



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

Iraq's Electoral Preparations and Processes - Report No. 1
Baghdad, 02 September 2020

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This report, the first in a regular series to issue on a monthly basis, is prepared pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 2522, adopted on 29 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."

Highlights for August

- Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) Board of Commissioners provide updates to the Prime Minister and Speaker on electoral preparations.
- Finalization of the electoral operational plan and commencement of IHEC preparatory activities.
- Status of recruitment of IHEC Directors General and heads of departments/sections.

IHEC BoC Reports to Prime Minister and Speaker on Electoral Preparations

On 13 August, the IHEC Board of Commissioners updated the Prime Minister on technical preparations for holding parliamentary elections on 6 June 2021. The Prime Minister urged IHEC to intensify its preparations and to cooperate closely with the UN in this regard. Outstanding issues such as the urgent need for passage of the electoral law and the Federal Supreme Court law were discussed. The IHEC Chairman confirmed IHEC's readiness to proceed on electoral preparations and highlighted ongoing cooperation with security institutions to plan electoral security. The IHEC Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) elaborated on the budgetary requirements, approval of staff contracts and the need for support from various government ministries.

On 24 August, the IHEC Board of Commissioners updated the Speaker, together with the Second Deputy Speaker, the Head of the parliamentary Legal Committee and the Head of the Supreme Committee for Election Security. Staff from UNAMI's Office of Electoral Assistance (OEA) were also present. IHEC Commissioners provided an update on ongoing activities and recalled outstanding considerations, including the electoral law and the budget allocation. They reported on IHEC's staff recruitment process and plans for resuming biometric voter registration. IHEC underlined the importance of UN support for their efforts. The Speaker expressed support for the work of the Commission and urged them to intensify efforts to complete preparations in time for early elections.



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Technical preparations

With the announcement of the election date, IHEC commenced its preparations for holding early elections. These include:

- Development of the electoral operational plan and timeline. IHEC is finalising an operational plan for the 6 June 2021 elections; and has prepared its budgetary request which has been submitted to the Council of Ministers. The operational plan defines all aspects of electoral preparations, including key milestones and details of activities in the run-up to election day and, subsequently, until the election results are certified. IHEC's operations committee met on 24 and 26 August with UNAMI OEA and others to get their inputs for incorporation into the operational plan and timeline.
- Audit of elections IT systems. The Council of Ministers has set up a committee to guide the selection of a suitable company to undertake testing of the technologies to be used in the elections. The committee is composed of an IHEC Commissioner (as Chair) and a representative each from the Ministry of Communications and the Al-Salam State Company. In a meeting on 17 August, attended by UNAMI OEA, the committee discussed the technical requirements for the audit and the need to broaden the pool of qualified testing and audit companies for consideration. On 23 August, UNAMI OEA met with the IHEC Commissioner who chairs the committee to share information on key considerations for conducting the audit.
- Election Security. The Supreme Committee for Election Security has been established and has started to meet regularly at IHEC. It is chaired by the Deputy Minister of Interior and is composed of high-ranking representatives from a number of state institutions, as well as IHEC.
- Voter Registry. IHEC is making preparations to reopen voter registration centres, in order to restart biometric voter data collection and enable distribution of biometric voter cards.
- Logistics. IHEC has directed its field offices to rehabilitate its warehouses and to survey the election equipment currently stored in these locations. It has also made a request to the Council of Ministers to waive fees for IHEC use of Ministry of Trade warehouses.
- Preparations for Out-of-Country Voting (OCV). IHEC is assembling a dedicated team to work on the out-of-country voting processes. The OCV Unit has been tasked to prepare mechanisms for the registration of eligible Iraqi voters abroad.
- Outreach and Media. With support from UNAMI, IHEC has refurbished its website as a key tool for enhanced messaging and outreach to voters and electoral stakeholders. The IHEC Board of Commissioners is also using the platform for weekly message updates.



Status of the electoral law

On 24 December 2019, the Council of Representatives (CoR) approved the text of the Law on Council of Representatives Elections. However, annexes to the law, on the delimitation of electoral constituencies and the allocation of seats, have yet to be finalised. Consequently, the CoR has not yet transmitted the electoral law to the Presidency Office for endorsement and for subsequent publication in the official gazette.

As approved by the CoR, the electoral law contains provisions that significantly change the way Members of Parliament are elected. Article 15 on electoral system provides for governorates to be divided into multiple constituencies, for nomination of candidates to be specific to a constituency and for regular CoR seats to be awarded to winning candidates according to the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) seat allocation method.

However, the law remains incomplete. As well as the missing annexes, there are also ambiguities concerning the identity documents required for voting, and a lack of clarity regarding provisions for the management and publication of election results. There is a need to address these gaps to enable IHEC to develop electoral regulations and proceed with operational and technical preparations. The CoR is now set to resume its regular session in early September. The CoR leadership has stated that completion of the electoral legislation is at the top of the agenda.

UNAMI OEA continues to advise on the importance of involving relevant technical institutions, including IHEC and the Ministries of Planning, Trade, Interior and Displacement and Migration, to work with the parliamentary Legal Committee on the technical aspects of the delineation process. UNAMI OEA shared with the IHEC Board of Commissioners a technical analysis and simulation that could be used to define constituencies and electoral seats.

Recruitment of Directors General and other senior IHEC staff

The new IHEC Law (Law 31 of 2019) mandated the replacement of all IHEC Directors General (through transfer to other government posts or retirement), their deputies (also transferred or retired), as well as heads of departments and sections (relegated to IHEC ordinary staff). The decision applies to senior positions in both IHEC headquarters and governorate electoral offices (GEOs). The law stipulated that the new Directors General should not be existing IHEC staff.

Following the approval of its internal by-laws and structure, in February 2020 the IHEC Board of Commissioners initiated a recruitment process to fill all these vacancies in its headquarters and GEOs. A committee composed of four commissioners has overseen the recruitment process and finalised the forms and guidelines for selection using an assigned numbers and points system. Application forms were disseminated to government institutions and internally within IHEC. A receiving committee was also established to classify and screen the applications.



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To date, the IHEC Board of Commissioners has already approved (pending Council of Ministers endorsement) the appointment of four Directors General (DG for Administrative and Financial Affairs, DG for Technical Affairs, DG for Political Party Affairs and the DG serving as Secretary General of the Board of Commissioners).

IHEC is also finalizing the selection of candidates for the positions of section managers and heads of units. During a teleconference with OEA, the IHEC CEO explained that they are emphasizing transparency and impartiality during the audit/review of candidates' CVs. She also mentioned that successful candidates will be asked to sign a pledge before taking office and will undergo a probationary period of three months. In the event of poor performance, IHEC has the right to remove an appointee without any legal ramification.

UNAMI did not participate in these recruitment processes and is not therefore in a position to endorse or comment on the outcomes. However, in line with its mandate, UNAMI did provide advice directly to IHEC regarding the recruitment.

Supporting the development of IHEC staffing capacities

IHEC Commissioners requested UN support for further capacity development activities within IHEC, in particular, for its newly appointed officials. The IHEC CEO raised the need for induction training to familiarise IHEC officials with organisational goals and framework, values, structure of the Commission and international principles and best practice on elections. The CEO also sought assistance in building capacities on operations, logistics and civic voter education, among other priorities. UNAMI confirmed that capacity building, together with support for IHEC's technical preparations for early elections, are the two focal areas for UN electoral assistance.
