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Electoral process in Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Mandate

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2576 \(2021\)](#), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to provide it with a detailed summary report on the electoral process in Iraq and the assistance provided by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for that process, no later than 30 days after the conclusion of the elections.

II. Electoral process in Iraq

A. Political and security developments

2. On 10 October 2021, Iraq held elections to the Council of Representatives, its fifth under the 2005 Constitution and the second following the military defeat of Da'esh. Advance special voting took place on 8 October for, inter alia, the security forces, internally displaced persons, prisoners and detainees.

3. The elections were conducted in advance of the constitutional deadline of May 2022, in response to widespread public calls for more inclusive representation, accountability and good governance.

4. Starting on 1 October 2019, demonstrations took place in Baghdad and several governorates in southern and central Iraq. They began as protests over corruption, unemployment and a lack of basic services and rapidly turned into calls for comprehensive reform of the political system. The countrywide demonstrations were marked by violence and excessive use of force. From 1 October 2019 to 30 April 2020, UNAMI and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights documented the death of at least 487 protesters and injuries to at least 7,715 people at protest sites.

5. Adil Abd Al-Mahdi resigned as Prime Minister on 1 December 2019, and the Council of Representatives confirmed Mustafa Al-Kadhimi as his successor on 7 May 2020. During his inaugural address, Mr. Al-Kadhimi described his Government as “transitional”, with the immediate task of prioritizing credible early elections.



6. Early elections were initially scheduled for 6 June 2021, but in order to allow sufficient time for technical preparations, and on the advice of the Independent High Electoral Commission, the Council of Ministers later approved the date of 10 October.

7. In response to public calls for independent and impartial electoral management as well as for more accessible and accountable elected representatives, the Council of Representatives passed legislation in December 2019 mandating an organizational restructuring of the Independent High Electoral Commission and adopting a single non-transferable vote system and smaller constituencies. Subsequent legislation was passed to delineate electoral districts, complete membership of the Federal Supreme Court and allocate a budget for electoral preparations.

8. In September 2021, most of the political leaders and candidates signed up to an electoral code of conduct, which sets out values and guidelines for ethical and professional conduct among all actors participating in the electoral process and is aimed at encouraging an environment that is conducive for voters and candidates. UNAMI supported the drafting and promotion of the code of conduct.

9. As the election date neared, prominent leaders increasingly emphasized the importance of broad electoral participation and an electoral environment that was conducive for both candidates and voters. On 29 September, the Office of Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani released a statement aimed at encouraging conscious and responsible participation in the elections, which remain “the safest way to cross the country into a future that is hoped to be better than the past”. The President, Barham Salih, together with the Prime Minister, political parties and the Iraqi Jurisprudence Council, among others, issued statements echoing the Grand Ayatollah’s calls.

10. Despite the many efforts to promote confidence in the electoral process, some parties maintained their withdrawal from the electoral race, claiming that conditions were not sufficiently conducive to their participation. On 27 August, Muqtada Al-Sadr announced his return to the electoral process, from which he had publicly withdrawn on 15 July.

11. On 7 October, the Council of Representatives dissolved itself, this being a constitutional requirement for the holding of elections.

12. The election involved the participation of 3,249 candidates, including 951 women (29 per cent). Overall, 21 coalitions presented 959 coalition candidates, 167 parties presented 1,501 candidates, while 789 candidates ran as independents.

13. The security environment of Iraq remained volatile during the electoral preparations. From 25 August to 9 October, a total of 157 attacks against the security forces were attributed to Da’esh, including an attack on 5 September in Kirkuk that resulted in the killing of 13 police officers. The continued intimidation and targeting of human rights defenders and civil society activists also highlighted the challenging pre-electoral security environment.

14. In order to enable the elections to be conducted in a safe and orderly fashion, the Government of Iraq and its security institutions adopted a stringent security plan for all governorates. From 2 October, all security units were placed on high alert for 10 days, with restrictions imposed on movement and public gatherings before and after the elections, alongside other security measures. Earlier, on 2 March, the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers had established a higher committee to promote and monitor the participation of women in elections and adopted measures to prevent and address violence against women candidates. These included the activation of free telephone hotlines to receive and respond to complaints from women candidates reporting harassment and violence.

B. Human rights overview

15. During the election campaign period, UNAMI documented instances of election-related violence. These consisted primarily of threats and intimidation against candidates and their campaign teams, both in person and online, as well as attacks on candidates and campaign meetings. For example, an attack by an unidentified gunman at a campaign gathering near a candidate's residence in Diyala Governorate on 3 October killed a member of the candidate's protection team and injured two other men. An explosive device detonated at a campaign event in Salah al-Din Governorate on 7 October, killing one boy and injuring four others. UNAMI did not record any discernible patterns of violations against specific groups or geographical areas.

16. As part of United Nations efforts to promote the protection of human rights during the elections, UNAMI conducted interviews and focus group discussions with women, minority and independent candidates, as well as human rights defenders, activists, journalists, lawyers and public officials. It met with Iraqi non-governmental organizations implementing civic and voter education activities aimed at women voters, internally displaced persons, young people and persons with disabilities. Overall, the vast majority of interlocutors did not report any direct human rights violations, but pointed to a broadly challenging political climate. Women candidates described a restrictive cultural environment that hindered effective campaigning, some reporting that they had received threats on social media. Minority and independent candidates reported difficulties in campaigning, fear of potential reprisal and insufficient financial and political support, as well as concerns about the overall security situation.

C. Electoral legal framework

17. The primary legislation regulating elections to the Council of Representatives consists of the Constitution of Iraq (2005), the new Council of Representatives Election Law (Law No. 9 of 2020), the new Independent High Electoral Commission Law (Law No. 31 of 2019) and the Law on Political Parties (Law No. 36 of 2015), as well as regulations and procedures adopted by the Independent High Electoral Commission.

18. According to article 49 of the Constitution, the number of parliamentary seats is calculated on the basis of the population of Iraq, at a ratio of 1 seat per 100,000 people. Under the new Council of Representatives Election Law, the previously established number of seats was maintained at 329, of which 83 (25 per cent) were reserved for women and 9 were allocated to the country's minority communities (5 for Christians and 1 each for Yazidis, Shabaks, Sabaeen Mandaean and Feyli Kurds). The law divides each governorate into constituencies, with a total of 83 countrywide. Each constituency is allotted three to five members of parliament, depending on its population. The new electoral system, known as a single non-transferable vote system, replaced the previous party-list system based on proportional representation.

19. The Law on Allocating and Financing the Expenditures of the Council of Representatives Elections (2020) allotted a budget of 329 billion dinars (approximately \$225 million) for the organization and holding of the elections on 10 October. The first amendment to Federal Supreme Court Law No. 30 (2005) completed the membership of the Federal Supreme Court, which ratifies the electoral results.

D. Electoral administration

20. According to the Independent High Electoral Commission Law, the Independent High Electoral Commission is a constitutional, independent and impartial public body with financial and administrative autonomy mandated to oversee, organize and conduct elections and referendums in Iraq. It adopts regulations, instructions and policies for the administration of elections and referendums and ensures their implementation. It is also empowered to promote an electoral culture, voter education and democratic practices. Under the Constitution, the Commission is subject to monitoring by the Council of Representatives.

21. The Independent High Electoral Commission is made up of a Board of Commissioners and an electoral administration. The Independent High Electoral Commission Law provided for the appointment of nine new commissioners by lottery, selected among candidates from the High Judicial Council (five members), the High Judicial Council of the Kurdistan Region (two members) and the State Council (two members). The current Board members (eight men and one woman) took office on 13 January 2020 and are serving for a non-renewable period of four years.

22. The electoral administration of the Independent High Electoral Commission consists of a national office in Baghdad, a regional office in Erbil in the Kurdistan Region and governorate electoral offices in the other governorates. The Commission employs around 4,000 permanent civil servants across Iraq, in addition to temporary staff during elections.

E. Voter registration

23. On 7 September 2020, the Independent High Electoral Commission started preparations to reopen biometric voter registration centres throughout Iraq to update the voter register with biometric information. At the time, 14.3 million voters (of the approximately 22.1 million registered voters in the Commission database) were already registered biometrically.¹ A total of 1,079 biometric voter registration centres were opened across the country on 2 January 2021.

24. Following advice from UNAMI, the Independent High Electoral Commission expanded its biometric registration coverage and sped up the distribution of voter cards ahead of the elections. It deployed approximately 890 mobile registration teams to bring the registration process closer to voters and launched public outreach and mobilization campaigns. The biometric update period ended on 15 April.

25. Over a seven-day period, lasting until 22 April, the Independent High Electoral Commission then organized the display of preliminary voter lists at voter registration centres, to allow for objections to be raised and corrections to be requested.

26. Upon completion of the biometric voter registration update, the Independent High Electoral Commission cleaned the voter registry by cross-checking and removing duplicate entries. According to provisional numbers provided by the Commission, some 2.7 million voters registered biometrically during the update period, resulting in a total of 17 million biometrically registered voters out of 22.1 million registered voters. On the basis of these data, around 77 per cent of voters were to be issued with biometric voter cards for use on polling day. The remaining 23 per

¹ The most recent population census of Iraq dates back to 1997. The accuracy of the population data used by the relevant authorities and institutions may therefore be in need of improvement. In the absence of a recent population census, the number of eligible voters is estimated at approximately 26 million on the basis of the Ministry of Trade public distribution system database, commonly known as the food ration card database.

cent could vote using electronic voter cards (which were non-biometric) in combination with additional photographic identification documents. Biometric voter cards were distributed through voter registration centres and mobile teams across the country until 5 October. While most cards were successfully distributed, around 1.7 million were not collected by voters and remain in the custody of the Commission.

F. Public outreach

27. To build public trust and inform voters about the electoral process, the Independent High Electoral Commission, with the support of UNAMI, launched a public outreach campaign that included content tailored to groups such as women, young people, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, minorities and the military. Information was disseminated on national television, other traditional media and social media and through many direct engagement activities. Regular press conferences were organized by the Commission and UNAMI, while #Vote4Iraq and #Ivoted campaigns were launched on social media to interact directly with voters. Thousands participated in live question-and-answer sessions organized by the Commission, in which electoral experts addressed issues such as filing complaints, special voting, the quota for women and campaigning.

28. More than 200 animated videos and infographics were developed, incorporating sign language interpretation for the first time, which was also provided at press conferences. Combating misinformation was also part of the Independent High Electoral Commission's efforts. Weekly meetings were held between the Commission, UNAMI and media outlets to discuss technical, procedural and policy issues. The Commission established a hotline to answer questions from voters and other stakeholders. Bulk short message service campaigns were also used to reach a maximum number of eligible voters. In addition, over 47 voter education projects, such as training courses and workshops, were implemented in all governorates by contracted civil society organizations to reach different groups of voters.

29. The Independent High Electoral Commission conducted three large-scale simulations of polling, counting and results transmission involving 2,179 polling stations throughout Iraq, which helped to identify outstanding technical issues in the run-up to election day while also increasing transparency. The second and third simulations were open events.

G. Polling

30. A special voting day was held on 8 October, 48 hours in advance of the general voting day, to allow specific categories of voters mentioned in article 39 of the Council of Representatives Election Law – including military and security forces (1,075,727 registered voters), internally displaced persons (120,126 registered voters) and prisoners and detainees (671 registered voters) – to cast their ballot for any of the 83 constituencies. Special voting was open only to those in possession of biometric voter cards. To prevent multiple voting, the voter cards were retained after the vote, until the general election day had ended.

31. For internally displaced voters, 309 polling stations were established in 86 polling centres throughout 17 governorates. Despite efforts to enfranchise internally displaced persons, some did not have sufficient documentation to apply for biometric registration.

32. On general election day (10 October), 55,041 polling stations opened in 8,273 polling centres. Voters were assigned to polling centres on the basis of updated voter

registration data. The serial numbers on the ballots issued to individual polling stations were recorded to ensure that any discrepancies could easily be detected. Ballots were printed with sequential serial numbers to enable precise tracking, and all ballots featured QR codes. Sensitive election materials were stored securely under the supervision of polling officers.

33. Each polling station was equipped with a voter verification device and a copy of the voter list for that station, as well as electronic counting, sorting and results transmission devices. The locking and unlocking of electronic devices and the registration of serial numbers took place in the presence of observers and representatives of political parties.

34. Upon entering the polling station, voters were required to present either a biometric voter card and undergo fingerprint verification or an electronic voter card along with a personal identification document. For those who presented an electronic voter card, fingerprint scans of all their fingers were required. Each voter then received a ballot paper and was required to sign the voter list. The voter verification device then captured and recorded the QR code of the ballot paper issued to the voter. These were matched with QR codes gathered by the ballot box optical scanner, to make sure that only issued ballots were cast. Indelible ink was also applied to voters' index fingers as a safeguard against multiple voting.

35. The Independent High Electoral Commission put in place numerous measures to tackle misuse of the (non-biometric) electronic voter cards. First, 1,500,000 undistributed electronic voter cards printed before 2014 were destroyed. Furthermore, all voters who used electronic voter cards were required to provide additional photographic identity documents on polling day, and their 10 fingerprints were scanned before the ballot papers were issued at the polling station. After election day, these were matched against the fingerprint scans stored in the national voter registry as a way to mitigate the risk of multiple voting. The matching process has been completed, and any violators are expected to be referred to the competent courts in accordance with legal procedures. After voting, the electronic voter cards were confiscated by the polling officers.

H. Vote count, tabulation and display

36. At the polling stations, ballots were counted electronically by an optical scanner attached to the ballot box. A results transmission system device was connected to each optical scanner to transmit the results to the Independent High Electoral Commission through a secure satellite link. All data were encrypted to prevent hacking. In addition to this results transmission system, back-up USB flash drives were collected from each polling station in order to ensure the accuracy of the results tabulation.

37. Furthermore, through a lottery witnessed by stakeholders (political party representatives, the media and election observers) and broadcast publicly on television, one polling station in each polling centre was selected for manual counting (a total of 8,960 polling stations). If the discrepancy between the initial electronic count and the manual count exceeded 5 per cent, all results from that polling centre were to be manually counted, and the manual count results would prevail. Once the count was completed, a copy of the results was posted for one day on the outer wall of each polling station for viewing by political entity agents, observers and the public. No discrepancies between the electronic and manual counts were reported for the 8,960 selected polling stations.

38. For stations that failed to transmit the results using either the results transmission system, or the USB flash drives, or both, a manual tabulation system was created, whereby the Independent High Electoral Commission cross-checked the

polling station ballots in question at the national manual counting centre in Baghdad in the presence of international and domestic observers and political party agents. After completing the cross-checks, the Commission would fill in results reconciliation forms and deliver them to its data centre, where they would be entered in a double-blind fashion (two data entry staff would enter the same form separately), with a verification phase in which another staff member would verify the data entered by the first two staff members. The results of both the electronic and the manual transmission systems were then reconciled in the results server to produce the electoral results. In cases of discrepancy, the data from the manual count would take precedence. The results were then published on the Commission's website and in the results display centres in real time as they were made available.

39. With the support of UNAMI, the Independent High Electoral Commission established results display centres at its headquarters and in all governorates. The centres were open to electoral stakeholders, including political parties and candidates' agents, international and national observers, civil society organizations and the media. This increased the level of transparency compared with previous elections.

40. For the first time, an independent international firm with extensive experience in election technology reviewed and audited all hardware and software, as well as the overall results management system. The company shared its reports with the Oversight and Audit Committee, which consists of members of relevant State institutions who monitor and evaluate the performance of the auditing company. The Committee will submit a report on its findings to the incoming Council of Representatives.

I. Security on election day

41. Although election-related violence was largely absent on election day, isolated security incidents resulted in some casualties. During the evening of 10 October, a suspected Da'esh gunman targeted a voting centre in the Rashad subdistrict of Kirkuk Governorate after it had closed, killing a police officer and wounding two others. A quarrel between supporters of opposing political parties in Maysan Governorate led to an altercation that resulted in the death of a civilian. Other reported security incidents on election day included an indirect fire attack on a polling station in Salah al-Din Governorate and a mortar attack near a polling station in Diyala Governorate, neither of which resulted in casualties or damage. On 10 October, the Security Media Cell of the Office of the Prime Minister announced that the election security plan had been a success.

J. Partial preliminary results

42. On 11 October, the Independent High Electoral Commission published partial preliminary results of the elections, covering 78 per cent of polling stations, on its website and at all results display centres. While the announcement was made within the time frame set by the Council of Representatives Election Law, the results of the 8,960 polling stations selected by lottery for manual counting were not included owing to a technical error.

43. The Independent High Electoral Commission included the results of 8,547 of the 8,960 polling stations selected by lottery for manual counting in its announcement of updated preliminary results on 13 October. The results of those stations had been received after the polls closed but were awaiting clearance in the system. While the results from the 8,547 stations were cleared and updated as part of the overall preliminary results, the remaining 413 stations were flagged for further verification

by the national manual counting centre, as they had failed to transmit their results using the results transmission system or USB flash drives.

44. Also on 13 October, the Independent High Electoral Commission started to cross-check the 3,681 polling stations that had experienced technical issues with electronic transmission (3,037 stations) or with the transfer of USB flash drives (504 stations) on election day, or both (140 stations). The cross-check and recount took place at the national manual counting centre in Baghdad, in accordance with the procedures adopted prior to election day. The process was completed on 16 October.

K. Consolidated preliminary results

45. On 16 October, at a press conference, the Independent High Electoral Commission declared that it had completed the counting of all polling stations and announced the full preliminary results from all 83 constituencies. It also stated that, with 9,602,876 actual voters among the 22,118,368 registered voters, turnout was 43 per cent.

46. The results remain subject to challenges and will not be final until ratified by the Federal Supreme Court. The Chair of the Board of Commissioners of the Independent High Electoral Commission stressed during the press conference that preliminary election results could be challenged within three days of their announcement.

L. Complaints and appeals

47. According to the Independent High Electoral Commission Law, the Board of Commissioners has exclusive authority to address allegations of electoral irregularities throughout the electoral process, including with regard to candidate registration, the campaign period, polling and counting, and the publication of preliminary results. The Law, as well as regulations and procedures that the Commission has developed, sets out the complaints and adjudication processes. According to its provisions, voters as well as agents of political parties, coalitions and candidates have the right to file a complaint in the case of perceived electoral violations. The Board is vested with the authority to adjudicate in all electoral complaints.

48. Decisions of the Independent High Electoral Commission on complaints are to be published on its website within three days of their issuance. Appeals against these decisions may be filed within three days of publication and will be decided on by the Electoral Judicial Panel, which comprises three judges. Once the Panel has ruled on all appeals (no specific deadline is provided in current regulations), the Commission will submit the final results to the Federal Supreme Court for ratification. The timeline for ratifying the final election results is not fixed.

49. As at 21 October, the Independent High Electoral Commission had recorded a total of 398 election day complaints, which it classified under three categories: green (no influence on the outcome), yellow (dismissed on formal grounds) and red (potential impact on the outcome). The Commission's classification committees processed the 398 election day complaints, with 10 classified as red, 217 as yellow and 138 as green. A total of 33 complaints had not yet been classified.

50. A total of 1,436 challenges have been received against the preliminary results announced, which will be submitted to the Electoral Judicial Panel along with the proper documentation, including the legal, procedural and operational reasoning of the Independent High Electoral Commission in each case.

M. Ratification of final results

51. The Constitution of Iraq sets out the process for ratifying election results. It vests in the Federal Supreme Court the authority to ratify the final results of elections to the Council of Representatives. Ratification takes place after the adjudication of all appeals. The timeline for ratification is not fixed: for instance, it took 85 days from polling day in 2010, 47 days in 2014 and 99 days in 2018.

N. Electoral observation

52. The Independent High Electoral Commission accredited a total of 1,891 international observers (including national support staff), 160,148 domestic observers and 495,733 political party representatives.

53. Preliminary statements were issued by international observers, notably the European Union and the League of Arab States, which issued statements on 12 and 11 October, respectively; and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation issued a press release on 31 October. These were published them on their respective websites.

III. Mandate and activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

54. At the request of the Government of Iraq (see [S/2021/135](#)) and pursuant to Security Council resolution [2576 \(2021\)](#), UNAMI was mandated to advise, support and assist the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission with efforts to plan and execute genuinely free and fair Iraqi-led, Iraqi-owned elections.

55. In addition to the enhanced provision of technical electoral assistance and advice pursuant to Security Council resolution [2522 \(2020\)](#), and taking into account the request of the Government of Iraq for additional support, the Council decided that UNAMI should provide a strengthened, robust and visible United Nations team, with additional staff, in advance of the election in Iraq, to monitor election day with the broadest geographic coverage possible.

56. UNAMI was also mandated to engage and coordinate with international and regional third-party observers invited by the Government of Iraq and to launch a United Nations strategic messaging campaign to educate, inform and update Iraqi voters on election preparations and United Nations activities in support of elections in advance of and on election day.

A. Technical electoral assistance of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

57. To implement its enhanced electoral assistance mandate, UNAMI, in coordination with the United Nations Development Programme, developed a project entitled "Support to Iraq's electoral process". A total contribution of \$32.4 million from 11 donors enabled UNAMI to implement the two phases of the project. Phase I was focused on capacity-building of the Independent High Electoral Commission, while phase II provided for direct technical support in preparation for the elections in Iraq.

58. As at 1 October, the United Nations had 160 electoral technical assistance personnel in Iraq, of whom 49 were international and 111 were national staff, a

fivefold increase on its technical electoral assistance compared with the 2018 elections. Technical assistance activities were provided to the headquarters of the Independent High Electoral Commission as well as its 19 governorate electoral offices, working from UNAMI regional hubs in Baghdad, Basrah, Erbil, Kirkuk and Ninawa.

59. Areas of electoral assistance included support for the development of electoral regulations and procedures for, inter alia, the nomination and registration of candidates, electoral campaigning, real-time results tabulation and the processing and adjudication of electoral complaints and appeals. Furthermore, UNAMI assisted in the recruitment and training of polling staff, the development of public outreach campaigns, voter registration, the implementation of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) mitigation measures, the procurement of electoral materials (including the printing of ballot papers), the establishment of results display centres, simulations in advance of election day and support for the conduct of the independent audit.

60. Following the elections, UNAMI and the Independent High Electoral Commission will engage in an exercise to determine lessons learned, with the objective of further developing and strengthening the Commission's capacity.

B. Monitoring of election day

61. In line with its mandate, UNAMI, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Project Services, deployed 150 United Nations international electoral experts and approximately 550 national support personnel in advance of and on election day. The planned project budget was \$15,811,008.

62. A preparatory team was deployed to Baghdad two months prior to the elections to develop the monitoring methodology and begin operational preparations. Four weeks before the elections, five regional teams were deployed to UNAMI hubs in Baghdad, Basrah, Kirkuk, Mosul and Erbil to prepare the ground for the short-term deployment of experts, while establishing the monitoring presence in the area of responsibilities. United Nations electoral experts arrived one week before the elections and were deployed in all 18 governorates. They monitored both the special voting day and the general election day.

63. During the special voting day, United Nations experts visited 79 polling stations in 25 polling centres. No major irregularities were reported. Overall, in the polling stations visited, procedures were generally respected by polling staff and voters could cast their ballot in an orderly manner. In a limited number of cases, voter verification devices did not recognize voters' fingerprints. Voters whose fingerprints were not recognized were not allowed to cast a ballot.² The preliminary results of the special voting day were announced on 11 October, on the same day as the first (partial) preliminary results of the regular voting.

64. On the general election day, United Nations experts monitored 1,108 polling stations in 301 polling centres in all 18 governorates. Election day was generally peaceful. In stations monitored by United Nations experts, polling was generally well managed. Most polling stations opened on time, although delays were encountered in several stations owing to the lengthy set-up time or to technical issues associated with

² Individual physical characteristics such as physically damaged, calloused or dirty fingers may result in failures. In other incidents, failure to recognize a person's fingerprints could be attributed to the voter verification device or to issues with the person's registration.

the activation of optical scanners,³ which were resolved by the Independent High Electoral Commission later in the morning. Furthermore, as was the case during the special voting day, voter verification devices did not recognize voters' fingerprints in a limited number of cases. According to the preliminary findings of the United Nations experts, such incidents affected older persons and women in particular. Overall, at polling centres visited by United Nations experts, procedures were generally respected by polling staff and voters could cast their ballots in an orderly manner.

65. A detailed analysis of all collected data will be published by UNAMI in due course.

C. Strategic communications

66. UNAMI strategic messaging campaigns sought to educate, inform and update Iraqi voters on election preparations, as well as related United Nations activities. They were also aimed at building public trust, spreading knowledge and tackling misinformation.

67. Under the slogan "Your country. Your future. Your vote", and with the hashtag #Vote4Iraq, UNAMI engaged in human-centred storytelling projects, thereby providing a platform for the Iraqi electorate, especially women, young people and voters with disabilities, to share their views on how voting could advance their goals. To demonstrate international support, the projects also underlined the work of United Nations personnel, including by increasing the visibility of election monitors through photographic and video coverage.

68. Tools used during the campaign included: approximately 900 social media posts (in Arabic, Kurdish and English, on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube); 40 murals in 11 governorates; 20 web stories; 14 videos; nine fact sheets; various media interviews by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq; two press conferences; one digital dialogue moderated by the Special Representative; one online workshop for young people; promotional materials, such as #Vote4Iraq T-shirts, stickers and buttons; and engagement with Iraqi artists and influencers. Collectively, all social media posts earned more than 3.8 million impressions on UNAMI social media channels alone.

69. The multilingual fact sheets, which were featured prominently on the UNAMI election web page, disseminated widely on social media and accompanied by regular reports on electoral preparations and processes, covered topics such as the new technologies being rolled out to improve the voting process and the specific types of operational support being provided by the United Nations to the Independent High Electoral Commission. Other themes included the complaints and appeals process, the quota for women, the role of international electoral observers and the participation of internally displaced persons.

70. To complement the detailed information provided in the fact sheets and reports, social media-friendly videos were produced in Arabic, Kurdish and English to convey messaging in a more user-friendly manner. They explained the many technical areas in which the United Nations was supporting the Independent High Electoral Commission; the importance of simulations in preparing for the elections and United Nations assistance in that regard; the specific actions that the Commission was taking to prevent the misuse of electronic voter cards; and how these elections differed from

³ Once the system has been activated, it cannot be turned off and on again without receiving a new one-time password from the Independent High Electoral Commission, this being one of the measures taken to mitigate the risk of fraud.

past ones, given such factors as the new electoral system, the introduction of results display centres and the expanded role of the United Nations.

71. Communications were frequently adjusted on the basis of feedback from Iraqi audiences, including on misperceptions of the electoral assistance role of the United Nations. For example, in a digital dialogue that the Special Representative conducted with Iraqi voters on 13 September, parts of which were covered live on local and regional television networks, 52 per cent of participants incorrectly thought that the United Nations was organizing and supervising the elections. Messaging to combat that misunderstanding was reinforced and clarified the Organization's electoral assistance role.

D. Coordination of and support to international observers

72. The Independent High Electoral Commission, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, invited embassies and international organizations to send electoral observers for the elections to the Council of Representatives. A total of 75 entities received invitations, namely 54 embassies and 21 international organizations, including the European Union, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

73. As mandated by the Security Council, UNAMI engaged and coordinated with international and regional third-party observers. It liaised with third-party observers and the Government of Iraq on logistical and security support, including for observation accreditation, vehicles, accommodation and security arrangements. Only the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the League of Arab States submitted requests for logistical support, sharing their operational plans and needs with UNAMI. In response, UNAMI helped to secure accreditation and observation badges for their observers. It provided the League of Arab States with two briefing sessions and helped the League to establish contacts with the Independent High Electoral Commission, the European Union Election Observation Mission and domestic observer organizations.

74. The European Union deployed a long-term observation mission, consisting of 20 long-term and 81 short-term international observers, with teams in 11 of the 18 governorates. The League of Arab States deployed 17 international observers for the elections in the governorates of Baghdad, Basrah, Najaf, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Diyala, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation deployed a five-member observation team in Baghdad.

75. The Governments of Australia, Brazil, India, Lebanon, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Russian Federation and Turkey, among others, responded to the Independent High Electoral Commission's invitation and deployed observer teams on election day, comprising existing embassy staff who handled their own logistics and security arrangements.

IV. Observations

76. The 2021 elections were the fifth parliamentary elections held in Iraq under the 2005 Constitution and the second since the military defeat of Da'esh in 2017. The holding of the elections reaffirmed the strong commitment of the Government and people of Iraq to the fundamental democratic principle that vests the authority of government in the will of the people as the best hope for political, economic and social progress.

77. I commend the courage and determination of all Iraqis who participated in the elections, including those internally displaced persons who cast their ballot despite the difficult conditions that they were facing. I also pay tribute to the participation of women as voters and candidates in the election. Preliminary election results suggest that there will be a historic number of women in the Council of Representatives, surpassing the 25 per cent quota.

78. The elections took place in a challenging environment. I acknowledge the essential role played by the Government and security forces of Iraq in ensuring a largely peaceful and orderly electoral process. The Independent High Electoral Commission, with a large number of new managers and electoral staff, has demonstrated that it was able to conduct an electoral process within constitutional timelines, despite a number of complex operational challenges.

79. In a commendable effort to increase the transparency of and confidence in the electoral process, the Independent High Electoral Commission implemented a significant number of technical and procedural improvements, such as an independent audit of software and hardware; wide-scale public polling simulations; methods to more accurately and securely count, tabulate and transmit results; real-time publication of preliminary results; banning of cameras and phones in voting booths; manual counting of at least one polling station in each polling centre to compare manual and electronic results; and manual counting of all polling stations in a given polling centre if results differed by more than 5 per cent.

80. I further welcome the international community's response to the call by the Government of Iraq for electoral observation assistance and other support, including from the European Union, the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and individual Member States, which dispatched their own international electoral observers to Iraq. The large number of domestic election observers participating in these elections also demonstrates the dedication of Iraqi citizens to democratic principles.

81. As the competent electoral bodies work towards ratifying the final election results, I urge all political parties, candidates and other stakeholders to exercise patience and address any outstanding concerns, including claims regarding alleged electoral fraud, through established legal channels and within applicable timelines, as well as in accordance with the code of conduct for the electoral process. This implies refraining from making threats and spreading misinformation about national authorities, including the Independent High Electoral Commission, the electoral process or the international support provided in advance of and on election day.

82. In the same context, I call on all stakeholders, political parties and candidates to create a post-electoral environment that fosters mutual understanding and national unity through peaceful and constructive dialogue. The next priority is the expeditious formation of an inclusive Government that is able to address the needs and aspirations of all Iraqis, including women, young people and marginalized communities. The new Government will have a solemn responsibility to deliver on reforms that lead to more effective governance exercised by more accountable institutions, capable of providing better basic services, combating corruption and building a diversified and equitable economy.

83. The relatively modest voter turnout underscores the need to further invest in promoting a democratic culture and trust in the democratic processes and institutions of Iraq. In particular, it will be important for the Iraqi political leadership to reach out to those Iraqis who did not participate in the elections out of disinterest, disillusionment or a general lack of trust. In this regard, the improvement in processes, procedures and transparency in the recent elections as well as lessons

learned for future electoral improvement can serve as stepping stones on a longer path towards regaining public trust.

84. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and all the United Nations staff who played a role in providing electoral assistance for the Iraqi parliamentary elections on 10 October, including those from the United Nations country team and notably the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office for Project Services.
