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Background Information
January 2009

Provincial Elections in Iraq, 31 January 2009

The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) will hold provincial, or “governorate council” elections in Iraq later this week.

The 31 January governorate council elections will be the first of several election activities organized by the IHEC in 2009. Contests for 14 governorate councils will take place across Iraq on that day, while governorate council elections for the Kurdistan Region and Kirkuk will be set at a later stage. (IDPs who have registered to vote in absentia will vote on 31 January in those governorates as well.)

The January elections will be implemented on the basis of the 2008 Election Law, passed by the Iraq Council of Representatives. This is a new election system for Iraq – using an open list system, by which voters choose not only a party, but also specific candidates.

More than 14,500 candidates have been approved by the Justice and Accountability Commission (“De Baathification Commission”) and certified by the IHEC to run in the January elections. The Election Law also provides special measures to ensure the participation of women, and nearly 4000 women have been certified to run.

Approximately 15 million individuals have registered to vote for the governorate council elections. The voter registry – originally drawn from the public distribution system (or food ration database) was updated over the summer and in November 2008. IDPs have been given the opportunity to vote in absentia.

The IHEC has implemented several new measures to mitigate fraud, including by printing the final voter lists at the polling station level. The IHEC has been implementing an extensive public outreach programme to ensure that all voters know the location of their polling stations.

In addition, the IHEC has increased the number of polling stations, with nearly 42,000 stations in some 7,000 locations across all 18 governorates. Predetermined locations will be available for registered IDPs. There will be no out-of-country voting.

Voters falling within a special category (i.e. Iraqi Security Forces, detained and hospitalised voters) will be able to cast their ballot on 28 January, by conditional ballot.

Security for the election process will be provided largely by the Iraqi Security Forces, supported in some locations by international forces.

Ballots will be counted at the polling stations under observation by domestic observer groups and political party agents. The International Reconstruction Fund Facility (also known as the Iraq Trust Fund) has funded nongovernmental agencies to train up to 60,000 domestic observers.

The ballots of IDPs and others who voted on 28 January will be held in secure counting centres in governorate capitals and counted together with all other ballots.

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