



United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)
بعثة الأمم المتحدة لمساعدة العراق (يونامي)

Iraq's Electoral Preparations and Processes - Report No. 4
Baghdad, 10 December 2020

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Highlights for November

- The electoral legislation approved by Parliament becomes law.
- The electoral budget is submitted for parliamentary approval.
- Iraq requests the United Nations Security Council to provide UN observers at the June 2021 parliamentary elections.
- IHEC and Ministry of Interior sign a cooperation agreement on voter registration.

Electoral Legislation

On 5 November, the President of Iraq ratified the Law for the Election of Iraq's Council of Representatives (CoR Election Law No. 9 of 2020). The law came into effect on 9 November following publication in the official gazette. It makes provision for 329 parliamentary seats to be contested in the upcoming parliamentary elections, of which 25% (83 seats) are reserved for women, in line with constitutional provisions, and nine are reserved for minority representatives (5 Christians, 1 Yezidi, 1 Shabak, 1 Sabeen Mandeian and 1 Fayli Kurd). Each governorate will be divided into several constituencies, with a country-wide total of 83 constituencies. Each constituency will return 3-5 members of parliament, depending on its population density.

Now that the electoral law has come into force, IHEC is working on the necessary implementing regulations. A committee composed of several IHEC commissioners and IHEC legal staff is currently reviewing draft regulations prior to submission for approval by the Board of Commissioners. UNAMI is providing technical inputs to the committee. Regulations that have been drafted thus far include: a Regulation on the Registration and Certification of Candidates for the Election of Iraq's Council of Representatives 2021; an Electoral Campaign Regulation; a Media Regulation; a Regulation on Electoral Complaints and Appeals; a Voter Registration Update Regulation; and a Regulation for the Accreditation of Agents of Candidates, Political Parties and Electoral Alliances.

Electoral Budget

IHEC initially requested a budget of IQD 429 billion for the upcoming election. This was reduced after revision to IQD 329 billion, and was submitted on 5 December. With Iraq facing severe financial and budgetary constraints, the Prime Minister chaired a meeting on 16 November between IHEC and the

* This report, the fourth in a monthly series, is prepared pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 2522 (May 2020). In extending UNAMI's mandate, the Council instructs that the Special Representative of the Secretary General and UNAMI shall: "further advise, assist and support the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission with efforts to plan and execute genuinely free and fair Iraqi-led, Iraqi-owned elections and referenda, including through regular technical reviews and detailed reporting on electoral preparations and processes, as part of the Secretary-General's regular reporting cycle."



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Ministry of Finance to discuss ways to proceed on the electoral budget. Subsequently, the Council of Ministers approved the draft election budget of IQD 329 billion and referred it to the Council of Representatives for legislative approval. There has been no further movement so far by Parliament, and IHEC has yet to receive funds.

The parliament must act swiftly to ensure passage of the legislation allocating the electoral budget. Any further delays will significantly affect the ability of IHEC to move forward on implementation of its electoral tasks. For example, lack of funding is already affecting IHEC's plans to deploy mobile voter registration teams.

Recruitment of IHEC Personnel

The recruitment process for IHEC staff began in the first half of 2020; most of the vacant positions are now filled. In June, while recruitment was ongoing, UNAMI submitted an advisory to IHEC urging the application of transparent, consistent recruitment practices.

All appointments are now subject to a three-month probationary period. During that period, any appointee found to be politically affiliated or infringing their pledge of office in any other way, is to be removed from their post. As the end of the probationary period for most new staff is fast approaching, electoral stakeholders will be carefully watching how IHEC implements this provision.

Iraq's Request for UN Electoral Observation

On 20 November, the Government of Iraq made a formal request to the United Nations Security Council for UN observation of the 6 June 2021 parliamentary elections, to help strengthen public trust in the electoral process. The Security Council has yet to respond.

Status of Technical Preparations

Technical preparations for the elections continue. It is hard to assess progress in the absence of a formal electoral operational plan and timeline (see below). IHEC has established numerous committees to follow up on activities, but it is not clear how these various undertakings are integrated at the technical or policy level. There is slow but steady progress on efforts to expand biometric data collection and speed up card distribution coverage; the development of regulations and procedures; the finalisation of procurement plans; an audit of electoral IT systems, and public outreach initiatives.

The UN continues to assist the IHEC Board of Commissioners in bridging capacity gaps, although the UN-led international electoral support project has yet to receive the necessary funding transfers from donors to launch recruitment and deployment of UN electoral advisors. These advisers are urgently needed on the ground to provide technical expertise and advisory support to IHEC: it is UNAMI's hope that an imminent release of donor funds will enable the first deployments to take place in early January 2021.

Biometric voter registration



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The process of voter biometric data collection and voter card distribution continues, with IHEC operating 1,079 voter registration centres country-wide. IHEC records suggest, however, that the rate of registration remains low, with a weekly average of only 7,200 voters coming for biometric registration and about 44,000 cards distributed weekly. At this rate, IHEC will barely even reach an additional 2% of the voters who still do not have the cards by June 2021. There is thus a need to further intensify efforts, including the deployment of more mobile registration teams, once the budget is approved, together with more focused public outreach and mobilization campaigns.

With 11.3 million voters (out of 26.6 million) still without biometric records, UNAMI is urging IHEC to consider options for expanding biometric registration coverage and speeding up the distribution of voter cards, including by drawing on support from other government institutions and seeking solutions with their service providers. For example, on 16 November, IHEC and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) signed a cooperation agreement to collaborate on the voter registration process. In addition to MoI security support to IHEC registration teams, IHEC and MoI are considering a joint project to complement IHEC's voter database with the MoI's national ID card project. In the short term, this could result in enabling the compatibility and use of both IHEC and MoI databases which can then further develop, in the long term, into a more sustainable and unified ID solution integrating both the national ID and voting requirements in a single system.

Electoral operational planning

Following approval of the electoral law, IHEC is working to finalise the electoral operational plan and timeline. UNAMI is helping to develop a guidance document that will aid IHEC in preparing a comprehensive plan that defines major tasks, a schedule of activities, and implementation and coordination mechanisms. IHEC has also activated its Operations Committee, headed by the Chief Electoral Officer and composed of her two deputies and the heads of relevant operational and technical sections, to coordinate the progress of electoral preparations. In its meeting on 17 November, the Operations Committee discussed requirements for the process of updating voter lists, planned to commence in January 2021.

Developing strategies for communicating electoral information

IHEC continues to rely on its website to relay information to the public, including by releasing weekly statements on electoral preparations. Given the website's limited public reach, there is a need for IHEC to be more strategic in communicating electoral information and in addressing public confidence and trust issues. UNAMI is currently providing support for the development of IHEC's communications/media strategy, its digital platform, and its relations with stakeholders, including civil society organisations.

Capacity Development Support for Newly-Appointed IHEC Officials



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During the month of November, two orientation and training sessions were offered to newly-appointed IHEC heads of departments and sections. A UNAMI trainer provided online training attended by 10 officials. Further induction and training activities will be implemented in due course under the UN-led electoral support project.

Audit of Electoral Results Management and IT Systems

IHEC has, with UNAMI input, prepared terms of reference (ToR) to conduct an audit of its electoral results management and information technology systems. On 26 November, IHEC organised a virtual meeting with a range of IT/audit companies to discuss the tender process and specifications. Given the urgency of undertaking an audit, as stipulated in the electoral law, UNAMI is encouraging IHEC to rapidly select a suitable company so that the audit can be conducted in sufficient time to implement its findings ahead of the elections.

Political party registration

During the reporting period, IHEC registered an additional 10 political parties, bringing the total to 240 political parties accredited thus far. A further 76 applications are in process. IHEC also received accreditation applications from 20 electoral alliances. While the accreditation process remains open, UNAMI encourages IHEC to disseminate clear public information, in line with the provisions of the new electoral law, stipulating the requirements, deadlines and subsequent steps for political party registration and candidate nomination.

Visits to governorate electoral offices

Members of the IHEC Board of Commissioners continued visiting IHEC field offices to assess readiness for elections. November saw visits to southern governorates Basra, Missan, Karbala and Dhi Qar. The Commissioners discussed with IHEC field staff the progress on voter registration in these governorates and ways to increase the registration turnout and the distribution of voter cards. They also looked at logistical preparations, including the status of warehouses and other facilities to be used for storing, preparing and transporting electoral materials.

COVID-19 countermeasures

The IHEC Committee on COVID-19, which has yet to meet, needs to define and implement strategies and countermeasures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. IHEC will need to give greater priority to the issue, ensuring that its personnel in both HQ and the field comply with established protocols.

Invitations for international observation

On 26 November, IHEC forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs invitation letters for international observation of the national elections set for next June. On the basis of a list provided by the Ministry, a total of 53 embassies and representations in Iraq are invited to consider deploying electoral observers.



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Separate invitation letters will be sent to 19 international organisations with expertise in electoral observation. This is similar to previous invitations that Iraq has extended to embassies and international organizations to observe its electoral processes. This is separate from the exceptional Iraqi request submitted to the UN Security Council for UN electoral observation. However, if and when the Council considers Iraq's request, the coordination of all international observation efforts will be further defined.
