



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

Iraq's Electoral Preparations and Processes - Report No. 6  
Baghdad, 8 March 2021

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**Report No. 6**

**Highlights for February**

- IHEC further extends period for submission of candidacies and the registration of political coalitions.
- Biometric registration coverage reaches 62%, voter registration update continues until 31 March.
- IHEC organizes dialogue with representatives of political parties and alliances to intensify engagement with electoral stakeholders.
- Concept of operation being prepared for out of country voting (OCV) process.
- Discussions ongoing on the need for a fresh look at the electoral complaint adjudication process.
- Polling procedures and regulation up for review and finalization; MPs raise concerns about distribution of polling centers impacting on access and turnout of voters.
- UN electoral teams now deployed at all UNAMI regional hubs.

**Candidates and Coalition Registration**

On 25 February, IHEC decided to extend for the second time the period for the submission of candidacies and the registration of political coalition. The new deadlines are 17 April for candidate nomination and 1 May for the registration of political coalitions. They were previously set for 27 February and 1 March respectively.

The decision was taken during the IHEC Board of Commissioners meeting, in which UNAMI provided advice on the timeline for the finalization of candidate lists and the design and printing of ballot papers. In deciding to extend, IHEC also took note of the low rate of candidate registration to date.

As of 25 February, only 86 candidates had submitted their nomination papers to IHEC. Of these, only 12 are women candidates. There are 3 candidates seeking to contest the Yazidi reserved seat, 1 for the Fayli Kurds and 1 for the Sabian Mandeian component. Also, of the total candidacies submitted so far, only 3 have indicated their political party or coalition affiliations. The rest are independent candidates.

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\* This report, the sixth in a 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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To date, the registrations of 5 coalitions have been approved while 8 applications are still in process; a total of 249 political parties are now accredited while 58 applications are still in process. Of these, 99 political parties have indicated their intention to participate in the upcoming election.

### **Voter Registration Update**

The voter registration update (VRU) has been extended until 31 March. IHEC continues to process requests for addition, change, correction and deletion of voter registration records. A total of 1,079 Voter Registration Centres (VRCs) continue to operate countrywide. These are also the facilities, in addition to mobile teams, that are being used for the collection of biometric voter data, the registration of IDPs and the distribution of voter cards.

As of 25 February, IHEC's biometric registration coverage has reached 62% with biometric data collected for 15,534,518 voters out of 25,139,375 total voters. Week on week, the increase in biometric registration ranges from 75,000 to 120,000. At current rates, IHEC will likely reach only 63% to 64% biometric coverage by the close of the VRU period, unless turnout improves further.

In terms of voter card distribution, a total of 13,221,628 voter cards have been distributed. A further 1.5 million cards already printed are in the process of being distributed through the VRCs and mobile teams. IHEC will also need to order the printing of biometric voter cards for those voters who provided their biometric data during the VRU period.

Members of parliament from Ninewa ascribed the low turnout and participation of voters, particularly women, to the considerable distance they have to travel to reach VRCs and polling centres. They are proposing for IHEC to consider deploying more facilities in remote locations to improve voter access.

### **Outreach Activities**

There is a need for IHEC to further intensify its voter education and outreach activities on the new electoral system. This is to address prevailing misconceptions, largely due to past practices associated with the previous electoral system, particularly on the registration of candidates and technical operational preparations, including ballot paper design. IHEC needs to further explain these changes in its interactions with political parties and electoral stakeholders.

On 17 February, IHEC organized a meeting with representatives of political parties to update them on registration mechanisms for alliances, parties and candidates. IHEC informed the party representatives of IHEC's decision to lower the deposit amount for the nomination of candidates from the previous rate of IQD 5 million to IQD 2 million. This is to reduce barriers to registration for individuals intending to run as candidates. IHEC also provided updates on its electoral preparations, including for out of country voting. At the same time, IHEC encouraged those present to support IHEC's public outreach efforts and promote increased participation in the voter registration process.



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On 23 February, IHEC hosted a symposium with teachers and education staff in Baghdad regarding the important role of academia in increasing public awareness on the electoral process. The discussions also served to share updates on electoral developments and to highlight the role of teachers and students in the upcoming elections.

In support of these outreach activities, IHEC's Public Outreach Department drafted an activity matrix to help systematize the outreach plan, including schedules, agenda, activity type, target audience and the preparation of talking points for senior IHEC officials attending the activity. UNAMI is encouraging IHEC to give attention to adequate preparations and logistics prior to every outreach activity.

### **Out of Country Voting Preparations**

Planning for out of country voting operations continues, with IHEC weighing its options to initiate the biometric registration of eligible Iraqi voters living abroad, as required by law. The current plan is to implement OCV in the same 21 countries where OCV was held in the previous election. The concept of operations, including the mechanisms for recruiting OCV staff and for deploying and retrieving electoral materials, is currently being prepared with UN support.

### **Results Management IT Systems**

IHEC is in the process of selecting the audit company that will examine the electoral results management IT systems. The committee, chaired by one of the IHEC Commissioners, resumed work after receipt of a number of clarifications from the two bidding companies. This work was undertaken by the assigned evaluation subcommittee. Unanimously, the committee members voted to recommend one of the companies for the award, subject to approval by the Board of Commissioners.

The objective of the audit is to verify that the IHEC Result Management System is free of defect, hacking, bugs and to ensure credibility in the electoral process. This entails a complete technological audit (hardware and software), and ensuring that the required technology standards are met. It includes verifying the integrity of (1) PCOS (ballot box optical scanners at the polling station level); (2) CCOS (optical scanning for ballot papers at the polling centre level); (3) biometric voter verification devices; (4) Results Management Center in Baghdad; and (5) data transfer between polling stations and the Results Management Center in Baghdad, by checking that all data sent is duly encrypted and cannot be penetrated/hacked.

On the results management system, the IHEC Chief Electoral Officer expressed his intention to explore the feasibility of implementing a decentralized approach, to address transparency issues encountered in previous elections. The details of such decentralization are still subject to further technical assessment.



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### **Legal Advisories, Election Complaints and Appeals**

Given the experience and lessons from the 2018 CoR elections regarding the handling of electoral complaints and appeals, there is a need to have a fresh look at the overall electoral complaint adjudication process. This is another priority area for IHEC as it builds the regulatory and procedural framework for electoral dispute resolution.

On 21 February, UNAMI shared an advisory with IHEC containing recommendations for the processing of election-related complaints and appeals. Work is also ongoing to analyse incidences of complaints, particularly in governorates that have historically had a higher number of complaints lodged on election day. This is for IHEC to anticipate and proactively address various scenarios that may arise during the electoral process.

On 10 and 11 February respectively, UNAMI provided IHEC two advisories on IDP registration and on the regulation of candidate registration. IHEC considered the recommendations and adopted the decision enabling IDPs to register for biometrics in their current location of displacement, as well as the decision to reduce candidate deposit requirements.

### **Other Technical Preparations**

#### *Election Training and Procedures*

IHEC shared the draft of the polling and counting procedures for review. However, the polling and counting regulation itself is still subject to approval by the Board of Commissioners. Discussions are also ongoing on the development of various learning tools, including short videos, that will aid in implementing the training cascade for polling staff, planned to commence in May 2021.

#### *Procurement*

IHEC is finalizing the specifications for the printing of sensitive electoral materials, including ballot papers, voter lists and election forms. Outstanding items for discussion include the quantities and dimensions of the ballot papers and other printed materials.

#### *IHEC's Internal Appointments*

The issue of quota-based distribution (*muhasasa*) continues to come up in the appointment of officials and staff in IHEC. More recently, there are reports of an impending change to the head of one of the key technical sections in IHEC that handles electoral data management. Purportedly, the primary reason for the change is due to quota-based considerations. UNAMI continues to raise the issue with IHEC, emphasizing the importance of professional and merit-based appointments for its officials and staff across all departments and levels, in line with efforts to rebuild not just its capabilities but also, equally importantly, to restore trust in IHEC as an electoral institution.

#### *COVID-19 countermeasures*



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Discussions continued with the IHEC CEO and relevant sections on incorporating COVID-19 preventive measures during planning and in all stages of the electoral process. There is a keen interest at IHEC to provide additional protective items for polling officials as well as to plan the layout of polling stations to ensure proper distancing.

In relation to this, and in line with an MOU with the Ministry of Health, IHEC is examining the possibility of submitting a request on specific COVID-19 protective measures/items for polling and IHEC staff, and sanitation of electoral facilities.

Invitations for international observation

IHEC forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs another letter inviting embassies and international organizations to send electoral observers for the 10 October 2021 elections. This is essentially the same as the first invitation sent in November 2020, but now reflects the new election date. A total of 75 entities are on the mailing list, including 54 embassies and 21 international organizations. The list also includes the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the League of Arab States.

Election Security

The Election Supreme Security Committee continued to meet regularly to plan and coordinate security arrangements for the elections. On 23 February, the committee held a meeting at IHEC presided by the Deputy Commander of the Joint Operations Command and attended by senior Iraqi security officials, IHEC and the Prime Minister's Adviser for Election Security.

**Deployment of UN Electoral Advisers**

UN teams of regional electoral operations advisers (ROA) are now deployed at all UNAMI regional hubs in Kirkuk, Erbil, Basrah and Mosul. They have commenced their introductory visits to the IHEC governorate offices and have begun meeting their IHEC counterparts. They also conducted site visits of electoral facilities including the warehouses where IHEC electoral materials are stored.

Meanwhile, the recruitment of national electoral officers to be deployed to the governorates is ongoing.

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***Note: UNAMI reminds all stakeholders that electoral preparations must remain free from political interference at all stages. This independence is essential to build public trust in the elections and their outcome.***