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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2421 \(2018\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report every three 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 my previous report, dated 31 October 2018 ([S/2018/975](#)), and the briefing to the Security Council, on 13 November, by my former Special Representative for Iraq and Head of UNAMI, Ján Kubiš, who completed his assignment on 15 December.

II. Summary of key political developments

A. Political situation

2. Despite endorsement by the Iraqi Parliament of 14 ministerial candidates on 24 October 2018, the formation of the new Iraqi Government under Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi has been stalled by continuing disagreements between political blocs over the allocation of the remaining eight ministerial posts, most notably the Ministries of Defence, Interior and Justice. In an effort to reach a compromise, the three Iraqi presidencies, President Barham Salih, Prime Minister Adil Abd al-Mahdi and the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mohammed al-Halbousi, have conducted extensive consultations with political leaders from all sides. The President has repeatedly urged all political parties to act in the national interest, to contribute to a stable political process and to support the Prime Minister in forming his government. Commentators from across the political spectrum are demanding an expeditious decision on the outstanding posts.

3. On 3 December, in the wake of the repeated postponement of parliamentary discussions on the outstanding posts, Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi submitted a list of eight nominees to the Speaker and sought a vote of confidence. In a letter to the Speaker, the Prime Minister outlined the principles underlying his selection of candidates, which included public acceptability, political independence, efficiency, integrity, innovation, ethnic and sectarian balance, gender diversity and the reflection of electoral results. He underlined that all candidates had passed vetting by both the Commission of Integrity and the Supreme National Commission for Accountability



and Justice, and warned that further delays in completing the government would undermine democratic progress.

4. On 4 December, a session scheduled for a vote of confidence on the Prime Minister's eight candidates was boycotted by parliamentarians from the Sa'iron Alliance and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. After taking attendance of those present at the session, the Speaker declared that quorum had not been achieved and postponed the voting session to 6 December. In a press conference, the Prime Minister regretted that Parliament had failed to vote on the ministerial nominees, declined to submit new candidates and encouraged Parliament to agree to his selection. Parliamentary sessions in the following days, however, did not address the completion of the Cabinet.

5. On 5 December, the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker consulted on the way forward for government formation within the constitutional and legal frameworks. Underlining the need to avoid an escalation of tensions, the three presidencies promoted concerted efforts among all parties to overcome the political impasse and preserve national unity, in the interest of Iraq and its people. On 11 December, the Prime Minister sought additional nominations from political parties for the posts of Minister of Defence and of the Interior. In a further attempt to foster consensus, President Salih met with key political party leaders.

6. On 18 December, the Council of Representatives (the parliament) met to consider the eight Cabinet candidates proposed by the Prime Minister. At that session, the nominees for the Ministries of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Planning and Culture were formally endorsed. At a further session, on 24 December, two additional ministers, for Education, and for Migration and the Displaced, were approved. Three key posts (Interior, Justice and Defence) remain unfilled. Only 1 of the 19 ministerial positions (Education) was allocated to a woman. However, that post remains open, as the nominee has withdrawn her candidacy, following allegations regarding a family member's affiliation with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

7. Meanwhile, on 10 December, the first anniversary of the military victory over ISIL was marked with a series of commemorative events in Baghdad and across Iraq. During a high-level ceremony at the Ministry of Defence, Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi, speaking as Commander-in-Chief, paid tribute to all those from the security forces who fought and died during the military campaign. He also commended the leadership of the previous Prime Minister and of the Government and paid tribute to the Supreme Religious Authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

8. On 3 December, in Erbil, the Kurdistan Democratic Party announced that the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, would be the party's candidate for President of the Kurdistan Region if that position were reactivated by the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region. The party also indicated that the Kurdish Regional Security Council Chair, Masrour Barzani, was its proposed candidate for Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region. The Kurdistan Democratic Party confirmed that it had established a team to lead the second round of consultations with other Kurdish regional political parties on the formation of the next Kurdistan Regional Government. Most other political parties in the Kurdistan Region welcomed negotiations, although some indicated an interest in forming a parliamentary opposition. There has been limited progress on the formation of a new Kurdistan Regional Government in the weeks since the announcements.

B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil

9. On 14 November, the Federal Supreme Court postponed, until 9 December, a hearing to consider the case filed by the former Minister of Oil of Iraq against the Kurdistan Regional Government on the constitutionality of the unilateral direct export of oil from the Kurdistan Region. The Court explained that the postponement was due to a delay in the finalization of a report by technical experts appointed by the Court. The hearing was rescheduled for 23 January 2019.

10. On 16 November, the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government agreed to resume the export of oil from Kirkuk through the Kurdistan Region pipeline. The agreement made provisions for the federal Government to start exporting between 50,000 and 100,000 barrels per day to the Turkish port of Ceyhan through the Kurdistan Region, under the protection of the State Oil Marketing Organization of Iraq.

11. On 21 November, the head of the Customs Department of the Kurdistan Regional Government announced that the Kurdistan Regional Government had signed an agreement with a customs delegation from the federal Government for the removal of customs checkpoints, established in September 2018 by the federal Government, between Erbil and Kirkuk, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah, and Dahuk and Mosul. The decision has yet to be implemented, and customs checkpoints remain in operation. On 16 January, the Ministry of Finance of Iraq issued a statement indicating that the central Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government had agreed to unify customs duties at all border crossing points in the country and to remove the customs checkpoints between the Kurdistan Region and the rest of Iraq.

12. On 22 and 23 November, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Masoud Barzani, held consultative meetings in Baghdad and Najaf with senior national political figures, including Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi and Speaker Al-Halbousi. The meetings focused on breaking the deadlock between Baghdad and Erbil and developing a peaceful dialogue as an effective means to resolve disputes and start a new chapter in the relations between Baghdad and Erbil. The security situation and reconstruction in Ninawa, the normalization of the political situation in Kirkuk and coordination between Iraqi security forces and Peshmerga in operations against ISIL remnants were also discussed.

13. Funding from the federal Government remains a concern for politicians in the Kurdistan Region, in particular, the allocation of 12.67 per cent of the national budget to the Kurdistan Regional Government under the proposed 2019 federal budget law, which had its second reading in Parliament on 24 December. The allocation is based on a disputed calculation of the population of the Kurdistan Region in proportion to the national population.

C. Security situation

14. ISIL remnants continue to pose an asymmetric threat in northern and north-central Iraq (Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates) and in central Iraq (Anbar, Baghdad and Diyala Governorates). In addition, pressure on ISIL in the border regions of the Syrian Arab Republic has resulted in counter-attacks by the group and led to increased insecurity on the border with Iraq. On 13 November, the Prime Minister announced that the Iraqi-Syrian border was secure and that the Iraqi security forces were continuing to monitor the situation. On 21 November, the Ministry of Defence of Iraq reported that Iraqi aircraft had conducted air strikes against ISIL positions inside the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.

15. The restoration of political, social and economic normality in the lives of Iraqis continues to be threatened by terrorist activities, with Iraqi civilians bearing the brunt of attacks. Meanwhile, the clearance of explosives, both those planted by ISIL and remnants from conflict, offers some modest encouragement for the establishment of a stable environment conducive to reconstruction.

16. During the reporting period, the Turkish Ministry of Defence acknowledged air strikes against Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) targets in northern Iraq. Civilian casualties and property damage from those attacks remain of concern to the Government of Iraq. On 14 December, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq issued a statement deploring Turkish military air strikes against PKK positions in the Sinjar mountains and in Makhmur. According to the statement, the air strikes resulted in the deaths of four civilians.

D. Regional and international developments

17. At the beginning of October, I joined leaders from countries neighbouring Iraq, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, in congratulating Barham Salih on his election as President of Iraq, and Adil Abd al-Mahdi on his designation as Prime Minister. Regional actors have made clear that they view government formation in Iraq as an important step towards building a stronger and more balanced relationship among the countries in the Middle East region.

18. From 11 to 18 November, President Salih embarked on a regional tour with visits to Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia. In meetings with the leaders of those countries, President Salih underlined the desire of Iraq to strengthen its relations with neighbouring countries in the areas of economic cooperation and the continued fight against terrorism. He also highlighted the need for more support from regional partners in the reconstruction of Iraq following the military defeat of ISIL.

19. The Speaker has also engaged with regional leaders, making visits to Qatar, on 18 November, and to Saudi Arabia, on 17 December, during which future cooperation was discussed, in particular regarding trade and investment in Iraq.

20. On 26 December, the President met with the Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and discussed peaceful coexistence, tolerance and combating religious extremism. On 29 December, President Salih met with the Prime Minister of Jordan, Omar Razzaz, and their discussion covered, among other issues, cooperation in the transport, industrial, financial, energy and agricultural sectors.

21. On 3 January, President Salih led a high-level Iraqi delegation on a visit to Turkey. Talks between President Salih and the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, focused on enhancing trade and economic relations between Iraq and Turkey. Regional issues, including combating terrorism and transboundary water management, were also discussed.

22. The Government of Iraq continued bilateral discussions with the United States of America regarding an extension to the temporary waiver, issued by the latter on 5 November, that enables Iraq to continue to import gas from the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to support the national generation of electricity. On 20 December, the United States granted a 90-day extension to the waiver, aimed at assisting Iraq in meeting its immediate energy needs.

23. On 9 January 2019, President Salih, Prime Minister Abd al-Mahdi, Speaker Al-Halbousi and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Ali Alhakim, met with the Secretary of State of the United States, Michael Pompeo. During the meetings,

discussions were focused on the efforts to deliver stability, security and prosperity to Iraq, including the territorial defeat of ISIL and United States support to the Iraqi security forces within the context of the Strategic Framework Agreement of 2008.

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

A. Political activities

24. During the process of forming the new government, my Special Representative engaged with government officials, representatives of political parties, parliamentarians, women's groups, civil society and religious and community leaders, as well as with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. My Special Representative congratulated them on achieving this important step in the democratic transformation of the country and urged all political forces to reach an agreement on the cabinet posts so that the Government could start delivering on its promises to the public regarding better security, the dignified return of internally displaced persons, rehabilitated public services, a revitalized economy and the implementation of reconstruction and development projects. My Special Representative reminded the political parties of the responsibility they share in creating an enabling environment for the new Prime Minister and his Government to deliver on their programme for transitioning Iraq from a context of crisis to one of sustainable development and political stability.

25. During the reporting period, my Special Representative also visited the Kurdistan Region to urge political leaders to promote and support an inclusive Government in Baghdad, to expedite the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Erbil following the parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region on 30 September, and to address all pending issues between the federal Government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

26. My Special Representative also met with the heads of political blocs in Baghdad and in Erbil, to advocate for the meaningful inclusion of women in the negotiations to form the Government and their representation at all levels of decision-making, including in the Cabinet, parliamentary committees and the executive branch.

27. On 25 November, in Erbil, my Special Representative participated in the launch of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign, on the theme "Hear Me Too", as part of the Mission's advocacy efforts to protect the rights of women. He underscored the continued global advocacy of the United Nations for the protection of the rights of women and noted the strengthening of humanitarian assistance across Iraq.

28. From 24 October to 6 December, in coordination with the Iraqi National Reconciliation Committee, the Mission engaged in a series of working sessions with representatives of minority groups on the theme "Minorities in the media", with the aim of drafting a strategy and a workplan for ensuring the full engagement of minorities with the Iraqi media.

29. On 9 December, my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance, in collaboration with the Government of Iraq, launched a national strategy to combat violence against women, which provides an overall framework that policymakers and decision makers will draw upon to take concrete actions aimed at preventing violence against women and girls and protecting survivors of violence.

30. My new Special Representative, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, took up her post in Iraq on 16 December. She has subsequently engaged with senior leaders in Baghdad

and in Erbil, political party representatives, the international community and the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission. During her meetings, she has reiterated the Mission's continued support to Iraq as the country reorients itself towards a more peaceful and prosperous future, and has committed to fully aligning the Mission's work with the Government's priorities for long-term political, economic and societal stability in Iraq.

B. Electoral assistance

31. On 10 November, following a parliamentary vote to lift their suspension, the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission and the directors general of the governorate electoral offices formally resumed their functions. The Board of Commissioners held meetings to discuss the management of the upcoming provincial council elections, which were originally scheduled for 22 December 2018. The Commissioners have argued that the elections require several months of preparation and will submit proposals for a new election date to the Council of Representatives and the Council of Ministers. On 25 November, the Legal Committee of the Council of Representatives met with the Board of Commissioners to discuss proposed amendments to the laws on provincial council and district council elections.

32. On 18 November, the Independent High Electoral Commission reopened its voter registration centres to resume biometric registration of eligible voters, including of those who will reach voting age before the provincial council elections. The Commission is also distributing existing uncollected voter cards. The Board of Commissioners has indicated that the technology used in the 2018 general election, including for voter registration and verification and results management, will be used for the provincial council elections.

33. In meetings with UNAMI, the Independent High Electoral Commission has indicated its intention to undertake a post-election review to assess and generate lessons learned from the May 2018 parliamentary elections. UNAMI and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems will support the Commission in this process.

34. Following a request from the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission, UNAMI helped to develop the concept and methodologies for a post-electoral review, which have been approved by the Commission. In addition to sessions with polling centre officials, governorate managers and Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission departments, the review will also include focused activities with the representatives of political parties and civil society organizations. The Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission will fund the activities, while the Electoral Affairs Office of UNAMI will provide technical support.

C. Human rights and rule of law developments and activities

35. Civilian casualties from 13 November to 31 December totalled 97: 48 civilians killed, including 1 woman, and 49 civilians wounded, including 1 woman. The number is significantly lower than during the same period in 2017, when 479 civilian casualties were recorded (150 killed and 329 wounded). The leading causes of civilian casualties during the reporting period were small arms fire and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. Such attacks pose a threat primarily to civilians in Anbar, Baghdad, Basrah, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa, Salah al-Din and Najaf Governorates.

36. On four occasions during the reporting period, ISIL or other unidentified armed groups killed or abducted local mayors (mukhtars) and tribal leaders in Ninawa, Diyala and Anbar Governorates, accusing their victims of providing information on the groups' activities to the authorities.

37. The Mission continued monitoring trials in Iraq (including those of alleged ISIL members) and remains concerned about the lack of consistent adherence to due process and to obligations concerning fair trials, in accordance with the relevant treaty obligations of Iraq. In addition, dialogue and advocacy continued regarding the treatment of alleged ISIL defendants, responses in the criminal justice system to allegations of the ill-treatment and torture of defendants, and the implementation of national and international due process safeguards during criminal investigations and trials in Baghdad. In this context, UNAMI held a meeting with the Iraqi Bar Association on 2 December.

38. Monitoring the judicial hearings of alleged ISIL defendants is also part of UNAMI engagement on ISIL accountability, as ensuring both justice and accountability remains crucial if a unified Iraq is to succeed in the post-conflict recovery period. Closely linked to such efforts is the ongoing support of UNAMI to the Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD), established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2379 (2017), aimed at national efforts to hold ISIL accountable for what may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide.

39. According to preliminary data for 2018, the total number of reported acts of violence against women (excluding murders and suicides) has exceeded the total for 2017 (7,129 compared with 6,987). Ineffective preventive and response measures continue to hinder the protection of women against violence.

40. Efforts continue to rescue members of the Yazidi community still missing or in captivity, and the number of those still unaccounted for remains high. Since my previous report, 12 more persons have been found or liberated. The Department of Yazidi Affairs in the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in the Kurdistan Regional Government reported that as at 29 November, a total of 3,334 individuals (2,121 women and girls and 1,213 men and boys) had been found or liberated, leaving a total of 3,083 Yazidis (1,427 women and girls and 1,656 men and boys) in ISIL captivity or missing.

41. Public protests have continued in several governorates and have led to acts of violence against demonstrators. For example, UNAMI verified the killing, on 17 November, of Sheikh Wissam al-Ghrawi, a cleric who had taken part in demonstrations in Basrah demanding the provision of clean drinking water and adequate electricity, who was shot and killed in front of his house by unknown gunmen. UNAMI is following up with authorities to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable. In addition, UNAMI continues to monitor the issue of families' access to relatives detained in Basrah during public protests.

42. As part of its advocacy to build networks and consensus for legislative reforms, UNAMI organized a two-day consultative workshop, on 26 and 27 November, aimed at countering violence against women in Iraq. Participants agreed to petition the Legal Committee of the Council of Representatives to include, on the Council's agenda, discussions on the enactment of an anti-domestic violence bill and on the amendment or repeal of Penal Code article 398, which allows a perpetrator of certain crimes of sexual violence to avoid criminal charges by marrying his victim; and article 409, which provides justification for "honour" killings.

43. On 28 and 29 November, UNAMI organized a training session in Baghdad for 31 youth representatives on the “Role of the youth in the promotion and protection of human rights in Iraq”. The objective of the training session was to raise awareness on the subject and of their role in the promotion and protection of human rights in Iraq.

44. On 4 December, UNAMI met with the chief judge of the Federal Cassation Court of Ninawa in Tallkayf district. He reported that, in 2018, the first chamber of the criminal court in Ninawa had tried 1,029 cases, 93 per cent of which were prosecuted under article 4 of the 2005 Anti-Terrorism Law. Of those, 232 defendants were sentenced to death, 269 to life imprisonment, 359 to imprisonment for 15 years and 157 were released.

45. On 5 December, UNAMI held a one-day round table with lawyers and civil society activists from Ninawa to discuss the criminal justice system in the Governorate since the military defeat of ISIL. Participants shared their experiences in the administration of justice, the treatment of victims of sexual violence and that of marginalized groups. The round table is the first of several forums to be held in Ninawa in the coming months on issues relating to justice. As an outcome of that gathering, UNAMI established the Ninawa Human Rights and Justice Network, comprised of civil society activists, social workers and representatives of the Mosul Bar Association, in order to examine human rights issues relating to the administration of justice, including concerns relating to due process.

46. From 10 to 13 December, UNAMI organized a variety of activities to commemorate International Human Rights Day in several Governorates, including Baghdad, Basrah, Erbil and Kirkuk. Participants included government officials, members of national human rights institutions, journalists, minority groups, human right defenders, academics and members of civil society.

47. The Mission’s country task force on monitoring and reporting grave violations committed against children in times of armed conflict, co-chaired by UNAMI and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), verified nine incidents of grave violations against children during the reporting period, resulting in the killing of 6 children (all boys) and the maiming of 15 boys and 6 girls. The incidents involved explosive hazards and bomb attacks, and took place in Anbar, Diyala, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates. There was also one unverified attack on a school in Salah al-Din.

48. The Mission organized workshops for local and international non-governmental organizations working with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, during which UNAMI highlighted the importance of monitoring the conditions of ISIL-affiliated families in camps for internally displaced persons, a worrying number of whom appear to be the victims of crimes of sexual violence. On 21 and 27 November, UNAMI, with other high-level focal points on conflict-related sexual violence, held meetings with the authorities in Erbil and Baghdad to review progress on the implementation of the six priority areas of the joint communiqué on the prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence and to identify priorities for 2019. Participants sought the support of UNAMI in developing a communication protocol that would facilitate information-sharing and the assessment of progress on the technical implementation of the joint communiqué.

49. On 29 November, UNAMI and UNICEF held the inaugural meeting of a group for coordinated action to respond to the needs of children born of rape, children born to ISIL fighters and their survivor mothers. The group aims to improve responses to the needs of children born during conflict and to streamline and strengthen coordination among key actors to ensure an effective, focused and coordinated inter-agency response.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

50. Since the military defeat of ISIL, almost 4.1 million internally displaced persons have returned to over 1,400 areas of origin across 35 districts and seven governorates of Iraq. Of those that have returned, 500,000 are assessed to be living in conditions of high or very high severity of humanitarian need and are geographically clustered in 15 districts within five Governorates: Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din. The rate of returns steadily decreased in 2018 and more than 1.8 million people remain displaced within Iraq.

51. On 20 November, the International Organization for Migration released its study “Reasons to remain: categorizing protracted displacement in Iraq”, which is the first step in a process to provide a comprehensive, geography-based analysis of remaining internally displaced persons and further identification of obstacles to return.

52. Heavy rainfall and flooding in late November affected tens of thousands of people, primarily in Ninawa and Salah al-Din, washing away roads and bridges and damaging houses. Several internally displaced persons camps in Ninawa were significantly affected. Rapid needs assessments in camps identified temporary shelter, tent replacement, water, sanitation and hygiene services, drainage and debris clearance operations as critical needs. The humanitarian response focused on addressing those immediate needs as well as the improvement works necessary to restore minimum standards across 125 camps. On 25 November, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck the western part of the Islamic Republic of Iran, close to the border with Iraq. This was the second earthquake in the same region in a four-month period, and the third in a year. A 7.3 magnitude earthquake on the border between Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran border in November 2017 had killed over 630 people. Contingency planning and preparedness, including for natural disasters, is one of the strategic objectives of the 2019 humanitarian response plan.

53. During the reporting period, humanitarian actors reached 416,221 vulnerable Iraqis with some form of humanitarian assistance, reaching a total of 2.2 million people throughout the year. In 2018, \$1.06 billion was allocated towards the humanitarian response in Iraq, of which 48 per cent was allocated to the 2018 humanitarian response plan, which was 89 per cent funded.

54. The humanitarian country team is finalizing the 2019 humanitarian needs overview and response plan, which aims to assist 1.8 million internally displaced persons, in both camps and out-of-camp settings, and those returnees in conditions of high and very high severity of humanitarian need. The overall aim is to support post-conflict transition towards durable solutions consistent with the principled returns framework endorsed by the Government of Iraq.

55. On stabilization, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization has now completed 1,617 projects across all nine sectors of work in the five liberated governorates of Iraq. In total, the Facility has 3,051 projects across the country, 53 per cent of which have been completed, and is in need of further funding to carry out the remaining projects already identified. Discussions are ongoing with the Government of Iraq on its own potential contribution to the programme.

56. The United Nations country team continued to support longer-term recovery and reconstruction efforts. On 15 November 2018, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) presented the initial planning framework for the reconstruction of Mosul, offering perspectives on how to “build back better” the city for the people of Mosul. Over 100 participants from local government, the private

sector, civil society organizations and United Nations system entities discussed the priorities and recommendations presented. The event highlighted the complex challenges of ensuring rapid reconstruction, while protecting the heritage and historical characteristics of the Old City.

57. The Iraq Crisis Response and Resilience Programme of UNDP has completed 270 projects with a focus on basic services, critical infrastructure, livelihoods, peacebuilding and crisis management.

58. On 29 November, my Deputy Special Representative for Development and Humanitarian Affairs and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator delivered remarks at the graduation ceremony of an explosive ordnance disposal course, which was the first such course to include policewomen among its graduates. Two training courses were provided to both male and female officers by the Ministry of Interior, supported by the United Nations Mine Action Service, in order to enable a stronger and self-sufficient national capacity to respond to explosive hazards over the long term.

59. Following a request by the Ministry of Health and the Environment, the United Nations Environment Programme is conducting a comprehensive analysis of environmental samples in internationally accredited laboratories to help identify the causes of the large scale fish kill in the Euphrates River near Musayab, Babil Governorate, at the end of October/early November. An estimated 8 million farmed carp fish (10,000–15,000 tons) died, with serious economic consequences for the local population. The study's results will assist in identifying remedial and preventative measures to reduce the risk of similar incidents in the future.

60. In November, in response to a situation of water scarcity in southern Iraq, UNICEF continued to ensure the provision of safe water and educational messaging, reaching more than 50,000 children (25,000 of whom are girls) in 70 school buildings in Abu al-Khasib district, as an immediate and short-term measure to keep children in school. In order to support national capacity, UNICEF has trained 25 government staff from the Directorate of Health of Basrah on water quality monitoring and trained 300 staff from 13 Basrah hospitals on treating waterborne diseases, including cholera, which is endemic in Iraq. Those actions contribute to reducing the risk of outbreaks of waterborne diseases, at a time of year when such illnesses are of great concern. UNICEF, other United Nations system entities and government partners continue to identify and activate further longer-term and more sustainable solutions to the water resource challenges faced by Iraq and on prevention and preparedness measures against cholera and other waterborne diseases.

61. On 15 December, UNESCO opened a new conservation facility in the Digital Centre of Eastern Manuscripts in Erbil to support the ongoing national programme for the digitization and conservation of a rare collection of ancient manuscripts. The ceremony represents the culmination of the engagement of UNESCO with the Centre to provide essential equipment and materials, in addition to providing training for its staff in conservation and restoration techniques. More than 8,000 manuscripts from 105 different collections from Iraq, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran are being digitized. There are approximately 10,000 manuscripts still to be conserved and archived.

62. The United Nations has continued to support Government efforts on reform and capacity-building, setting conditions for sustainable development. From 12 to 18 November, the Development Coordination Office, under the auspices of my Deputy Special Representative for Development and Humanitarian Affairs and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and in support of the United Nations country team, organized a series of thematic group discussions for the United Nations Iraq Common Country Assessment, which will frame the preparation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2020–2024.

63. In addition, during the reporting period, the Development Coordination Office, in collaboration with the United Nations System Staff College, organized workshops on United Nations country programming in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for representatives from the United Nations, Government, development partners, the private sector and academia. The training events will not only strengthen the capacity of the United Nations and its partners in supporting the Government in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Iraq, but will also create a pool of trainers to share learning and skills at various levels.

64. In November 2018, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Government of Iraq and other partners, delivered key findings on the situation of children and women in Iraq. Data were gathered through a multiple indicator cluster survey and are now available on approximately 200 indicators covering all 18 governorates in Iraq. The results will inform the Government's national frameworks, plans and policies to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

65. The improvement of the criminal justice system, law enforcement and anti-corruption efforts has been a critical area of support by the United Nations to Iraq. During the reporting period, UNDP organized workshops for 60 senior and mid-level officers to orientate them on the newly approved local police service road map. On 13 November, UNDP launched a tracker survey on public perception regarding safety and security across six governorates. UNDP also provided capacity development support for forensic audits and anti-corruption investigations to the Board of Supreme Audit. It has also introduced a regulatory impact assessment approach at the Ministry of Planning to help the Ministry implement its mandate of examining laws through the lens of social, economic and environmental impact.

66. During the reporting period, UNDP trained 130 community leaders (including 30 women) and sheiks in Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates on conflict resolution and mediation. On 13 November, UNDP facilitated a meeting, in Baghdad, of the Iraqi universities group for peace education; 12 of the university deans who participated subsequently formed a scientific subcommittee to prepare a curriculum for a peace studies diploma. In addition, from 22 November to 22 December, UNDP organized six workshops on conflict transformation and preventing violent extremism for 150 youth (66 of whom were women) in Erbil. The participants were from Anbar, Baghdad, Basrah, Dhi Qar, Kirkuk, Ninawa, Qadisiyah and Salah al-Din Governorates.

67. On 11 December, the Office of the Prime Minister convened its first stakeholders' meeting to mobilize support for the 2020 population and household census that is being prepared with technical support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Iraq conducted its last full census in 1957 and is in urgent need of generating accurate population data to inform evidence-based policymaking and planning. To that purpose, the Ministry of Planning, the statistical offices of Iraq and UNFPA launched a national adolescent and youth survey that will become a part of Iraq's adolescent and youth 2030 vision.

68. Restrictions at key access points still impede the delivery of humanitarian aid, namely, the checkpoints between Erbil and Kirkuk, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah, and Dahuk and Mosul. Import procedures now take four times longer than before the checkpoints were established, up to 12 weeks, depending on the commodities that humanitarian partners seek to import. Non-governmental organization partners have also reported that security actors at checkpoints throughout the northern and central governorates request additional permissions from local authorities to supplement the access letters provided by the federal authorities. UNAMI is engaged in discussions with the relevant authorities to mitigate the negative impact of such newly introduced restrictions.

E. Security and operational issues

69. The Mission continued to implement robust security risk mitigation measures to provide maximum safety to its entities in the delivery of their programmes in a challenging security environment. The United Nations maintains close coordination with the Government of Iraq for the security support that is central to its political, humanitarian and development activities in the country. Sustaining that coordination will be imperative for the provision of effective security to United Nations operations and personnel in 2019.

70. The implementation of the recommendations of the independent external review of November 2017 has progressed during the reporting period, including through the restructuring of the Mission's development and humanitarian coordination function, the strengthening of coordination mechanisms across the United Nations system and the completion of the second review of the security architecture of UNAMI. Additional staffing changes in line with the review recommendations include the introduction of national United Nations Volunteers into the Mission's staffing table.

71. Following a review, the Integrated Coordination Office for Development and Humanitarian Affairs was replaced by the Development Coordination Office. The Office will address political elements of the development and humanitarian agenda with the Iraqi Government, the international community and other stakeholders. It will also support my Deputy Special Representative for Development and Humanitarian Affairs and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in ensuring the alignment and coordination of the international community's efforts with the priorities of the Government, and support coordination between the political efforts of UNAMI and the work of the country team. The new structure was approved by United Nations legislative bodies as part of the budget for 2019 and has been in place since 1 January 2019.

72. Thematic working groups with representation from UNAMI and the United Nations country team are in place, resulting in a more coherent system-wide approach with a focus on complementary of activities across the United Nations system and the development of joint benchmarks. The groups are guided by the integrated programme management team, established in July 2018, that supports programme strategy development, planning, monitoring and performance measurement.

73. In line with the recommendations of the independent external review, a joint review of the United Nations security architecture in Iraq was completed in December. The report published as a result of the review details 24 recommendations aimed at better equipping security staff in the post-ISIL environment (while noting that ISIL remains a threat). Recommendations with budgetary implications will be reflected in the budget submission for 2020; in the meantime, recommendations that have no budgetary implications and that enhance efficiency in the areas of security risk management, security clearance procedures and information-sharing within the United Nations system will be implemented.

74. The steering committee of the trust fund for UNAMI granted approval for the construction of additional floors in buildings "A" and "B", which were recently built, and in building "C", which is currently under construction, in the integrated United Nations compound in Baghdad. The additional floors will provide a further 72 accommodation units for international staff, including those serving in UNITAD, for which UNAMI provides administrative and logistical support. The accommodation units are expected to be completed by the end of June 2019.

IV. Observations

75. The process of government formation has continued throughout the reporting period, with new appointments confirmed in December 2018. I commend the sustained efforts from the three presidencies to facilitate a compromise between the political blocs on the Cabinet appointments to the Ministries of Interior, of Justice and of Defence, which are yet to be confirmed, and urge the leaders of the political blocs to act in the national interest.

76. The swift and effective completion of the government is an essential prerequisite for the new Government to gain the trust and support of the Iraqi people. By completing the process soon, the new Government would be able to fully concentrate on delivering on its programme to improve basic services, promote reconstruction and economic development and foster a safe and secure environment, on the basis of a well-resourced federal budget for 2019.

77. Political leaders will also need to address key gender issues, such as gender-responsive budgeting and gender-based violence, and to ensure gender equality and equal participation of women in political processes.

78. All regional and international partners of Iraq should support the country in its efforts to promote stability, in accordance with the principles of respect for its sovereignty, territorial integrity and good neighbourly relations.

79. I urge the Governments of Iraq and of Turkey to accelerate their bilateral efforts to address issues of mutual concern, including security-related developments in northern Iraq. I welcome and encourage bilateral dialogue between the two Governments with a view to resolving such issues based on the principles of mutual respect, sovereignty and territorial integrity and good neighbourly relations.

80. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil will continue to require close attention and support from the international community and the United Nations. I look forward to further progress on outstanding issues, including the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk and the management of oil production and revenues.

81. The efforts by the Independent High Electoral Commission to review and harness the lessons learned from the recent national parliamentary elections will provide valuable information for the preparation of future elections. Meanwhile, I urge the Government of Iraq to set a date for the provincial council elections, in consultation with the Electoral Commission, and encourage the Council of Representatives to rapidly finalize proposals for amending the provincial council electoral law.

82. Similarly, the initiative of the Kurdistan Independent High Electoral Commission to conduct a post-election review, with the aim of enhancing its systems and processes, is a welcome development. Strong and independent electoral institutions are necessary to further consolidate and sustain the democratic process in Iraq.

83. Following the parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region, I encourage the swift formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government and urge its President and Prime Minister to work with all political parties, civil society and community leaders to address the many challenges faced by the region and to resolve all outstanding issues with Baghdad through dialogue.

84. All political leaders of Iraq are encouraged to continue promoting minority rights, which is an important contribution to strengthening social cohesion and furthering national stability.

85. With investigations and prosecutions of ISIL defendants continuing, it is important for the Government of Iraq and the judicial authorities to ensure that due process protections remain in place and to ensure the provision of greater transparency of information regarding trial processes. Such an approach will uphold the rights of the families of the victims of the terror perpetrated by ISIL to see those responsible held properly accountable and to know the truth of what happened to their loved ones.

86. Finally, I would like to welcome my new Special Representative for Iraq, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, who assumed her official functions on 16 December. I take this opportunity to thank my former Special Representative for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, for his services at a challenging time in the country and the region. I would also like to express my gratitude to the national and international staff of UNAMI for their continued efforts in implementing the mandate of the United Nations mission in Iraq.
