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Background Information
January 2009

Role of UNAMI in the Governorate Council Elections

On Saturday 31 January 2009, Iraq will hold Governorate Council elections in 14 of its 18 provinces, while Governorate Council elections for the Kurdistan Region and Kirkuk governorate will be set at a later stage. However, polling will take place in these governorates in special polling centres to accommodate Internally Displaced People (IDPs) who have registered to vote in absentia.

These elections are of great importance, since the Iraqi constitution grants the local councils a fundamental role in administering the affairs of the respective provinces. The election of Governorate Council members who truly represent the interests of all the major communities in Iraq will be a significant advance in Iraq's democratization which will again be furthered by the parliamentary elections scheduled for the end of 2009.

Approximately 15 million individuals have registered to vote for the upcoming Governorate Council elections. A voter registration update was held over the summer and in late November 2008, to update the voter registry and provide an opportunity for voters to move their polling location. IDPs were given the opportunity to register to vote in absentia for their governorate of origin. The Final Voter List is drawn from the Public Distribution System database (also known as the "food ration database"). Approximately 2.9 million Iraqis turned out for the voter registration update. Over 14,500 candidates from over 400 political party entities stand for nomination. Seven thousand polling centers and 42,000 polling stations were established throughout Iraq for the Governorate Council elections.

It is expected that over 250,000 accredited domestic observers and political entity agents will be deployed in polling facilities throughout the country. Representatives of international organizations, diplomatic missions, political entities and media organizations have also been accredited as observers.

The January elections will be implemented on the basis of the 2008 Election Law, passed by the Council of Representatives. These elections will see a new election system – an open list system that will allow voters to choose not only the party for which they wish to vote but also a specific candidate. The Election Law provides special measures to ensure that many women will be elected to the Governorate Councils. Nearly 4,000 women have been certified to run.

UNAMI operates under Security Council Resolution 1830 that mandates the UN to advise, support, and assist the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) on the development of processes for holding elections and referenda. UNAMI focuses on capacity and institution building of the IHEC and heads the International Electoral Assistance Team (IEAT) which is comprised of international advisors from organizations such as UNOPS, UNDP, Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna and IFES. All partners fall under the umbrella of the IEAT led by UNAMI's Chief Technical Adviser. UNAMI electoral advisers seek to disseminate best practices for electoral administration with the view of helping the IHEC to undertake elections that will be seen as credible and accepted by the Iraqi people. The IEAT strives to support processes that enhance the independence, transparency and credibility of the IHEC's work.

The law forming the IHEC states that the Commission should seek assistance from the UN on the different stages of preparation and conduct of elections and referenda. In addition, the IHEC has invited UNAMI to provide logistical and technical support and to participate in the development of the institutional capacity of the Commission.

UNAMI's electoral experts work within the Commission itself, providing their Iraqi counterparts with technical support and advice, as required, on a day-to-day basis. Ahead of the latest elections, UNAMI has provided the IHEC with advice and assistance on a broad range of electoral issues including its nationwide revamping of the voter registry in order to increase accuracy and reduce the potential for multiple voting. The

Mission has also conducted training workshops and study trips for IHEC managers; assisted the Commission in carrying out a transparent selection process for the heads of provincial electoral offices; and helped IHEC strengthen its procurement practices.

Furthermore, UNAMI worked to build consensus within Iraq's Council of Representatives on the Election Law passed unanimously on 24 September 2008. The key issue of minority representation was subsequently addressed in the form of an amendment to the law which calls for component reserved seats in three key governorates. Iraq's new election law also provides for an open list and for the election of women candidates to office.

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