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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2470 \(2019\)](#), 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 of 22 November 2019 ([S/2019/903](#)) and the briefing to the Security Council by my Special Representative for Iraq and Head of UNAMI on 3 December 2019.

II. Summary of key political developments

A. Political situation

2. Popular protests demanding substantial political, economic and social reforms, which had started on 1 October 2019, continued during the reporting period in Baghdad and in central and southern governorates.

3. The last week of November witnessed a significant escalation in violence, particularly in Dhi Qar and Najaf Governorates, where clashes between protesters and security forces contributed to the rising number of deaths and injuries. On 27 November, protesters set fire to the Consulate of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Najaf. On 29 November, the representative of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani delivered a sermon, in which he emphasized that it was “forbidden to attack peaceful protesters” or to “prevent them from exercising their right to ask for reforms”, noted the “failure of the concerned authorities” to deal with the protests and called upon the Council of Representatives to take the necessary action to “prevent the country from sliding into violence, chaos and destruction”.

4. On the same day, the Prime Minister, Adil Abd Al-Mahdi, announced that he would submit an official letter to the Council of Ministers to request approval from the Council of Representatives for his resignation. On 1 December, the Council of Representatives accepted the Prime Minister’s resignation, which he had submitted



on 30 November, with immediate effect.¹ As a next step, the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mohammed al-Halbousi, announced that he would send a letter to the President, Barham Salih, calling for a Prime Minister-designate to be nominated in accordance with the Constitution. Meanwhile, the Government remained in place in a caretaker capacity.

5. Following the resignation of the Prime Minister, political blocs consulted with a view to identifying a consensus nominee within the 15-day constitutional deadline, in accordance with article 76 of the Constitution. The 15-day period started on 4 December when the President, through whom the nomination must be channelled, received the official notification. In an effort to secure political consensus on a nominee, the President met with the heads of most political blocs and with academics and union leaders on 9 and 11 December, respectively.

6. On 9 December, parliamentarians from all political blocs submitted to the President a list of preconditions for a candidate to be nominated, including that candidates be politically independent, that they hold only Iraqi nationality, that they had not held any executive or legislative position since 2003 and that they be acceptable to the protest movement. The submission was signed by 174 of the 329 parliamentarians.

7. On 11 December, protesters in Baghdad issued a statement announcing their criteria for the prime ministership, which was similar to the parliamentary list but also required the nominee to be under the age of 55, to pledge not to run in the next elections and to commit to implementing substantial reforms.

8. On 19 December, the constitutional deadline for the nomination of a consensus candidate expired without a name being submitted to the Council of Representatives, despite intense negotiations. On the same day, the President sought a legal opinion from the Federal Supreme Court to identify the largest parliamentary bloc, which, under article 76 of the Constitution, had the right to nominate the Prime Minister-designate. In its opinion issued on 22 December, the Court stated that the term “largest parliamentary bloc” referred to the largest bloc in parliament after the 2018 elections, noting that it was immaterial whether it had run as a single list during the elections or was constituted from multiple parties after the elections.

9. After the Federal Supreme Court ruling, the Bina’ bloc sent a letter to the President indicating that it was the largest parliamentary bloc according to the Court’s criterion and nominating the Minister for Higher Education, Qusay al-Suhail, as Prime Minister-designate. The nomination was rejected by other political blocs and Mr. al-Suhail subsequently withdrew his candidacy. On 23 December, the President received an official letter from the Speaker, identifying the Bina’ bloc as the largest parliamentary bloc and nominating the Governor of Basrah, Asaad al-Eidani, as the bloc’s replacement candidate. Again, the nomination was rejected by other political blocs. In a letter addressed to the Speaker dated 26 December, the President declined to nominate Mr. al-Eidani, citing as reasons his responsibility to the people and his “national responsibility towards the stability and security of the country”. He referenced as an additional reason the fact that Mr. al-Eidani did not meet the preconditions set out by political blocs in the parliamentary submission of 9 December. The President also indicated his readiness to resign if the parliament did not accept his actions as constitutional.

10. On 20 December, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, through his representative, said in his weekly sermon that early elections and a new Government were needed to steer the country out of the situation of civil unrest. He called on political blocs to

¹ At the time of drafting of the present report, the Prime Minister remained in office, in a caretaker capacity.

expedite the passage of a “fair and credible” electoral law that satisfied the aspirations of voters and brought them closer to their representatives.

11. On 29 January, the President gave political blocs a four-day period to agree on a nominee for the prime ministership, stating that he would exercise his constitutional powers to assign the most acceptable candidate if no agreement had been reached by the 1 February deadline. Hours before the deadline, the President nominated Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as the Prime Minister-designate and asked him to form a new Government within the 30-day period stipulated in the Constitution. Following his nomination, Mr. Allawi delivered a televised address to the Iraqi people setting forth priorities for his premiership, including the protection of the right to peaceful protests, accountability for violence against demonstrators, the formation of an inclusive and non-sectarian Government, socioeconomic reforms and preparations for early elections.

12. During the reporting period, security developments had significant political repercussions (see paras. 23–35). Following air strikes on locations near the border between Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic on 29 December and close to Baghdad International Airport on 3 January, the Prime Minister called for an extraordinary parliamentary session to develop an official Iraqi position.

13. On 5 January, attending an extraordinary session of the Council of Representatives, the Prime Minister delivered an address that laid out two options for the Council of Representatives to review, namely, ending the presence of foreign troops in Iraq or reviewing the conditions of their deployment. On the recommendation of the Prime Minister, parliamentarians subsequently adopted a decision calling on the Government to end support from the international coalition to counter Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and to work to end the presence of all foreign troops in Iraq. They also called for control of all weapons to be restricted to the State and for official complaints to be submitted to the United Nations and the Security Council regarding the air strikes conducted by the United States of America.

14. Meanwhile, the parliamentary constitutional review committee continued its work. A separate presidential review committee completed its meetings on 21 December. In addition, a ministerial review committee, formed on 18 November, also met. The presidential and ministerial committees agreed to start preparing a joint report on their findings, to be submitted to the presidency of the Council of Representatives.

15. Throughout the constitutional review process, Kurdistan Regional Government representatives expressed concerns over the possible implementation of fundamental constitutional changes that could negatively affect the Kurdistan Region, most notably discussions on the federal status of the Republic of Iraq and the system of governance (parliamentary or presidential system).

16. Public protests continued during the reporting period, with violent clashes occurring in Baghdad, Dhi Qar, Karbala’ and Wasit Governorates. On 6 December, unidentified masked men fired at protesters on Sinak Bridge and in Khilani Square in Baghdad, causing deaths and injuries, according to the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights. The incident was condemned by the Government on 7 December. Between 12 and 18 January, tensions escalated between protesters and security forces throughout the southern governorates over attempts to reopen schools and universities, with some protesters forcibly preventing students and teachers from accessing educational institutions.

17. On 12 January, protesters in Dhi Qar Governorate temporarily closed the Baghdad-Basrah highway and gave a one-week deadline for the ratification of the new law on elections to the Council of Representatives, the confirmation of election

dates, the formation of a new Government and the publication of the investigation into the deaths of protesters in Nasiriyah. Similar demands were expressed by protesters elsewhere. On 19 and 20 January, with the demands unmet, protesters in Baghdad and other governorates attempted to block major routes, including access to ports and oil facilities, leading to clashes.

18. On 24 January, a large-scale demonstration, called for by Muqtada al-Sadr, against the presence of foreign troops in Iraq, took place in Baghdad. Prior to the event, members of the ongoing protest movement voiced their rejection of the demonstration. Following the event, the crowd dispersed without incident. Later in the evening, however, clashes broke out between members of the protest movement and security forces in central Baghdad. On 25 January, security forces began to clear roads in Baghdad and sit-in sites in Basrah and Dhi Qar Governorates.

19. In the Kurdistan Region, on 11 December, the Council of Ministers of the Kurdistan Regional Government approved a draft pension reform bill and submitted it to the Kurdistan Regional Parliament. The bill included a series of measures to improve transparency with respect to salaries, pensions and allowances for public servants. The Kurdistan Regional Parliament decided to delay the parliamentary recess by one month in order to expedite the passing of the bill. The pension reform bill was subsequently passed on 16 January.

B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil

20. Limited progress was made during the reporting period on relations between Baghdad and Erbil. Although a preliminary agreement on oil and revenue-sharing was announced on 25 November, the agreement is yet to be submitted to the Council of Representatives for its first reading.

21. The Speaker of the Council of Representatives visited Erbil on 22 December. He met separately with the President of the Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, and with the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, Masoud Barzani, to discuss political and security developments in Iraq and the region and pending legislation before the Council of Representatives.

22. The Prime Minister of Iraq travelled to Erbil on 11 January and met separately with the President of the Kurdistan Region and with the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region, Masrour Barzani. Mutual relations, regional security and the threat from ISIL were among the issues discussed. The Prime Minister also travelled to Sulaymaniyah Governorate and met the First Deputy Secretary-General of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Kosrat Rasul Ali.

C. Security situation

23. Remnants of ISIL continued to launch frequent asymmetrical attacks against the Iraqi people and security forces, particularly in areas of Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul and Salah al-Din Governorates. Iraqi security forces continued their action against ISIL cells throughout these areas. On 7 and 29 December, respectively, Iraqi security forces launched phases seven and eight of Operation Will of Victory, with phase seven aimed at clearing ISIL remnants from parts of Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din Governorates and phase eight aimed at launching further operations in those areas and in Ninawa Governorate. Military operations also extended to western Anbar and areas along the border between Diyala and Sulaymaniyah Governorates.

24. On 5 December, the Iraqi Joint Operations Command reported that two rockets landed on the Balad airbase in Salah al-Din Governorate, where United States and Iraqi troops are co-located, without causing casualties or material damage. On 9 December, the Command reported rocket attacks against compounds near Baghdad International Airport, wounding six Iraqi soldiers. Additional rockets, which landed close to the airport perimeter, were reported on 11 December. On 27 December, the Security Media Cell of the Office of the Prime Minister reported that mortar shells had landed on the K1 military base, located 13 km north-west of Kirkuk. On 29 December, the United States Department of Defense stated that a rocket attack on an Iraqi base near Kirkuk had “resulted in the death of a United States citizen and injured four service members and two members of the Iraqi security forces”. No group claimed responsibility for the attack. The Popular Mobilization Forces, in a statement on 28 December, denied involvement in the incident.

25. On 29 December, the Command reported air strikes on three Popular Mobilization Forces locations close to the Iraqi-Syrian border in Anbar Governorate, including the headquarters of Kata’ib Hizbullah, the forty-fifth brigade of the Popular Mobilization Forces. On the same day, in a statement, the United States Department of Defense noted that “United States forces have conducted precision defensive strikes against five Kata’ib Hizbullah facilities in Iraq [three] and Syria [two]” in response to the group’s “repeated attacks on Iraqi bases that host Operation Inherent Resolve coalition forces”. The statement also indicated that attacks against United States and coalition forces “must cease”. On 30 December, the Popular Mobilization Commission announced that 25 members of the Popular Mobilization Forces had been killed and 51 injured.

26. The political leadership of Iraq issued statements denouncing the air strikes. In a statement issued by his spokesperson on 29 December, the Prime Minister described them as a “violation of Iraq’s sovereignty”. On 30 December, the President, the Speaker and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also issued statements in which they described the air strikes as “a violation of Iraq’s sovereignty”, called upon all parties to “exercise restraint” and “rejected the use of Iraqi territory as an arena for external conflicts”. Similar statements were issued by the office of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and the leaders of many political blocs.

27. On 31 December, mourners, predominantly from the ranks of the Popular Mobilization Forces, gathered in Baghdad for the funerals of those killed in the air strikes on 29 December. Hundreds subsequently entered the former International Zone and gathered in protest outside the Embassy of the United States. Fires were started close to the perimeter wall, external facilities were destroyed, and some demonstrators attempted to enter the compound. Later that day, the Prime Minister stated that attacks against, or harassment of, foreign embassies and representations were strictly prohibited by the security forces and would lead to punishment under the law. By the evening of 1 January, protesters had withdrawn from the perimeter of the Embassy.

28. On 3 January, the United States announced the death of the Commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, General Qasem Soleimani, following an air strike close to Baghdad International Airport. The death of the Iraqi Deputy National Security Adviser and Deputy Chairman of the Popular Mobilization Commission, Jamal al-Ibrahimi (also known as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis) and others was subsequently confirmed. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in a letter dated 3 January addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2020/13), stated that the air strike constituted “a gross violation of the fundamental principles of international law”. In identical letters dated 6 January addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2020/15), the Government of Iraq condemned “in the strongest possible terms” the act, which violated “the sovereignty

of Iraq and the principles of international law”. The Iraqi political leadership and Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, among others, condemned the air strike and called for maximum restraint on all sides. The Iraqi National Security Council stated that “the air strike had violated the rules of conduct for the [United States] presence in Iraq”. In a letter dated 8 January addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2020/20), the United States Government stated that, “in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations”, it had “undertaken certain actions in the exercise of its inherent right of self-defence”, including “an operation on 2 January 2020 against leadership elements of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps... on the territory of Iraq”. The letter further stated that the “actions were in response to an escalating series of armed attacks in recent months by the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iran-supported militias on United States forces”. In a letter dated 29 January addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2020/81), the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran firmly rejected “the claim that the Iranian armed forces conducted armed attacks against the United States in the years 2019 and 2020” and categorically rejected “the attribution to Iran of any armed attack against the United States by any entity or individual in Iraq and the region”. The letter also stated that it considered the invocation of the right to self-defence “an extremely arbitrary interpretation of international law, particularly Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations”.

29. On 5 January, the Combined Joint Task Force known as Operation Inherent Resolve announced that, owing to “repeated attacks on bases housing its troops”, the international counter-ISIL coalition would pause its activities in Iraq until further notice. On 4 and 5 January, rockets were fired and landed within or close to the former International Zone in Baghdad.

30. On 8 January, the Government of Iraq and the United States reported that the Islamic Republic of Iran had launched missiles against military bases hosting United States troops in Anbar and Erbil Governorates. The Security Media Cell of the Office of the Prime Minister stated that a total of 23 missiles had fallen in Iraq, on the Ayn al-Asad airbase and to the west of Hit City in Anbar Governorate, and on two locations in Erbil. A spokesperson for the Prime Minister confirmed that no casualties had been registered, and that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran had informed him in advance. Also on 8 January, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Javad Zarif, stated that the missile strikes had “concluded” the country’s “proportionate measures in self-defence under Article 51 of [the] UN Charter”. The United States confirmed, on the same day, that there had been no American casualties. In an update on 24 January, the United States Department of Defense reported that a number of service members had been diagnosed with “traumatic brain injuries” and that some required hospitalization.

31. In identical letters dated 9 January addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2020/26), the Government of Iraq stated that the missile strike was “a breach of the sovereignty of Iraq and a violation of the principles of good-neighbourliness... and international law”. The President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among others, also called on all parties to prevent further escalation. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in a letter dated 16 January addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2020/44), described, inter alia, the strike as a “measured and proportionate response, in exercising its inherent right to self-defence”.

32. The Security Media Cell reported that the Balad airbase was targeted again on 12 January, with eight rockets landing but causing no casualties. On 14 January, the Cell also reported a rocket attack on the training camp in Taji, to the north of Baghdad, again without casualties. The camp hosts coalition forces.

33. Early on 21 January, the Security Media Cell reported that three rockets had landed within the vicinity of the Embassy of the United States in the former International Zone in Baghdad. On the same day, the Prime Minister strongly condemned the attack as a “crime against a diplomatic mission on Iraqi soil” and instructed the Baghdad Operations Command to launch an investigation, according to a statement by his spokesperson. No casualties were reported.

34. On the evening of 26 January, the Security Media Cell reported that five rockets had landed within the former International Zone. Shortly after, the Prime Minister noted that a number of rockets had fallen within the United States Embassy compound. The Prime Minister subsequently issued a statement condemning the incident, which he described as an unlawful action that weakened the State and undermined its sovereignty and the sanctity of diplomatic missions in Iraq. According to his statement, the Prime Minister instructed the security forces to investigate the incident and arrest those responsible. In a phone call with the Prime Minister on 27 January, the Secretary of State of the United States, Michael Pompeo, expressed appreciation for the commitment of the Government of Iraq to strengthen security for United States personnel and diplomatic facilities. The United States Department of State reported that there had been one injury.

35. During the reporting period, the Ministry of National Defence of Turkey reported continued military activity against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) positions in northern Iraq.

D. Regional and international developments

36. Iraq continued its efforts to establish stronger relations with its neighbours and to diversify its regional partnerships. On 17 December, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Ali Alhakim, met counterparts from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey on the margins of the Global Refugee Forum, held in Geneva, to discuss ways to maintain and strengthen social and economic stability in the Middle East region.

37. From 21 to 24 January, the President of Iraq attended the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and met counterparts from Estonia, Germany, Jordan, the Netherlands and the United States, as well as the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Jens Stoltenberg. The President of the Kurdistan Region, also attended the Forum. On 25 January, the President of Iraq visited the Holy See and Italy.

38. On 21 January, the Speaker travelled to Jordan to discuss bilateral relations and regional developments.

39. Discussions with the following high-level visitors to Iraq focused, inter alia, on strengthening bilateral relations and regional and international political and security developments, including continued cooperation to counter ISIL: on 17 December, the Governor-General of Australia, David Hurley; on 19 December, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs of the United States, David Hale; on 9 January, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu; on 14 January, the Political Director General of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Philipp Ackermann; on 15 January, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani; and on 18 January, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan, Ayman Safadi.

40. Telephone conversations included calls between the President of Iraq and the Vice-President of the United States, Michael Pence, on 11 December; the Prime Minister and the United States Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, on 16 December; the Prime Minister and the President of the United States, Donald Trump, on

31 December, as well as several calls between Iraqi senior officials and the Secretary of State of the United States in December, including on the protection of diplomatic missions.

41. On 31 December, the President of Iraq spoke with the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, and, on 5 January, the Prime Minister spoke with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, Jean-Yves Le Drian.

42. Throughout January, the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker engaged regional and international partners to call for de-escalation, reaffirming the need to respect the sovereignty of Iraq. The Prime Minister held telephone discussions with several partner nations to discuss the decision taken by the Council of Representatives on 5 January regarding the presence of foreign troops in Iraq, including those of Canada, France, Germany, Jordan, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States. The Prime Minister also spoke with the Secretary-General of NATO and with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell.

43. On 7 January, the Speaker had conversations with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, François-Philippe Champagne, and the Speaker of parliament of Turkey, Mustafa Şentop on issues of common concern, including developments in Iraq.

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

A. Political activities

44. The Special Representative engaged extensively with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Prime Minister, the President and the Speaker, political leaders, the Supreme Judicial Council, various groups of peaceful protesters, human rights defenders, religious authorities and union representatives, to discuss their demands and identify possible solutions. She also discussed the short- and medium-term measures proposed in her “Next step” document of 10 November, focusing on electoral reform, security sector reform, counter-corruption efforts, constitutional review and the enactment of a number of pending laws that would promote, among other issues, good governance, economic diversification and reconstruction. The Special Representative repeatedly condemned the intimidation, abduction, unlawful arrest and killing of unarmed protesters, urging the Iraqi authorities to protect protesters and to press ahead in addressing the people’s demands for reforms.

45. The Special Representative also held multiple meetings with the leadership of Iraq and parliamentarians to discuss electoral reforms. During discussions on the new law on elections to the Council of Representatives, she reaffirmed the readiness of the United Nations to provide electoral advice and technical support, including information on international best practices. She urged parliamentarians to reflect provisions in the new law that promoted the demands of their constituents for credible, free, inclusive and participatory elections.

46. Subsequent to the resignation of the Prime Minister, the Special Representative met with Iraqi political leaders, emphasizing the importance of reaching consensus on a way forward to resolve the political stalemate over the nomination of a candidate as new Prime Minister-designate within the framework of the Constitution. Following the decision adopted by the Council of Representatives on 5 January regarding the presence of foreign troops in Iraq, my Special Representative met with the Prime

Minister, the President and the Speaker to discuss the potential impact of the removal of foreign troops, including on the continued fight against ISIL. Emphasizing the importance of Iraqi unity and sovereignty, the Special Representative urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to resume dialogue as the only means to build stability, resilience and peace in Iraq and beyond.

47. In the same context, my Special Representative travelled to Erbil on 13 January, where she met the President of the Kurdistan Region and the Prime Minister of the Region, to discuss internal security and economic issues, as well as political developments in the country and region.

48. On 18 January, the Special Representative was received in Doha by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, with whom she discussed the situation in Iraq and related regional developments.

49. The Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance visited Basrah on 11 December, where she met local officials to discuss the response by security forces to ongoing public protests in the south. She also met with civil society activists and tribal leaders to discuss the demands of protesters, resolution of the ongoing political impasse, voter engagement in future elections and the building of social cohesion and inclusion in the southern governorates.

50. The Deputy Special Representative continued to chair workshops across Iraq for young civil activists, organized by UNAMI in cooperation with the Supreme Commission on Coexistence and Social Peace in the Office of the Prime Minister and the al-Amal Association, an Iraqi non-governmental organization. At a workshop in Tikrit, Salah al-Din Governorate, on 21 December, local youth representatives took advantage of the presence of senior local political figures to discuss their proposed solutions to the challenges facing their country.

51. During the reporting period, UNAMI held consultations with the Women Advisory Group for Politics and National Reconciliation in Iraq to solicit its input on the Government's ongoing review of the Constitution. The Group proposed the inclusion of a constitutional article that would guarantee women's representation at all levels of governance and independent institutions through a quota, among other suggestions, in accordance with the principle of inclusion in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which Iraq is a party. According to article 49 of the current Constitution, the 25 per cent quota provision is only applicable to the representation of women in the Council of Representatives.

B. Electoral assistance

52. UNAMI intensified its engagement during the reporting period with the Council of Representatives and its Legal Committee as deliberations continued on proposed changes to the law on elections to the Council of Representatives and the Law on the Independent High Electoral Commission. The Mission's Electoral Assistance Office provided technical assistance and advice to the parliamentary Legal Committee on best practices for electoral reform and the reorganization of the Independent High Electoral Commission. My Special Representative also discussed electoral reform with the Speaker and various political leaders. My Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance met with members of the Council of Representatives to discuss draft electoral legislation and the provision by the United Nations of technical assistance in future electoral processes.

53. On 5 December, the Council of Representatives adopted a new Law on the Independent High Electoral Commission, which provided for the appointment of nine electoral commissioners, including one woman. All commissioners are judges (five

nominated by the Supreme Judicial Council, two by the Shura Council, and two by the Judicial Council of the Kurdistan Region). It also mandates the appointment of new, non-partisan officials for senior and mid-level positions in the restructured Commission. The female commissioner was appointed as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Independent High Electoral Commission.

54. Following protracted deliberations and negotiations between political blocs, the new law on elections to the Council of Representatives was approved by the parliament on 24 December. The law is expected to provide for a new electoral system (the single non-transferable vote based on subgovernorate level constituencies, with seats to be allocated to candidates who receive the highest number of votes). However, the final text of the law had not been issued during the reporting period.

C. Human rights and rule of law activities

55. The Mission's Human Rights Office issued its second and third special reports on the public protests on 5 November and 11 December, respectively. The third report, covering the period from 5 November to 8 December, noted that serious human rights violations and abuses continued to occur in the context of ongoing protests, including: killings, excessive use of force and disappearances, as well as ill-treatment and violations of the procedural rights of arrested demonstrators. Between 1 October and 26 January, protest-related violence resulted in at least 467 deaths and at least 9,131 injuries were caused by tear-gas canisters, live ammunition or shrapnel. The number of those injured may exceed 21,000 if those suffering from excessive tear-gas inhalation are included.

56. Throughout the protests, UNAMI continued to receive credible reports of killings of activists and journalists involved in the protests, carried out by unknown armed men described as "militia", "unknown third parties", "armed entities", "outlaws" and "spoilers". On 12 December, the Government established a committee to review the allegations of killings and disappearances. Although some investigations were conducted, no information regarding the findings or steps concerning accountability has yet been made public.

57. The Mission also documented threats against activists and high-profile demonstrators and cases of disappearances. Since the beginning of the protests, UNAMI has received credible reports that Iraqi security forces arrested and detained thousands of demonstrators, typically without warrant and mostly without providing those arrested the means to contact their families or defence lawyers, prompting fears that those arrested were being held incommunicado or had been disappeared. In Babil, Basrah, Dhi Qar, Karbala', Maysan and Muthanna Governorates, most schools and universities have remained closed since early November, following strikes and calls for school closures by demonstrators.

58. Women continued to participate in the ongoing demonstrations for political and economic reform in Iraq, hoping to achieve a more balanced and meaningful representation in politics and the economy, and urging reform measures to also benefit women, in particular those from vulnerable and impoverished groups.

59. Following the monitoring of trials conducted in previous reporting periods, on 28 January, UNAMI and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report entitled "Human rights in the administration of justice in Iraq: trials under the anti-terrorism laws and implications for justice, accountability and social cohesion in the aftermath of ISIL". The report outlined the main findings based on information collected from 794 criminal hearings and provided recommendations to the Government, with the aim of enhancing criminal justice procedures and safeguards.

60. With the approval of the Ministry of Justice, the Mission's Human Rights Office conducted 16 visits to places of detention and interviewed 31 detainees within its detention monitoring programme, implemented throughout Iraq. The monitoring activity aims to support the Government's efforts to address and prevent torture and ill-treatment at sites of deprivation of liberty, through targeted recommendations based on the collection and analysis of credible information obtained during the visits. In parallel, the Government's report on the implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was submitted to the Committee against Torture in 2019, as part of the second reporting cycle.

61. My report on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2019/984) was discussed by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict of the Security Council on 8 January 2020. In the report, details were provided on six grave violations against 2,114 children, which were verified during the period from July 2015 to July 2019 and distressingly high levels of violations against children were noted.

62. On 24 January, the International Day of Education, the United Nations in Iraq brought together teachers, government officials and students in Ninawa Governorate to discuss obstacles faced in improving access to education for children, in particular those who have lived under the territorial control of ISIL.

63. On 6 December, a mass grave was discovered in the Suqur area of Fallujah district of Anbar Governorate. On 22 December, a judge of the committee on mass graves in Anbar Governorate issued an order to preserve and protect the site and to postpone exhumation owing to technical constraints.

64. To commemorate Human Rights Day, UNAMI held events across Iraq on 10 December. Marking the global theme for 2019, "Youth standing up for human rights", UNAMI facilitated events in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Basrah and Mosul with young human rights defenders and activists. In Erbil, UNAMI distributed approximately 660 booklets containing the nine core international human rights treaties in the Sorani Kurdish language, the first known translation of those texts into the language.

65. Also on Human Rights Day, to mark the closure of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign, my Deputy Special Representative addressed political leaders and women activists in Halabjah, Kurdistan Region. Reflecting on gender-based violence against women and girls in Iraq, she praised the efforts by political and civil society actors to support the passage of anti-domestic violence legislation, which has not yet been submitted to the Council of Representatives for approval.

66. As part of a global initiative of the Human Rights Committee established under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on 26 December, UNAMI brought together 15 young activists (between the ages of 12 and 17) to discuss draft general comment No. 37 of the Human Rights Committee on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, relating to the interpretation of article 21 of the Covenant. Their insights will contribute to informing the drafting of general comment No. 37, which is expected to be finalized in 2020.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

67. As of 31 December 2019, there remained approximately 1.4 million internally displaced persons in Iraq. An estimated 4.6 million people have returned home after having been displaced by ISIL, but the sustainability of some of these returns remains in doubt, while development gains do not meet projected targets. During 2019, humanitarian partners reached just over 1.5 million people with some form of

assistance, or 85 per cent of the 1.75 million targeted in the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan. Over 100 humanitarian actors are working in 1,300 locations across Iraq, nearly a threefold increase in geographical scope from the beginning of 2019, reflecting expanded priorities beyond the in-camp internally displaced persons, who had been the focus during the period 2017–2018. The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan attracted \$641 million in funding, or 92 per cent of the \$701 million sought. The 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan seeks \$520 million to meet the acute needs of 1.77 million in-camp internally displaced persons, out-of-camp internally displaced persons and returnees in areas of high severity.

68. Notwithstanding notable successes during 2019, humanitarian operations in Iraq were significantly affected during the reporting period by the protests, as local government curfews, among other operational and security challenges, restricted the movements and activities of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

69. Coordination between humanitarian actors and relevant federal ministries was periodically interrupted during the reporting period. The disruption of coordination was particularly detrimental to humanitarian operations, as the mechanism for granting access authorization letters to non-governmental organizations was paused, with no alternative procedures put in place. As of mid-January, such organizations operating in Iraq did not have a centrally authorized way to pass through checkpoints and carry out vital aid delivery programming. Efforts were made by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and by partners during the reporting period to find local solutions to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

70. Despite operational and security challenges, the United Nations continued to support humanitarian and development efforts in Iraq, which also received significant numbers of Syrian refugees during the reporting period. As of 26 December, a total of 18,776 individuals had arrived in Iraq from the Syrian Arab Republic, the majority in the Kurdistan Region.

71. Following extensive advocacy by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Permanent Committee for Refugee Affairs in Iraq of the Ministry of Interior, the federal Government entity mandated to register and document refugees in Iraq, continued the process of registering Syrian refugees in the central and southern governorates, which had started in November 2019.

72. During the reporting period, humanitarian partners in Iraq undertook winterization efforts for internally displaced families. The shelter and non-food items cluster identified 84,000 internally displaced families who were in need of winter assistance support. Humanitarian partners provided essential winter kits, children's winter clothing, sealing-off kits for people living in critical shelter and tent replacements. Government authorities also provided kerosene, clothing and tents.

73. The United Nations continued to support stabilization efforts in Iraq. During the reporting period, 19 projects were completed through the Funding Facility for Stabilization. Completed projects included four cash-for-work projects, three in Ninawa Governorate and one in Kirkuk Governorate, which, together, provided livelihood opportunities to 918 people, including 320 women. The rehabilitation of 647 housing units in west Mosul was also completed. To date, the Facility has successfully completed the rehabilitation of 22,946 homes across Anbar and Ninawa Governorates.

74. In 2019, the Facility received \$260 million in contributions. It has now completed a total of 2,304 projects across the five Governorates in Iraq that were previously under the control of ISIL (Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din). Overall, the Facility delivered its highest level of financial assistance to date in 2019, at \$272.4 million, which included funding received in previous years. The

Facility's funding gap stands at \$205 million out of a total requirement of \$1.38 billion.

75. During the reporting period, the United Nations increased its efforts to support national capacities in the country's mine action sector. In December, a project for the employment of "mixed teams" on explosive hazard management, consisting of female and male members of both the Yazidi and Muslim communities in Sinjar, Ninawa Governorate, was successfully concluded. Based on the success of the project, the Mine Action Service developed a new operational model that prioritizes national ownership and more effective approaches to mine action.

76. On 5 December, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and representatives of employers' and workers' associations signed the first decent work country programme in Iraq, at a ceremony in Baghdad. The programme, which will run from 2019 to 2023, supports national initiatives to promote decent work and strengthen the country's capacity to mainstream decent work into social and economic policies. Under the programme, ILO will work with the Government and with workers and employer organizations to support national initiatives to prioritize private sector development, which will, in turn, support job creation, strengthen social protection, prevent and eliminate child labour, and improve social dialogue in order to promote rights at work.

77. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, supported the Ministry of Planning during the reporting period in strengthening the routine measurement of child poverty and the development of a national multidimensional poverty index. The index will be used to inform the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy of Iraq and as a tool to guide government social spending to better address poverty and inequality. To the same end, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning, Zain telecommunications company, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Food Programme, implemented an innovative model to estimate and map poverty using mobile data and satellite imagery, with the aim of providing poverty estimates in real time and informing an emergency response.

78. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) conducted a national stakeholder consultation to explore opportunities for the implementation in Iraq of Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) on youth and peace and security, and drafted a road map for future courses of action. Forty representatives of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, civil society organizations, government officials and youth from different parts of Iraq attended the two-day consultation, held on 5 and 6 December in Erbil. As a result, a coalition on youth and peace and security will be formed, comprising youth organizations, non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, and relevant government entities.

79. UNFPA also trained 268 young people on the prevention of violent extremism and peacebuilding in 10 governorates, during which they learned practical facilitation skills to prevent conflict and violence, and to design and implement campaigns on preventing violent extremism. Some 1,349 young people participated in activities that promote tolerance and peace among youth and equip them with techniques to address issues related to the prevention of violent extremism. The participants also developed action plans on preventing violent extremism for Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala and Najaf Governorates, which will be rolled out in 2020.

80. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization developed new training materials on the prevention of violent extremism through education, designed for use by primary school principals, teachers and parents. During the reporting period, 78 teachers and school managers, seven principals and

three officials from the Ninawa Directorate of Education were trained in the prevention of violent extremism through education. In late December, 300 parents enrolled for training programmes on the topic in Mosul.

81. The World Food Programme resumed a programme focused on school feeding in late December, which had been on hold since June 2018 pending the appointment of the Minister for Education and subsequent civil unrest that impeded student and staff access to schools. The school feeding programme will reach some 300,000 children in 1,200 schools in 11 governorates. It is fully funded by the Government of Iraq.

E. Security and operational issues

82. Throughout the reporting period, the Department of Safety and Security in Iraq continuously monitored developments across the country and implemented security risk management measures to enable continued United Nations operations. Regular security advisories and alerts were issued to keep United Nations personnel informed of precautionary measures. The risk of collateral damage to United Nations compounds in Baghdad was heightened by their proximity to key protest sites, as stray bullets hit the United Nations compound, without causing casualties or material damage.

83. The Government of Iraq enforced public access restrictions to the former International Zone during the reporting period. The perimeter and access points of the United Nations compounds in Baghdad have been reinforced. There were indirect fire incidents against the former International Zone on 4, 5, 8, 21 and 26 January.

84. During the reporting period, the Department of Safety and Security supported an average of 65 field missions per day across the country, with assessed risk levels ranging from medium to high. Close coordination with the host Government ensured the proper flow of information and the necessary security support for United Nations operations.

85. UNAMI 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.

IV. Observations

86. I am deeply concerned about the impact of increasing regional tensions on Iraq. With the assistance of the international community, Iraq has made significant progress in overcoming the threat of ISIL, enabling the country to focus more resources on fostering stabilization, reconstruction and development, and strengthening relations with countries in the region. Yet, on its path towards greater stability, Iraq still needs to overcome a number of political, security, humanitarian and economic challenges. As a result, the country can ill afford any action that risks undermining its fragile recovery.

87. This is a moment for all stakeholders to exercise maximum restraint and explore avenues for peaceful dialogue, negotiations, and renewed regional and international cooperation. I therefore appeal to all regional and international stakeholders to work with the Government of Iraq and to remain committed to supporting Iraq in its reconstruction and economic development, as a key element of political stabilization in Iraq and the region. The Iraqi people deserve a peaceful, prosperous and dignified future.

88. Human rights violations in the context of the ongoing demonstrations remain a grave concern. I urge all actors to refrain from violence and reiterate my call for the swift conduct of serious investigations into all acts of violence. Accountability is of

utmost importance. Continued impunity will generate further discontent. Impartial and transparent accountability processes for crimes committed in any context will prove crucial in promoting peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. I also remind the Iraqi authorities of their obligation to protect peaceful protesters, diplomatic and consular facilities and personnel, and public and private property.

89. Building a stable, secure and prosperous Iraq requires an effective and accountable Government committed to the rule of law, addressing corruption and strengthening viable and responsive State institutions. I hope the designation of a new Prime Minister will lead to the formation of a Government that will be able to take swift and effective action to develop and implement reforms that meet the aspirations of the Iraqi people.

90. Support for humanitarian operations in Iraq remains crucial. Humanitarian partners estimate that 4.1 million people in Iraq will require some form of humanitarian assistance in 2020, with 1.8 million considered to be in acute need. A solution to the access restrictions facing humanitarian partners is urgently required so that assistance can reach those in need. I also encourage Member States to contribute to the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan for Iraq, which seeks \$520 million to meet the acute needs of 1.77 million in-camp internally displaced persons, out-of-camp internally displaced persons and returnees in areas of high severity.

91. The preliminary agreement between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the federal Government on oil and revenue-sharing is encouraging. The negotiation process demonstrates that both parties can resolve outstanding issues through dialogue and negotiation. I encourage the parties to formalize the agreement without further delay and move on to address other outstanding issues, including the security structures and administrations of Kirkuk and Sinjar.

92. Current efforts to ensure free, credible, inclusive and participatory elections should continue. Inclusive political participation is essential during this challenging time. I welcome the adoption of the Law on the Independent High Electoral Commission and the appointment of a woman as the Chief Executive Officer of the Commission. I encourage the Council of Representatives to expedite the dissemination of the final text of the new law on elections to the Council and to clarify outstanding issues. The United Nations reiterates its readiness to continue working with the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission to strengthen electoral capacities. At the same time, I call on Member States to continue to provide the necessary support, including by devoting further resources towards electoral assistance, to ensure that the country's electoral reform process can be a success.

93. The contribution of women to ongoing reform discussions is not only an important driver for the advancement of women's rights, but also a necessity for more balanced decision-making that benefits all Iraqis.

94. The cooperation of the Supreme Judicial Council in facilitating the Mission's programme of trial observation is welcome. In order to address the needs of victims and their families for justice, accountability and reparation, I reiterate the vital need for fair trials, in line with the domestic legal framework of Iraq and its obligations under international law.

95. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my Special Representative, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and the United Nations staff in Iraq for their continued dedication to implementing the Organization's mandate under challenging circumstances. The United Nations remains strongly committed to supporting Iraq in building a peaceful, just and prosperous country.