



Security Council

Distr.: General
8 February 2021

Original: English

Implementation of resolution [2522 \(2020\)](#)

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2522 \(2020\)](#), in which the Secretary-General was requested to report to the Council every three months on progress made towards fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The present report covers key developments relating to Iraq and provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Iraq since my previous report of 10 November 2020 ([S/2020/1099](#)) and the briefing given to the Security Council by the Special Representative for Iraq and Head of UNAMI on 24 November.

II. Summary of key political developments

A. Political situation

2. The Government of Iraq continued to undertake efforts to establish conditions conducive to holding free, fair and credible early elections. After the electoral legislative framework was published on 9 November, the Council of Ministers approved a draft law under which 329 billion Iraqi dinars (approximately \$225 million) would be allocated for election-related activities and referred it to the Council of Representatives for adoption. On 17 December, the Council of Representatives adopted the Law on Allocating and Financing the Expenditures of the Council of Representatives Elections (2020), with an allocated budget of 290 billion dinars (approximately \$198 million).

3. Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi engaged with the country's electoral authorities to emphasize the importance of effective coordination and transparency in all electoral preparations. During a visit to the headquarters of the Independent High Electoral Commission on 30 November, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of ensuring that electoral procedures were in line with the electoral legal framework as a necessary precondition to building integrity and public trust in the electoral process. He instructed relevant governmental agencies to provide full support to the Commission for the completion of all technical and operational preparations.

4. The Government paid particular attention to promoting inclusivity in the elections, including through technical preparations to ensure broad voter



participation. On 6 December, Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi of the Council of Representatives met with the Board of the Commission to urge an expansion in the biometric registration of voters and the development of mechanisms to expedite the process for completing the distribution of biometric voter registration cards. Discussions were also focused on ensuring the integrity of the elections, including the identification of a reputable international company to audit the results management and information technology systems, and continued cooperation with the United Nations on the audit.

5. Discussions took place on the electoral timetable needed for technical preparations. On 14 January, the three presidencies held a meeting with the President of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Independent High Electoral Commission. Following the meeting, a presidential statement was issued in which it was noted that the Council of Representatives must adopt the law on the Federal Supreme Court and dissolve itself prior to the election as specified in article 64 of the Constitution (60 days in advance). On 17 January, the Commission sent a letter to the Prime Minister in which it proposed 16 October as the date for early parliamentary elections and to extend the registration period for political alliances and candidates, which would allow United Nations experts and international observers to play a role in achieving the greatest degree of monitoring and transparency.

6. The Government of Iraq took steps to address the budget deficit, which was compounded by a decline in global oil prices and the economic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Following lengthy negotiations between the Government and the legislature on the scale of permissible borrowing to finance the budget deficit until the end of 2020, the Council of Representatives adopted the Law on Financing the Fiscal Deficit for 2020 on 12 November. The Law authorized the Government to use internal and external borrowing to finance the 12 trillion Iraqi dinar deficit (approximately \$10 billion) from October to December 2020. The Law also allowed the Government to disburse the salaries and pensions of civil servants and included funding for investment projects, the operational expenses of ministries and independent bodies, and governorate-level projects. The Law stipulated that federal budget allocations to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq would be based on the share stipulated in the 2019 Law on the Federal Budget (12.67 per cent) and made them conditional on the transfer of oil and non-oil revenues to the federal Government by Erbil.

7. On 28 November, the Finance Committee of the Council of Representatives submitted a reform paper to the Government in which it recommended urgent measures to address the fiscal situation, in particular the lack of liquidity. Recommendations covered three main areas: increasing revenues and decreasing expenditures; reform of financial and monetary policy; and general economic reforms. The Committee called on the Government to elaborate on its plans to implement the White Paper for economic and financial reform, which had been approved by the Council of Ministers on 13 October.

8. Work on the preparation of a budget for 2021 continued. On 19 December, the Central Bank of Iraq announced a devaluation of the dinar by approximately 20 per cent at the request of the Minister of Finance. According to a Central Bank statement, the devaluation of the country's currency constituted a one-off measure to address the liquidity crisis caused by low oil revenue. After extensive debates in the Council of Ministers and numerous amendments to the initial budget as submitted by the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister announced on 21 December that the draft budget had been finalized. The next day, the spokesperson of the Council of Ministers announced that the draft had been submitted for parliamentary approval. On 29 December, the Speaker confirmed in a statement that the Council of Representatives had received the draft and announced the extension of the current legislative term by one month,

until 3 February, to allow the completion of the 2021 federal budget law and other legislation.

9. A step was taken to increase the diversity in senior positions within the Government, including women's representation, when, on 15 December, the Council of Representatives confirmed Hiyam al-Haidari as a Minister of State and the third female cabinet member.

10. On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 25 November, the President issued a statement in which he affirmed the need to take all measures necessary to end violence and discrimination against women. He called on the Government and relevant authorities to develop effective programmes, plans and mechanisms that support women's economic, social and political empowerment. The Speaker marked the occasion by issuing a statement on social media in which he called on the legislature to fight violence against women. Meanwhile, on 7 December, Deputy Speaker Bashir al-Haddad chaired a consultative forum organized by the parliamentary committee on women, family and child affairs in cooperation with the Iraqi Al-Amal Association and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign.

11. The Government continued to address the COVID-19 pandemic. On 17 November, the Prime Minister announced in a statement that the Ministry of Health had started preparations for vaccine storage. On 24 November, the Ministry of Health announced that Iraq would purchase a sufficient number of doses of any vaccine approved by the World Health Organization, with priority given to health-care personnel, security forces and the elderly. On 22 December, the Council of Ministers directed the Ministry of Finance to fund the purchase of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Further public directives were issued by the Ministry of Health on 30 November to slow the transmission of COVID-19, including calls for mask-wearing and social distancing in public places. On 22 December, the Iraqi Civil Aviation Authority announced international travel restrictions in response to the emergence of a new COVID-19 strain.

12. Small-scale and predominantly peaceful protests continued in southern and central governorates. On 27 November, demonstrations were staged in Baghdad and southern Iraq that led to violent clashes with other protesters in Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Governorate. In response, on the same day, the Prime Minister ordered the dismissal of the Dhi Qar Police Commander and formed an investigative committee. On 28 November, tensions escalated between security forces and protesters in Nasiriyah. Security forces fired warning shots to disperse the crowd and later withdrew from the area as protesters burned tyres and blocked major intersections. On 29 November, the Prime Minister affirmed his support for peaceful, lawful protests and announced the formation of an emergency crisis team headed by National Security Adviser Qasim al-Araji. The crisis team was granted powers to protect peaceful demonstrators, State institutions and private property and met with security officials, tribal leaders and youth representatives in Dhi Qar Governorate.

13. On 27 November, security forces in Wasit Governorate removed protesters' tents from the main demonstration site in Kut to end protests close to government buildings. Confrontations broke out the next day as protesters returned, burned tyres, damaged public property and threw stones at security forces. One protester died after setting himself on fire.

14. From 2 to 12 December, demonstrations also took place in Sulaymaniyah Governorate. Protesters initially gathered in the city of Sulaymaniyah, calling for the payment of public sector salaries, criticizing the lack of government transparency and accountability, and demanding basic services and jobs. Security personnel forcibly

dispersed demonstrators. The protests then spread within the governorate and became violent, with protesters setting fire to political parties' offices and government buildings.

B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil

15. Negotiations to resolve outstanding disagreements between Baghdad and Erbil continued, with a focus on two contentious issues: the sharing of revenue and the transfer of federal budget allocations to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The absence of an agreement on the latter further delayed the budget transfer to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and thus the payment of civil servants' salaries in the region, triggering demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah Governorate that began on 2 December.

16. Disagreements emerged between Baghdad and Erbil over the Law on Financing the Fiscal Deficit for 2020. The Council of Representatives passed the Law on 12 November in the absence of parliamentarians from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, who had left the session prior to the vote. In a statement issued on 13 November, President Salih underlined the need to enact the law in order to ensure the payment of employees' salaries but noted its passage "in the absence of a national consensus". The Presidency of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq issued a statement on 12 November in which it noted that the Law had been passed without consideration for the "principles of partnership and consensus". However, after a meeting of the three presidencies of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on 15 November, the President of the Region, Nechirvan Barzani, stated that the Kurdistan Regional Government stood ready to reach agreements with the federal Government on revenue-sharing and other outstanding issues. Since then, two delegations of the Kurdistan Regional Government have visited Baghdad. The first delegation was led by the Kurdistan Regional Government Minister of Finance and Economy on 3 December, and the second by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq from 9 to 17 December. However, no agreement was reached on the transfer of pending or future federal budget allocations to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

17. The agreement of 9 October between the federal and the Kurdistan Regional Governments on Sinjar, Ninawa Governorate, entered into force on 21 November. The Joint Operations Command confirmed the start of the implementation of the agreement's security provisions on 1 December.

C. Security situation

18. On 10 December, Iraq marked the third anniversary of the military defeat of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh). The President recalled "the ultimate sacrifice made by our heroic security forces when they defeated ISIL". The Speaker noted that the "victory will be completed with the return of the displaced to their homes and the reconstruction of the devastated areas". On the same day, the Prime Minister visited Fallujah in Anbar Governorate and met with the local Operations Commander and other security officials. The Prime Minister commended the sacrifices that had made "victory" possible and the ongoing role of the security forces in the fight against terrorism. Meanwhile, Iraqi security forces continued to conduct counter-terrorism operations in areas still experiencing ISIL attacks, primarily Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates.

19. On 17 November, the acting Secretary of Defence of the United States of America, Christopher Miller, announced a further drawdown of his country's troops in Iraq from 3,000 to 2,500 by 15 January 2021. He affirmed that the decision was "not irreversible" and was consistent with "established plans and strategic

objectives.” He emphasized that Iraqi and officials of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization had been consulted. Later that day, seven rockets were launched towards the former International Zone, four of which landed within its perimeter. Rockets landing outside the former International Zone killed a child and injured five civilians. The attack was the first since the announcement on 10 October of a unilateral “ceasefire” by a spokesperson for a group that proclaimed itself “the Coordination Body for the Islamic Resistance”. Rockets also landed in the former International Zone on 20 December, causing damage to residential buildings and vehicles. The President and Prime Minister issued statements condemning the attacks as affronts to the sovereignty of Iraq, reiterating the commitment of the Government of Iraq to the protection of diplomatic personnel and premises and pledging to apprehend and hold the perpetrators to account. The attack of 20 December was also condemned by the international community, including the United States and the regional neighbours of Iraq, notably Bahrain, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

20. On 9 December, attacks with improvised explosive device were targeted at trucks contracted to carry supplies for the international counter-ISIL coalition, the first such incident since the announcement of the unilateral “ceasefire” of 10 October. Since then, a total of 18 similar incidents reportedly took place in Babil, Basrah, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, Qadisiyah and Salah al-Din Governorates.

21. The Ministry of Defence of Turkey reported continued military activity against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) targets in northern Iraq. On 9 December, in an address to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the Minister of National Defence Hulusi Akar stated that 28 operations had been carried out in northern Iraq against PKK elements in the preceding month. In the same address, Mr. Akar also stated: “while maintaining close contact with our Iraqi brothers, steps are being taken for a closer cooperation, especially in the fight against terrorism”. In response to the identical letters dated 29 October 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2020/1065), the Permanent Representative of Turkey sent a letter dated 16 November 2020 to the President of the Security Council (S/2020/1117) in which he reiterated that Turkey was obliged to take “appropriate measures against terrorist threats to its security emanating from Iraq”. In a subsequent letter to the President of the Security Council, dated 3 December 2020 (S/2020/1165), the Permanent Representative of Turkey “firmly rejected” any criticism towards his country for exercising its inherent right of self-defence, as outlined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and acting within the context of responsibility attributed by relevant Security Council resolutions to States Members of the United Nations in the fight against terrorism. In identical letters dated 13 January 2021 addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2021/57), the Permanent Representative of Iraq transmitted, on behalf of his Government, a list of “Turkish violations of Iraqi territory and airspace” between 30 September 2020 and 7 January 2021. According to the letters, those violations of the sovereignty of Iraq by Turkey were contrary to the principles of good-neighbourliness and constituted a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. In the same letters, Iraq reiterated its willingness to cooperate with Turkey with a view to finding common ground and arriving at appropriate solutions that would bring an end to the repeated violations.

22. On 5 November, in response to a reported attack by PKK against Kurdistan’s Peshmerga forces in Amedy District, Dahuk Governorate, the Prime Minister’s Office issued a statement condemning the attack. In the statement, the attack was labelled as an “assault on the country’s sovereignty” and measures were announced to end similar attacks. During the cabinet meeting of 4 November, the Prime Minister of the

Kurdistan Region of Iraq also condemned the attack. On 16 December, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq reported another attack by PKK against Peshmerga forces after the Peshmerga had stopped PKK elements from crossing the border from the Syrian Arab Republic. He condemned the “reckless, unprovoked attack” by the PKK against a Peshmerga base. PKK reportedly denied being responsible for either incident.

D. Regional and international developments

23. Iraq continued efforts to strengthen relations with its regional neighbours and international partners. In the area of economic development, the fourth meeting of the Saudi-Iraqi Coordination Council, a mechanism to harmonize positions between the two countries on issues of mutual interest, took place in Baghdad on 8 November at the ministerial level. It was followed on 10 November by a virtual meeting between the Prime Minister and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Al-Saud to review the Council’s work. The two sides affirmed their determination to strengthen bilateral relations, to coordinate positions on matters relating to oil, including full commitment to decisions made by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and with other major oil-producing countries, to cooperate in confronting the threat of terrorism and in supporting regional and international stability. They also agreed to enhance commercial ties, including by reopening the Arar border crossing between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, which had been closed since 1990 and which reopened on 18 November.

24. The President of Iraq engaged with international partners to underscore his country’s desire to be a stabilizing force in the region and its commitment to global action to combat COVID-19 and climate change. On 2 December, he spoke with the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, to review regional developments and discuss ways to strengthen Iraqi sovereignty. The President of Iraq addressed a special session of the General Assembly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on 3 December and the Climate Ambition Summit on 12 December.

25. On 17 November, the Prime Minister spoke with the Secretary of State of the United States, Michael Pompeo, to discuss bilateral relations and cooperation between Iraq and the international counter-ISIL coalition in the ongoing global fight against terrorism.

26. The Prime Minister conducted visits aimed at deepening the bilateral ties of Iraq with its regional neighbours. He travelled to Ankara at the invitation of the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan with whom he met on 17 December. The Prime Minister’s Office reported via social media that the two sides discussed bilateral relations and ways to consolidate them in various fields and reviewed a number of issues of common interest. During a joint press conference, President Erdoğan expressed appreciation for the operations against PKK conducted by the Iraqi authorities. He noted that Turkey and Iraq had agreed to continue their fight against common enemies, including PKK and ISIL, and added that the two countries had reaffirmed their consensus to enhance cooperation in that regard. The Prime Minister of Iraq underlined the desire of Iraq to maintain friendly and good relations with its neighbours. He emphasized that it was impossible for Iraq to tolerate any terrorist formation that threatened the national security of Turkey from Iraqi soil. During the visit, two bilateral agreements were signed relating to taxation and cultural cooperation. On 19 December, the Prime Minister visited Jordan, where he met with King Abdullah II. Agenda items included bilateral relations and issues of common interest, notably the region’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recovery measures.

27. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fuad Hussein, conducted visits aimed at boosting the bilateral ties of Iraq, including economic ties, with regional and international partners. On 25 November, he led a high-level delegation on a visit to Moscow, where he met separately with the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Energy. In a statement issued on 25 November, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq expressed his country's keenness to further develop bilateral ties, including through the activation of 14 memoranda of understanding in the areas of education, public health, oil and transportation, and underscored his appreciation for the role the Russian Federation played in the global fight against terrorism. The Minister attended the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain from 4 to 6 December. He visited Kuwait on 16 December and Turkey on 17 December.

28. The Minister of Defence of Iraq, Juma Anad Saadoun, and the Minister of National Defence of Turkey, Hulusi Akar, paid reciprocal visits on 28 December and 18 January respectively. They discussed joint cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

29. On 22 December, the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq spoke with the United States Secretary of State. According to a readout by the Department of State, they discussed regional security and continued security cooperation between the United States, the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments and the international counter-ISIL coalition.

30. On 5 January, the United States Department of State extended a waiver for 90 days enabling Iraq to continue to engage in financial transactions related to the import of energy from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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

A. Political activities

31. The Special Representative continued to engage with the three presidencies, the leaders of political parties, members of parliament, the Independent High Electoral Commission and religious and community leaders on issues related to, among other things, electoral preparations, public protests and relations between Baghdad and Erbil.

32. Following the promulgation of the Law on the Election of the Council of Representatives of Iraq, the Special Representative discussed with relevant actors the need to ensure the swift allocation of an electoral budget to allow the Independent High Electoral Commission to implement its tasks. She underlined the importance of full transparency to instil public trust in the electoral process and boost voter participation. She emphasized that, as an essential requirement for electoral integrity, the Iraqi people must be able to vote freely, away from political interference and security threats.

33. As protests continued to be marked by violence, the Special Representative, under her good offices mandate, held meetings with Iraqi activists and Government officials. She listened to the activists' concerns and confirmed that UNAMI continued to monitor, document and publicly report on human rights violations and to provide specific and concrete recommendations to the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments, legal authorities and security forces for remedial and pre-emptive action. In her engagement with government officials, the Special Representative

cautioned that the lack of transparency and accountability remained a source of public discontent.

34. On the issue of domestic anti-corruption activities, the Special Representative discussed with government officials that efforts in that domain were welcomed but must follow due process in a manner that promoted transparency and fairness, consistent with established legal norms.

35. From 19 to 21 December, the Special Representative visited Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. She met with the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, the Prime Minister of the Region, Masrour Barzani; Co-President of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Lahur Talabany; the General Coordinator of the Gorran Movement, Omar Sayid Ali; and the Secretary General of the Kurdistan Islamic Union, Salahuddin Muhammad Bahaauddin , with whom she discussed the overall political situation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as well as outstanding issues between the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments. The Special Representative emphasized that a positive and constructive relationship between the federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government was crucial to the stability of the whole country. Concerning the public protests in Sulaymaniyah, the Special Representative condemned the acts of violence that had resulted in deaths, injuries and the destruction of property. She expressed concern over persistent reports of human rights violations, with respect to the freedom of expression, including arbitrary arrests and detention, and other forms of interference.

36. The Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance continued her activities in preparation for the elections for the Council of Representatives. On 3 December, she met with the Chair of the Independent High Electoral Commission. She continued her engagement with the international community in the context of enhanced electoral technical assistance to the Commission.

37. On 7 November, the Deputy Special Representative represented UNAMI at the virtual closing session of a series of workshops that had been held across Iraq. Organized by the Iraq Foundation and supported by the Mission, the workshop in Baghdad provided training for women in leadership, communications and advocacy. The Deputy Special Representative highlighted the need for sustained efforts to translate women's informal grassroots leadership into formal political and public roles.

38. The Deputy Special Representative led the final sessions of online youth workshops in Maysan, Muthanna and Dhi Qar Governorates organized by UNAMI in cooperation with the Committee for Coexistence and Societal Peace of the Prime Minister's Office and the Amal Association, an Iraqi non-governmental organization. On 22 November, she virtually addressed a national youth conference, the culmination of 18 workshops across governorates that brought together hundreds of young people and political representatives over the past 18 months to discuss key challenges facing youth and their contribution to shaping the country's future.

B. Electoral assistance

39. In a letter dated 20 November, the Government of Iraq made a formal request to the Security Council to strengthen the role of UNAMI to obtain more advice, support, technical assistance and electoral observation for early parliamentary elections in June 2021. In clarifying the request for electoral observation to ambassadors in Baghdad, the Minister for Foreign Affairs underscored that the need to rebuild public trust and promote participation were the main reasons behind the request. The request remains under consideration by the Security Council.

40. The Law on the Election of the Council of Representatives of Iraq (Law No. 9 of 2020) was signed by the President on 5 November. Under the new Law, parliament's 329 seats were maintained, 83 seats (25 per cent) were reserved for women and 9 seats for the country's minority communities (5 for Christians, 1 for Yezidis, 1 for Shabaks, 1 for Sabeen Mandean and 1 for Fayli Kurds). Each governorate was divided into multiple constituencies, with a total of 83 countrywide. Each constituency would return three to five members of parliament, depending on its population density. The Independent High Electoral Commission worked to adjust the voter registry structure and candidate nomination processes to reflect the new constituencies. The Mission continued to provide technical and legal assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission for the development of several electoral regulations, including the registration and certification of candidates, electoral campaigning, media regulations, electoral complaints and appeals, voter registration updates, and the accreditation of political parties, electoral alliances and candidates' agents.

41. With 11.3 million voters (out of 26.6 million) still without biometric records, UNAMI urged the Independent High Electoral Commission to consider options for expanding biometric registration coverage and speeding up the distribution of voter cards ahead of the elections, including by drawing on support from other government institutions and seeking solutions with service providers. The Mission provided technical assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Ministry of Interior as they considered ways to combine the voter database of the former and the national identification card project of the latter to improve the integrity and speed of voter registration. The Mission continued to assist the Independent High Electoral Commission with regard to technical requirements to undertake an independent audit of the election results management and information technology systems for the elections.

42. Concerns continued to be raised by parliamentarians over the recruitment of personnel for the Independent High Electoral Commission's national and governorate-level electoral offices. The Board of Commissioners reiterated that the appointments were being made according to established legal procedures and that all appointees were subject to a three-month probationary period. The Mission made suggestions to the Board on the application of a transparent and consistent evaluation process for the personnel. With the aim of building technical capacity, UNAMI held two orientation and training sessions in November 2020 for heads of departments and sections of the Commission. Those induction activities set the stage for the larger-scale capacity-building initiatives under the United Nations-led electoral support project.

43. Significant progress was made in mobilizing funding to implement the project entitled "Support to Iraq's electoral processes". To date, the project has received generous contributions and confirmed commitments from the Governments of France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States, as well as from the European Union. Those funds will enable the deployment of electoral experts from January 2021, to be assigned to provide capacity-building and technical assistance as the Independent High Electoral Commission prepares for early parliamentary elections.

C. Human rights and rule of law developments and activities

44. Criminal accountability for violations and abuses perpetrated against protesters since October 2019 remains largely absent, including with respect to the targeted killings, abduction and torture of protesters and activists. The fact-finding body

mandated to examine such violations, established by the Government in May, is not yet functional and the names of its members have not yet been announced.

45. During demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah Governorate, security forces used live ammunition in response to violence by protesters, resulting in 9 dead and 85 injured from 2 to 12 December, according to information verified by UNAMI. On 7 December, the Kurdistan Regional Government suspended the operating licence of a media outlet and closed its offices. The suspension remained in place until 19 December. On 13 December, the Kurdistan Regional Government issued written warnings to at least three other media outlets, announcing unspecified legal action for any continued broadcasting of violent images of the demonstrations. According to the authorities, the broadcast of demonstrations incited violence and disturbed social cohesion.

46. Violence targeted at protesters continued with no new arrests or prosecutions of suspects. On 27 and 28 November, in Haboubi Square in Nasiriyah, armed men killed 5 protesters, injured 90 others and burned down 50 tents, according to information verified by UNAMI. From 28 November to 2 January, UNAMI documented eight separate attacks with improvised explosive devices targeted at the homes of activists in Nasiriyah and Basrah, causing material damage. Similarly, in Baghdad, unidentified gunmen continued to target protesters in various locations, causing injuries. According to information verified by UNAMI, on 25 November, unidentified gunmen shot at a vehicle carrying two prominent protesters, injuring one. On 4 December, in Baghdad, unidentified gunmen shot at a vehicle in which four protesters were being taken from Tahrir Square, injuring two; on 11 December, a group of masked men attacked protesters near Tahrir Square, stabbing one in the back multiple times; and on 15 December, unidentified gunmen shot dead a prominent protester in Baghdad. The Mission also documented disappearances, abductions and torture of protesters.

47. On 16 November, prison authorities executed 21 male adult prisoners in the central prison of Nasiriyah. They had been sentenced to death after conviction for terrorism-related offences. On 21 and 22 December, UNAMI visited the prison the first time UNAMI had gained full access to the prison in line with its mandate for the first time. The Mission observed overcrowded cells and noted that inmates had limited access to health care and communication with their families. The Mission will continue to work with the Ministry of Justice to address those issues. The prison authorities confirmed that in 2019 and 2020, 32 death sentences had been carried out.

48. On 22 and 23 November, UNAMI held a two-day online workshop with the Supreme Judicial Council, attended by 16 Iraqi judges from courts in Baghdad and international human rights and judicial experts. Participants exchanged views on ways to strengthen an effective legal defence, on evidentiary standards, on judicial oversight of detention and on the reasoning of judgments. The workshop was the first step in a series of discussions with the Supreme Judicial Council to develop guidelines for the conduct of judicial investigations and trials.

49. Following a review of Iraqi efforts to protect persons from enforced disappearance at its nineteenth session, held in September the Committee on Enforced Disappearances issued its Concluding observations on Iraq on 27 November. The observations contained recommendations for the Government of Iraq and a request for the submission of up-to-date information on implementation by 25 November 2021.

50. From 7 to 9 December, UNAMI facilitated a workshop on promoting protection from enforced disappearance in collaboration with the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights and the International Commission on Missing Persons, an intergovernmental organization. The participants discussed strategies, including

increased engagement of civil society organizations with the relevant United Nations human rights mechanisms, the role of civil society in responding to victims' needs and the enactment of legislation on the protection of all persons from enforced disappearance.

51. To mark Human Rights Day, on 10 December, UNAMI launched three rap songs, "New world (COVID-19)", "Together" and "Final advice", written and performed by, respectively, Iraqi rappers Golden Nenous, Raz and Mr. Legendary in Assyrian, Kurdish and Arabic. Human rights and the health of others were front and centre in the songs. With the support of the organization Imprint of Hope, UNAMI distributed 10,000 information postcards in three densely populated neighbourhoods of Baghdad from 4 to 6 December, raising awareness of the human rights impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

52. On 15 and 17 December, UNAMI held two workshops on the preservation and protection of minority languages and protecting minority rights and defending diversity in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Ninawa Plains. The workshops were held in Baghdad and Erbil and brought together senior government officials, historians, language experts and representatives of minority groups to develop a strategy to protect and preserve minority languages in Iraq, including through the implementation of relevant recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

53. To mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign, UNAMI, in collaboration with three Iraqi artists, launched a social media campaign to raise awareness of domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Graphic images depicted the stigma faced by female family members when they seek health care and highlighted the contribution of women health-care workers to the COVID-19 response. The aim of the images was to promote public dialogue on the consequences of gender-based violence and to reinforce collective responsibility for ending violence against women. They were shared widely on social media.

54. Insecurity and violence continued to affect civilians. Between 1 October and 31 December, UNAMI documented 58 incidents resulting in at least 104 civilian casualties (41 deaths, including 3 children and 3 women, and 63 injured, including 12 children and 7 women). A total of 71 civilian casualties (25 deaths and 46 injuries) were attributed to ISIL, and 29 civilian casualties (12 deaths and 17 injuries) to unidentified armed groups. Aerial operations by Turkish forces targeting PKK locations continued. In the first week of December, three civilian casualties were attributed to Turkish military airstrikes in the Amedi district of Dahuk Governorate. In a letter dated 13 January addressed to the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Permanent Representative of Turkey referred to the military operation in the first week of December in Dahuk and noted that Turkey targeted only "identified PKK elements in the north of Iraq" and that it "displayed maximum restraint and precision not to cause any civilian loss". In the same letter, he expressed "firm rejection of the allegations attributing the death of three civilians in Dohuk" to Turkish military airstrikes.

55. On 10 December, UNAMI, jointly with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Justice Rapid Response, an international non-governmental organization, concluded a four-month online training programme. The final workshop in the programme was attended by 24 members (including 11 women) of the country task force on monitoring and reporting on the six grave violations committed against children. The aim of the programme was to strengthen capacity to document grave violations against children and to identify and address challenges in promoting child protection. The workshop launched a peer network as a platform for continued exchanges to strengthen the child protection framework in Iraq.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

56. The sudden closure of camps for internally displaced persons from mid-October onwards by the Government of Iraq and the associated challenges constituted a priority area for United Nations activities in Iraq during the reporting period. By early December, a total of 17 camps and informal sites had been closed or reclassified, affecting 34,000 people. A total of 4,735 households (23,158 individuals) were recorded as arriving at non-camp settings in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Karbala, Kirkuk, Ninawa, and Salah al-Din Governorates. Of the total number of recorded arrivals, 1,311 households (28 per cent) had not returned to their location of origin and were considered to be secondarily displaced, while 3,424 households (72 per cent) had returned to their areas of origin, although not necessarily to their former homes. According to representative follow-up surveys carried out by humanitarian partners of the United Nations country team, approximately 20 per cent of those affected by camp closures returned to houses or apartments that they owned; 35 per cent were in rented accommodations; 18 per cent were being hosted by family or friends; and the remainder resided in some kind of critical shelter. The whereabouts of the remaining 11,000 individuals who left camps during that period remained unknown during the reporting period.

57. In the same surveys, 42 per cent of respondents indicated that they could not return to their areas of origin due to destroyed or damaged housing, homes being occupied by other people, or the unavailability of basic services, and that they did not have other options for safe, voluntary and dignified durable settlement. In the surveys, the top three needs cited by internally displaced persons affected by the sudden camp closures were shelter, livelihoods and food. Women and children made up 78 per cent of those affected by camp closures.

58. As at 10 December, three formal camps remained open in federal Iraq: Nahiyat al-Amiriyah camp in Anbar Governorate, and Jad'ah 5 and Salamiyah camps in Ninawa Governorate. These camps host approximately 26,000 individuals. The Government of Iraq has indicated to humanitarian partners that the three camps will remain open for the time being, but humanitarian partners are preparing for any eventuality. Many residents are families with perceived ISIL affiliations. An additional 25 camps for internally displaced persons hosting 182,712 people remained open under the administration of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

59. The United Nations in Iraq continued to advocate for the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return or settlement of internally displaced persons. A series of joint and coordinated actions were undertaken to highlight concerns stemming from the sudden closure of camps and to seek clarity on developments. United Nations system agencies and non-governmental organizations have provided life-saving assistance where necessary to internally displaced persons leaving camps.

60. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to present health-care and other challenges for Iraq, although the rate of transmission recorded by the Government is steadily declining. Although the number of cases reported by the Ministry of Health rose to 602,938 (including 12,895 deaths, as of 10 January), the recovery rate increased to more than 92 per cent, while the death rate stayed around 2.1 per cent. According to the Government of Iraq, the public health authorities increased COVID-19 testing to between 30,000 and 40,000 daily. The reported daily number of cases peaked and then declined during the reporting period, indicating a decrease in the transmission rate (0.86) across Iraq. Compared with early November, there was a 70 and 60 per cent decline in the weekly number of infections and COVID-19-related deaths, respectively. The positive test rate fell to 2.3 per cent, suggesting that an adequate

amount of testing was now being conducted. Nevertheless, COVID-19 continued to pose a threat to the country's fragile health-care system.

61. The World Health Organization continued to collaborate with government ministries and institutions to conduct community awareness-raising campaigns on COVID-19, reaching millions of Iraqis, including refugees and internally displaced persons. The International Organization for Migration supported screening and triaging for COVID-19 at 28 health-care facilities. Fifty-three health-care workers were trained in infection prevention and control. Training on international health regulations was provided to public health officials at the border. The International Organization for Migration supported the hotline of the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights in Baghdad by providing psychosocial support for those affected by the pandemic. Over 500 people have been reached so far.

62. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provided support to vulnerable groups in key service domains, including small-scale farmers and essential workers, through the provision of medical personal protective equipment and sanitizers. In partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and other partners, FAO developed messages, distributed via mobile phone, on symptoms and preventative measures for workers along the food supply chain. In addition, the United Nations Population Fund supported the establishment of four isolation units in maternity hospitals in the north of Iraq to ensure safe deliveries for women who had tested positive for COVID-19.

63. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) continued to support access to basic hygiene items for families by distributing sanitary kits and cash assistance to limit the spread of COVID-19 among refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees across Iraq. From April to December, 35,026 refugee families and 65,309 displaced families (a total of 100,335 families or 565,500 individuals), cashed out their assistance. In addition, UNHCR distributed more than 77,780 sanitary kits that included hygiene and sanitary items to women and girls of reproductive age living in camps for refugees and internally displaced persons.

64. The United Nations country team continued to support essential health-care services across Iraq. On 29 November, Iraqi public health authorities, in partnership with the World Health Organization and UNICEF, began a mass polio vaccination campaign targeting over 1.9 million children under the age of five. On 22 November, the United Nations Population Fund, together with the Ministry of Health, launched the national family planning strategy in response to the unmet need for family planning among women. The strategy is multisectoral and engages all relevant ministries, religious institutions, media and civil society organizations.

65. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as part of its stabilization programme, continued the implementation of critical infrastructure rehabilitation and livelihood projects. Rehabilitation works were completed at nine health-care facilities in eight governorates, creating space for 160 isolation rooms, and work has been ongoing in four health-care facilities in four governorates. The UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilization in Iraq achieved a critical milestone in November with the endorsement by the Government of Iraq and international partners of a three-year extension into 2023, a transition year in which responsibility for stabilization needs will be handed over to the Government. To date, the Facility has supported more than 10 million Iraqis in the five liberated governorates (Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa, and Salah al-Din).

66. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) continued to support stabilization and recovery efforts in Iraq. UN-Habitat rehabilitated 86 houses with structural damage, connected 265 vulnerable houses to improved water networks

(thus providing a regular water supply to approximately 1,600 internally displaced persons, refugees and conflict-affected community members), created jobs for 200 returnees, issued occupancy certificates to 521 Yazidi households returning to Sinjar to support their tenure security, and organized a week-long sports festival engaging youth and children to mark the completion of a football pitch in west Mosul. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization supported stabilization efforts through the handover of 15 rehabilitated schools in Salah al-Din Governorate equipped with school furniture in addition to COVID-19 response materials.

67. The World Food Programme launched rural livelihood projects in Basrah that prioritized some of the poorest communities. The much-needed projects addressed access to water and resilience to climate change in places where households were among those worst affected by changes in temperature and rainfall.

68. The United Nations Mine Action Service cleared more than 135,000 m² of land in agricultural areas of Anbar and Ninawa Governorates that had been contaminated with explosive ordnance during the ISIL occupation. To support internally displaced persons facing camp closure, hygiene kits containing explosive ordnance risk education messages were provided in Salamiyah, Ninawa Governorate. In addition, the Mine Action Service trained 12 police officers of the Ministry of Interior Police Department on the disposal of explosive ordnance and improvised explosive devices.

IV. Security and operational issues

A. Update on security arrangements

69. The Department of Safety and Security monitored developments throughout Iraq and implemented risk management measures to enable United Nations operations. Regular security advisories and alerts, including broadcasts related to COVID-19, continued to be disseminated to keep United Nations personnel informed of precautionary measures being taken.

70. The Department of Safety and Security supported an average of 31 field missions per day across the country, with assessed risk levels ranging from medium to high. Its close coordination and engagement with the host Government continued to ensure the proper flow of information and the necessary security support for United Nations operations, in particular movements and access authorizations to regions still affected by COVID-19 containment restrictions.

B. Mission facilities, logistics, aviation, financial and legal issues

71. The Mission continued to implement all necessary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its risks in United Nations compounds and offices. It enhanced its medical preparedness through on-site COVID-19 testing with machines newly acquired by the United Nations, contracted a specialized team to support the operation of isolation and care units, signed agreements with hospitals in Erbil and Dahuk for the management of moderate to severe cases, and negotiated arrangements with neighbouring countries for the medical evacuation of United Nations staff. Confident in its crisis readiness, the Mission was able to resume construction and refurbishment projects in the United Nations compounds and offices while maintaining strict health and safety protocols.

72. The Mission continued to provide logistical and administrative support to the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in the delivery of its mandate.

V. Observations

73. I welcome the finalization of the electoral legislation required to enable continued preparations for early elections. Important work remains to be done, including the adoption of the law on the Federal Supreme Court and an agreement on the Court's membership, which are necessary for the certification of electoral results. All Iraqi stakeholders have a responsibility to ensure that preparations, including the selection of electoral personnel, continue and remain free from political interference at all stages. Doing so is vital to build trust in the elections and their outcome. All have a responsibility to assist in promoting a environment conducive to inclusive, transparent, and credible elections. As UNAMI and UNDP expand their technical electoral assistance activities, I thank Member States for their generous contributions. The United Nations remains strongly committed to provide stepped-up electoral support for the upcoming elections in accordance with Security Council resolution [2522 \(2020\)](#).

74. The economy of Iraq continues to be affected by the lack of fundamental reforms, the drop in global oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic reform proposals of the Government of Iraq are an encouraging first step towards addressing that challenge. Swift implementation of the proposed reforms is essential and will require broad political consensus to be successful.

75. I call on the federal and Kurdistan Region Governments and the Council of Representatives to cooperate and to overcome their differences in the interests of all Iraqi citizens. Sustainable solutions are urgently required.

76. The global health challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic also continue to affect Iraq. I commend the collective efforts of the country's health-care workers and government officials to reduce the transmission rate through life-saving support, increased testing and other measures. The United Nations will continue to work with the Government of Iraq and other partners in addressing COVID-19 in the country.

77. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for global solidarity and greater international cooperation and must be turned into an opportunity for fundamental change. I am encouraged by the bilateral and multilateral engagement of the Government of Iraq with international partners, including in the security and economic fields. Partnership agreements aimed at strengthening relations among regional and strategic partners should be respected and used as building blocks for strong alliances against threats to international peace and stability. Transboundary threats and terrorism should be dealt with collectively with respect for the territorial sovereignty of the States concerned and based on the principle of good-neighbourly relations.

78. The continued attacks against diplomatic missions and convoys in Iraq remain a serious concern. I reiterate my call for further concerted efforts by the Government of Iraq, working with all influential actors, to ensure the protection of all diplomatic missions and personnel in Iraq, to deal with security breaches in a firm and swift manner, and to hold accountable before the law those responsible for those attacks. It is incumbent upon all security actors to cooperate with the Government of Iraq in its efforts to strengthen State control.

79. The challenges faced by Iraqis attempting to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly remain another serious concern. It is incumbent on

the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments to protect and respect the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly. Respect for fundamental freedoms is integral to the strengthening of public trust in State institutions.

80. Ongoing impunity, most notably with regard to the abduction, torture and targeted killing of protesters and activists, remains a concern. I call on the Government of Iraq to ensure criminal accountability, in addition to determining the fate and whereabouts of protesters and activists who remain missing.

81. The engagement of the Government of Iraq with the Committee on Enforced Disappearances is commendable. The recommendations made in the Committee's concluding observations offer opportunities for Iraq to take concrete steps to address the issue of enforced disappearances through effective institutional and legislative measures. To that effect, the adoption of a draft law on protection from enforced disappearance compliant with the provisions of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance would be an important step towards the promotion of accountability and the search for disappeared persons.

82. I share the Government's goal of ending the displacement crisis in Iraq but reiterate that a new crisis in the form of secondary displacement should be avoided at all costs. The return of internally displaced persons must be voluntary, safe, dignified and informed, with conditions in place to enable reintegration and to ensure sustainable solutions. The United Nations stands by its commitment to support the Government of Iraq in achieving a durable solution for all vulnerable displaced persons and returnees in Iraq, including by supporting social cohesion measures.

83. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and the United Nations staff in Iraq for their continued dedication to implementing the Organization's mandate during extraordinary times and under challenging circumstances. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to my Deputy Special Representative, Alice Walpole, for her dedicated service since 2017 to the United Nations in Iraq.
