, where the two discussed the Development Road project.

40. On 6 November, the Prime Minister travelled to the Islamic Republic of Iran, where he met separately with the President, Ebrahim Raisi, and with the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in Tehran. The meetings were focused primarily on the situation in Gaza, with both sides calling for an “immediate ceasefire”. In his meeting with the President, the Prime Minister also discussed the implementation of the bilateral joint security agreement reached in March 2023, which is aimed at disarming and relocating Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in Iraq.

41. Between 18 and 22 November, the President of Iraq, Abdullatif Jamal Rashid, visited Italy, the Holy See, Azerbaijan and Armenia. During his meetings, the President touched on the importance of intercommunal dialogue and cooperation in pursuit of peace and security, cooperation in countering terrorism and combating drug trafficking, and the expansion of trade, tourism and infrastructure development, among other topics. On 11 December, the President visited Nicosia and met with the President of Cyprus, Nikos Christodoulides, to discuss political, economic and security-related developments.

42. Bilateral consultations with Türkiye continued. On 19 December, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fuad Hussein, and the Minister of Defence of Iraq, Thabet al-Abbasi, held separate meetings in Ankara with their Turkish counterparts, Hakan Fidan and Yaşar Güler, respectively. According to a joint statement, the two Ministers for Foreign Affairs agreed to enhance security cooperation in countering terrorism and stressed that regional security and stability is strengthened by cooperation in trade, investment, transportation and infrastructure projects. The parties also discussed, within the framework of security cooperation between the two countries, the threats posed by PKK.



43. On 1 and 2 December, the President led the Iraqi delegation to the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, hosted by the United Arab Emirates, and inaugurated the Iraqi pavilion at the Conference. In his address, the President highlighted his country's vulnerability to climate change and proposed the formation of a regional group comprising the eight riparian Gulf countries, to jointly devise collective solutions to climate change and water scarcity. On the margins of the Conference, he met bilaterally with several officials, including the President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Jens Stoltenberg, the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), Cindy McCain, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. He also attended the Summit of the Group of 77 and China on 2 December. At his meeting with the Secretary-General, the President underscored the role of the United Nations in supporting transboundary water cooperation. The Secretary-General also met with the President and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

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

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

44. The Special Representative continued to meet with government officials, political party leaders, judiciary officials, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. Discussions were primarily focused on the implementation of the government programme, election preparations, civil society concerns, Baghdad-Erbil relations, and regional developments. At her meetings, the Special Representative emphasized the importance of safeguarding stability and security in Iraq.

45. The UNAMI leadership continued to engage with the Independent High Electoral Commission, the government-established High Committee to Support Women's Political Participation, and other relevant electoral stakeholders in the context of preparations for the Governorate Council elections and the parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In her engagements, the Special Representative discussed the Mission's electoral assistance role exercised at the request of the Independent High Electoral Commission and in accordance with the Mission's mandate. During the reporting period, the Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance also met with the Head of the Directorate for the Empowerment of Women, as well as with the Council of Representatives Speaker's Adviser on Women, to discuss United Nations advice and assistance in support of the elections and the promotion of women's participation. He also held meetings with civil society organizations to discuss their concerns related to the elections.

46. In line with the Mission's mandate, the Special Representative visited Kuwait on 29 October, where she met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Salem Abdullah al-Jaber al-Sabah, and other government officials. She discussed UNAMI support for the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals as well as missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives, pursuant to Security Council resolution [2107 \(2013\)](#). They also discussed the completion of the ongoing maritime border demarcation process between Iraq and Kuwait beyond boundary point 162. The Special Representative expressed the readiness of the United Nations to provide expertise and support, should both sides request it.

47. As part of activities organized in the framework of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, on 16 November the Special Representative

underlined the need to invest in preventing violence against women and girls and to enhance the role of women in decision-making processes. She once again encouraged the Council of Representatives to expedite the adoption of the anti-domestic violence bill and advocated tailored policies and strategies.

48. During the reporting period, UNAMI convened seven rounds of consultations with concerned actors on the implementation of the 2020 Sinjar Agreement. The Special Representative and the Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance continued to engage with the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, as well as representatives of communities from Sinjar, to address the implementation of the Agreement. On 18 October, the Deputy Special Representative spoke at the inauguration of a Yazidi genocide memorial in Sinjar, during which he stressed the need to ensure full reparations and accountability.

49. The Special Representative, at her meetings with both officials of the federal Government and of the Kurdistan Regional Government, also discussed the ongoing implementation of the border security agreement signed with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

50. On 1 November, the Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance attended a third international conference on climate change, security and migration held in Baghdad, during which the President of Iraq and government ministers highlighted the Government's initiatives to mitigate the impact of climate change.

## **B. Electoral assistance**

51. Throughout the reporting period, UNAMI provided technical assistance and advisory support to the Independent High Electoral Commission as Iraq prepared for and held Governorate Council elections on 18 December.

52. On 12 December, the Special Representative attended a simulation of election day processes organized by the Independent High Electoral Commission. On 5 December, the Special Representative, together with the Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance, met with the Commission's Board of Commissioners, during which they were briefed on the status of electoral preparations. The Commissioners expressed confidence in their readiness to conduct the elections and expressed their appreciation for the Mission's technical assistance and advisory support.

53. On 15 November, the Special Representative participated in a conference organized by the Iraqi presidency on the role of the media in promoting electoral participation. UNAMI supported the Independent High Electoral Commission in contributing to the event, which was also attended by the Communication and Media Commission, the Iraq Media Network, representatives of political parties, civil society groups, and the media.

54. On 7 November, the Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance met with the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission to review the status of electoral preparations, United Nations electoral assistance activities, efforts to enhance women's participation, and efforts to ensure the peaceful conduct of the electoral campaign leading up to election day.

55. Following the candidate vetting process, the Commission approved a total of 5,904 candidates, including 1,662 women (28 per cent). The official electoral campaign period lasted 45 days, with the Commission setting up committees at the national and governorate levels to monitor electoral campaign violations. The High Committee to Support Women's Participation took measures to address security

concerns for women candidates during the campaign period, including the establishment of four hotlines by the Ministry of the Interior to address complaints from women candidates.

56. The UNAMI Office of Electoral Assistance supported the Independent High Electoral Commission in reviewing progress and addressing challenges related to the implementation of the operations and logistics plan. The Commission recruited and trained more than 200,000 polling and counting staff, 33 per cent of them women, who served on polling day in more than 38,000 polling stations distributed across 7,000 polling centres. UNAMI provided technical assistance to develop regulations and procedures for the Governorate Council elections, including on the allocation of seats reserved for women, electoral campaigning, and dispute resolution. UNAMI also supported the Commission in launching an intensive outreach campaign, using both traditional and social media channels, to educate and motivate voters to exercise their right to vote.

57. UNAMI provided technical assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission in developing the operational plan, timeline and regulations for conducting parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. UNAMI also continued to liaise with the Region's electoral stakeholders, including officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government, political parties, and civil society organizations, to enhance coordination with the Commission in moving forward with electoral preparations. However, Federal Supreme Court decisions on various provisions of the Region's electoral law remain pending, with a potentially significant impact on planning and implementation of the electoral operations and calendar.

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

58. From 1 September to 31 December, UNAMI documented 18 conflict-related incidents resulting in at least 30 civilian casualties (10 dead, including 5 children and 1 woman, and 20 injured, including 10 children and 5 women). The majority of these civilian casualties were caused by explosive remnants of war, followed by air strikes.

59. From 1 September to 31 December, the country task force on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children in armed conflict verified 15 grave violations against 15 children (13 boys and 2 girls), including the killing of 4 boys and 1 girl, the maiming of 7 boys as a result of explosive remnants of war, and the maiming of 2 boys and 1 girl as a result of air strikes.

60. UNAMI verified the execution on 25 December of 13 male Iraqi convicts, previously sentenced to death, in Nasiriyah Central Prison. In 2023, UNAMI documented a total of 29 executions. According to sources verified by UNAMI, the President of Iraq has approved orders to carry out 275 executions.

61. In November and December, as part of the Human Rights 75 initiative to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNAMI and the Babylon Film Institute jointly organized human rights film festivals in Baghdad, Mosul and Babil. The festivals featured documentary films on key human rights issues in Iraq. On 15 and 16 November, also as part of the Human Rights 75 initiative, UNAMI organized two round-table discussions in Najaf on due process for defendants and the rights of detainees.

62. On 3 and 4 November, UNAMI and the Iraqi Women Journalists Forum conducted a joint training in Mosul aimed at enhancing the inclusion of human rights considerations in their reporting. In December, UNAMI and the Iraqi Network for Social Media jointly organized a three-day training of trainers in Erbil for journalists, lawyers, civil society representatives and members of the Iraqi High Commission for

Human Rights on digital security and digital rights. The training provided participants with the tools to enhance their safe use of cyberspace and their understanding of the rights to freedom of expression and protection against online hate speech.

63. On 19 November, the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers issued a circular, directing that the term “gender” be replaced with the phrase “justice between women and men” in official government documents. It thereby updated its previous circular of 27 July, in which it allowed the continued use of the term “gender” provided that it was followed by the phrase “men and women”. These instructions were issued in the context of some social media criticism related to the use of “gender” to “promote values conflicting with Iraq’s social and religious traditions”. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights defenders, especially women’s rights groups, expressed concern that their advocacy and programmatic work could face impediments.

64. On 19 December, UNAMI conducted a high-level dialogue in Erbil to establish a coordination mechanism dedicated to promoting accountability measures for cases of domestic violence.

65. On 13 December, as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, UNAMI and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) jointly conducted a workshop in Erbil on the theme of justice for women. Participants, including women judges, discussed strategies to strengthen the judicial system to prevent violence against women by reinforcing accountability measures, and to promote the full and equal participation of women at all levels of the judiciary.

66. In October and November, UNAMI organized two 3-day workshops in Erbil on the right to education. The workshops brought together a diverse group of educators and education advocates from the Arab, Christian, Kaka’i, Kurdish, Shabak, Turkmen, Yazidi and Zoroastrian communities. The events were part of the Mission’s ongoing efforts to promote the equal and inclusive right to education for the diverse societal components of Iraq. The workshops were followed by a series of dialogue sessions in Baghdad and Erbil, which explored the challenges and opportunities faced by the country’s religious and ethnic components in obtaining access to the right to equal and inclusive quality education.

67. On 4 December, UNAMI organized an event in Baghdad on the theme of racial justice, as part of the Human Rights 75 initiative, which was attended by participants from various components of Iraqi society, government and civil society. Discussions were focused on the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in promoting and protecting racial justice, equality and accountability in Iraq; the obligations of Iraq under the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; and the role of government and civil society in combating racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance.

68. On 7 November, the Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance met with the Minister of Communications to discuss the Mission’s ongoing support to the Government in developing its national strategy to counter hate speech.

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

69. While Iraq has made progress towards durable solutions and development, humanitarian partners continue to face funding shortfalls, leading to programme closures that affect beneficiaries’ access to basic services. As at December 2023, the number of internally displaced persons who had returned stood at 4.9 million, whereas 1.12 million remained internally displaced in formal and informal settlements across

Iraq, of whom over 160,000 were hosted in the Kurdistan Region in 24 formal camps. Furthermore, since 2016, 21,798 families (130,788 individuals) across 12 governorates have faced climate-related displacement.

70. In 2023, the rate of return for internally displaced persons to their places of origin remained low. Nonetheless, Iraq witnessed progress in reopening some villages for return, particularly in Salah al-Din Governorate and in the Hassan Sham area of Ninawa Governorate. Moreover, 4,382 returnees moved from areas of Dahuk and Ninawa Governorates back to the Sinjar and Ba'aj districts of Ninawa. Meanwhile, the United Nations country team, supported by the Office of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement, worked closely with the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to accelerate the implementation of the “National plan to advance solutions for internally displaced persons”, including through the development of a dedicated road map.

71. Iraq focused on the return process of its nationals from Hawl camp in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. Since May 2021, 1,742 households consisting of 6,936 individuals (including 4,018 women and girls) have been registered in the Jad'ah rehabilitation centre, of which 967 households have since left. Currently, 825 households remain in Jad'ah, comprising 3,079 individuals, of whom 1,822 are women. On 24 September, the United Nations, jointly with the Government, launched the “One United Nations plan: a new beginning” programme, outlining programming and coordination priorities for United Nations agencies working, in close cooperation with relevant Iraqi authorities, on the return process.

72. At the Jad'ah centre, the United Nations and partners supported Iraqi returnees from Hawl camp in obtaining civil documents, thereby ensuring access to public services, and delivered over 1,800 documents to residents before and after their departure from the centre. The United Nations also continued to advocate with authorities for the adoption of flexible procedures in processing complex cases of families suspected of affiliation with extremist groups. In addition, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) trained criminal justice professionals on the treatment of children returning from the Syrian Arab Republic and detained for association with Da'esh.

73. The World Health Organization (WHO) led initiatives involving health infrastructure, disease outbreak investigation, and medical support. In collaboration with UNDP, WHO organized a multi-disease outbreak investigation workshop, promoting rapid response by health workers. In 2023, WHO provided critical medical supplies worth \$600,000 throughout the Kurdistan Region, including diagnostic kits and national guidelines for HIV testing. Initiatives supporting primary health care, mental health, and gender-based violence provided services for internally displaced persons in Sulaymaniyah Governorate, and for internally displaced persons, Syrian refugees and host communities in Dahuk Governorate.

74. The Mine Action Service cleared 167,865 m<sup>2</sup> of explosive ordnance in Ninawa Governorate and concluded the three-year “partnership grant model” between national and international NGOs. The model was focused on knowledge and skills transfer to national NGOs to autonomously clear complex explosive devices resulting from the Da'esh conflict. Two national NGOs are now leading operations utilizing local capacity to ensure sustained and autonomous mine action efforts. Twenty-eight per cent of deminers in the two national NGOs are women, reflecting the Service's continued efforts to promote gender mainstreaming. The Service supported the Ministry of the Interior in developing local capacity by training 7 female and 49 male deminers.

75. The United Nations continued to support the efforts of Iraq to mitigate the impact of climate change. It also supported communities experiencing climate-related

displacement by monitoring the number of displaced families and cooperated with the Government to provide assistance in strengthening social protection mechanisms, access to services, and climate change adaptation.

76. In October 2023, WFP and the International Trade Centre (ITC) launched a pilot hub for smallholder farmers in Ninawa Governorate to support sustainable livelihoods through agricultural market strategies. Concurrently, ITC continued its efforts to establish productive agribusiness partnerships between farmers and buyers through a holistic market development strategy. This included, among other aspects, supporting young entrepreneurs and conducting training on climate-smart agricultural practices and quality management.

77. In October in Erbil, WFP organized the second interministerial climate information technical working group workshop, engaging federal and Kurdistan Region government entities. In addition, it provided technical support to the Ministry of the Environment in integrating newly established climate departments into climate adaptation and mitigation actions across 15 Governorates.

78. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations collaborated with the Government to improve farm water availability through modern technology adoption and management practices. It conducted a nationwide agricultural survey to improve agricultural data accuracy and enhance national statistics collection. It further collaborated with the Iraqi Agricultural Engineers Syndicate to establish an agricultural platform for updating and aligning the animal health regulations in Iraq with global standards.

79. UNODC continued to support the efforts of Iraq to counter money-laundering and terrorism financing, addressing deficiencies and technical needs through training and technical advice. It also supported the Iraqi authorities in enhancing their capacities to combat drug trafficking. It also supported the review of the current Iraqi Correctional Service classification systems, bolstering the Service's capacity to manage and rehabilitate detained foreign terrorist fighters and prisoners alleged to be violent extremists.

80. UNDP engaged in efforts to enhance the anti-corruption framework of Iraq by contributing to policy, legal and institutional improvements. It supported the development of a law on access to information, which was approved by the Council of Ministers in October and submitted to the parliament. It also supported the final preparation of two draft laws on asset recovery and public procurement for submission to the Council of Ministers.

81. UNDP, in coordination with UNAMI and international partners, supported the efforts of Iraq to update its strategic policy framework for security sector reform. UNDP supported a drafting workshop for technical officials representing Iraqi security sector institutions, after which the draft Iraq security sector reform strategy was revised.

82. UNDP collaborated with the Central Bank of Iraq to bolster economic reforms and advance financial inclusivity. Strategic joint projects in this sphere included initiatives focused on advancing the country's digital economy; the establishment of the Riyada Bank for Social Development to foster small and medium-sized enterprises; supporting microfinance; and rolling out green financing. ITC provided technical assistance to support the country's World Trade Organization accession process.

83. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) continued to deliver services in camps for internally displaced persons, addressing sexual and reproductive health as well as gender-based violence. As Iraq prepares to carry out its first census in over 30 years, UNFPA is contributing technical support to the Government in developing a

strategic framework and an advocacy and communication action plan for the successful conduct of the census, planned for 2024.

84. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), under its flagship “Revive the spirit of Mosul” initiative, continued to rebuild the Nuri mosque, as well as the Saa’a and Tahera churches, promoting the cultural, religious and ethnic diversity of Iraq. UNESCO also rehabilitated 124 historic houses in Mosul and 11 Shanasheel historic houses in Basrah. In addition, UNESCO inaugurated the Karbala’ Vocational School for Hospitality and Tourism, which benefited 151 students and 45 teachers.

85. As part of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2024–2029) development process, the United Nations country team held consultations with donor partners and civil society organizations and organized an introductory workshop on the process with the Government, including line ministries.

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

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

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

87. The Department supported an average of 36 field missions each day across the country, all at risk levels assessed as medium or high. Close coordination with the host Government continued to ensure the necessary security support for United Nations operations.

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

88. The solar energy project, which is aimed at increasing the share of renewable energy to half of total consumption in United Nations compounds in Baghdad, Erbil and Kirkuk, has reached an 85 per cent completion rate across all sites. The project is expected to be completed by the end of March 2024. The initiative to upgrade wastewater treatment plants in these locations, undertaken by UNAMI in partnership with the United Nations Children’s Fund, has reached a completion rate of 66 per cent.

## **V. Observations**

89. The Governorate Council elections held on 18 December – the first held in 10 years – mark an important milestone for the democratic process in Iraq. I am pleased that they were conducted in an orderly manner and hope that the elections will lead to the swift establishment of new local governments able to deliver concrete benefits for the Iraqi people.

90. The continued support of the international community in mobilizing the necessary resources is welcome in order to enable UNAMI, in line with its mandate, to continue to support the Independent High Electoral Commission in preparing for parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Holding these elections is essential to fostering democratically empowered institutions in the Region. I call upon

all stakeholders to fulfil their roles and responsibilities for an orderly, peaceful and credible conduct of the elections.

91. Further progress in addressing outstanding issues between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq remains crucial to a prosperous, stable and peaceful Iraq. This can be achieved only through a well-prepared dialogue, both political and technical, geared towards outcomes that meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of all Iraqis.

92. As the hostilities between Israel and Hamas and other armed groups continue, I remain gravely concerned about a regional spillover of this tension, including to Iraq, as it risks undermining the country's security and stability. I therefore renew my call upon all concerned parties to exercise maximum restraint and to take urgent action to de-escalate tensions. In the same vein, I appeal to Member States to use their influence and leverage on the relevant parties to the same ends.

93. I commend the Government of Iraq for its commitment to fostering socioeconomic progress in the country. Continued political stability will be crucial to sustaining and building on these gains.

94. Addressing ongoing humanitarian needs and achieving durable solutions for internally displaced persons will be critical for the long-term stability and prosperity of Iraq. I reaffirm the continued support of the United Nations for the Government of Iraq in these areas, including support for government efforts to repatriate its nationals from Hawl camp in the north-east Syrian Arab Republic. I encourage the Government of Iraq to ensure that all humanitarian needs are being met, including through adequate funding allocations. I further urge the international community to uphold its commitment to supporting the development priorities of Iraq and its people.

95. The seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights offered an opportunity to take stock of progress made in protecting rights and fundamental freedoms. In this regard, promoting justice and equality for all Iraqis in line with the spirit of the Declaration and the country's obligations under international human rights law and enhancing efforts to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights remain key.

96. Many women in Iraq continue to face domestic violence. It is imperative that the Iraqi legislature enact the long-delayed draft domestic violence law as an important step towards accountability and to provide domestic violence survivors with the support that they need.

97. I welcome the participation of Iraq at the twenty-eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in the United Arab Emirates. The readiness of the Government of Iraq to engage in regional and international cooperation to address the multilayered impact of climate change is much needed. Climate change is global in scope, but its impacts are felt locally and interact with existing challenges in Iraq. The United Nations stands ready to actively assist the Government of Iraq in finding practical and sustainable solutions to pressing issues related to climate change impact and water scarcity, while highlighting the critical need for urgent assistance from the international community. Given the transboundary nature of these challenges, there is undoubtedly a need to foster regional cooperation.

98. 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.