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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 21 February 2020 ([S/2020/140](#)) and the briefing to the Council by my Special Representative for Iraq and Head of UNAMI on 3 March 2020.

II. Summary of key political developments

A. Political situation

2. Political developments during the reporting period were dominated by the process of forming a Government amid the growing impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Iraq.

3. On 1 March, the Prime Minister-designate, Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi, withdrew his candidacy for the premiership after extended consultations with political blocs following his nomination on 1 February. In a letter to the President, Barham Salih, Mr. Allawi underlined his attempts to form an independent Government and attributed his decision to withdraw to insufficient political support for his candidacy. On the same day, the President issued a statement in which he pledged to select another candidate within the 15-day constitutional timeline.

4. On 2 March, the caretaker Prime Minister, Adil Abd Al-Mahdi, addressed a letter to the President and to the Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mohammed al-Halbousi, explaining that he was voluntarily stepping down from most of his official duties. He clarified that matters assigned to him in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces would remain under his purview.

5. Following the withdrawal of Mr. Allawi's candidacy, consultations among political blocs on the selection of a new candidate for the premiership resumed. On 16 March, a committee established by seven Shia political blocs to select a new candidate and submit their nomination to the President announced that it had failed



to reach consensus. The following day, the President announced the appointment of Adnan al-Zurfi as Prime Minister-designate through a presidential decree.

6. Following his appointment, Mr. Al-Zurfi delivered a televised address setting out a number of pledges that included preparing for early elections, containing the COVID-19 outbreak, adopting the 2020 federal budget, protecting demonstrators and responding to their demands, and distancing Iraq from external conflict.

7. On 17 March, four Shia political blocs issued a statement in which they rejected the designation of Mr. Al-Zurfi by the President as unconstitutional because Mr. Al-Zurfi had not been nominated by the largest political bloc in the Council of Representatives. They noted that they would use all available means to prevent the process from moving forward.

8. Despite Mr. Al-Zurfi's extensive engagement with a large segment of the country's political actors, leaders of political blocs failed to reach agreement on moving forward with his nomination. In the absence of consensus, the blocs held consultations on the selection of a possible replacement for Mr. Al-Zurfi. On 5 April, Shia political leaders agreed to nominate Mustafa al-Kadhimi. On 9 April, Mr. Al-Zurfi announced his decision to withdraw his candidacy to preserve the "unity and higher interest" of Iraq. On the same day, the President tasked Mr. Al-Kadhimi with forming a new Government. The President noted the political consensus in favour of the nomination and, in line with the Constitution, granted Mr. Al-Kadhimi a period of up to 30 days to form a Cabinet and obtain the confidence of the Council of Representatives.

9. On the day of his designation, Mr. Al-Kadhimi pledged to form a Government that would prioritize the aspirations and demands of the Iraqi people. In a televised address, he elaborated on his priorities, which included addressing the COVID-19 health crisis, bringing arms under State control, strengthening the economy, protecting demonstrators, balancing external relations, safeguarding Iraqi sovereignty from external interference and securing the return of internally displaced persons to their places of origin. The parliamentary women's affairs committee called upon Mr. Al-Kadhimi to reintroduce the previously abolished post of Minister of Women and to appoint women to no less than one third of the ministerial positions in the Cabinet.

10. As efforts to form a Government were ongoing, the State authorities increasingly focused on addressing the emerging COVID-19 health crisis and its implications for the country. The crisis cell established by the Government on 26 January through Executive Order No. 55 assumed responsibility for the oversight of precautionary and treatment-related operations and the preparation and submission of associated recommendations. The cell put in place a range of preventive measures to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. The measures included the imposition of mandatory stay-at-home orders across Iraq; the banning of all pilgrimages and religious ceremonies; the suspension of all commercial passenger flights; the closure of all land borders, allowing only for essential trade; and the transfer of \$50 million to the Ministry of Health for COVID-19-related purchases. A curfew was imposed in Baghdad from 17 March and was to remain in effect until at least 23 April. However, on 19 April, the cell announced that, from 21 April to 22 May, the curfew would be partially lifted between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. for five days a week, and that a complete curfew would be in effect on Fridays and Saturdays. The ban on internal and external travel remains in place.

11. A separate COVID-19 crisis cell set up by the Council of Representatives became operational on 22 March. Recommendations issued by the body included the expedited purchase of medical equipment, the provision of support to security forces in curfew enforcement and the facilitation of the return of Iraqis from abroad.

12. On 27 March, a COVID-19-related ministerial-level high committee for national health and safety, chaired by the caretaker Prime Minister, was also established. On the same day, the President launched a national initiative to mobilize national and grass-roots-level efforts to counter COVID-19. On 7 April, the Committee allocated 600 billion dinars (\$500 million) to mitigate the economic impact of the curfew on approximately 10 million affected citizens over the next two months. The Government also postponed the collection of food ration fees and rent on public land for a three-month period.

13. Meanwhile, the Kurdistan Regional Government, after restricting internal and cross-border movement on 22 February, imposed, on 13 March, a curfew that would remain in effect until at least 23 April. Airports in the Kurdistan Region were closed as from 17 March. On 29 March, the presidency of the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region announced the suspension of parliamentary sessions.

14. Political and religious leaders supported government efforts related to COVID-19. On 10 March, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issued a statement in which he called upon the public to adhere to the instructions issued by the authorities. He reiterated this message through a televised address to the nation delivered by one of his representatives on 20 March.

15. The COVID-19 outbreak led to a near-total suspension of protests across the country. Demonstrators announced the partial suspension of their protests starting from 17 March, in an effort to prevent the spread of the pandemic. Notwithstanding, reports of arrests and violence against demonstrators and activists outside protest sites, and of sporadic clashes between protesters and security forces, continued in Baghdad and Diwaniyah, and in Dhi Qar Governorate.

16. On 1 April, the Ministry of Oil announced that crude oil exports in March had exceeded 104.683 million barrels (an average of 3.376 million barrels per day), a slight decrease from 3.415 million barrels per day in February. Iraqi oil revenues in March were \$2.5 billion lower than in February, owing to a 45 per cent reduction in oil prices in March.

17. On 12 April, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other major oil-producing countries agreed to cut their collective oil output by 9.7 million barrels per day from May, in an effort to stabilize declining global oil prices. The Minister of Oil of Iraq, Thamir al-Ghadban, announced that the agreement required oil producers to cut their production by 23 per cent, which for Iraq meant a reduction of 1.06 million barrels per day. He added that the production cut would apply throughout Iraq, including to oil operations in the Kurdistan Region. On 19 April, the Chief of Staff of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Omed Sabah, stated that a delegation of that Government had met in Baghdad with the Minister of Oil of Iraq and that both sides had agreed to reduce oil production in accordance with the agreement of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

18. Meanwhile, in the Kurdistan Region, the pension reform bill passed by the Parliament of the Kurdistan Region on 16 January was signed by the President of the Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, on 4 February and came into force on 7 April. On 7 February, the Kurdistan Regional Government had established two committees to facilitate the implementation of the law.

19. On 13 February, the new Leadership Council of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, elected on 24 December 2019, approved 77 by-laws, including by-laws on the determination of the leadership structure of the Union. The Council completed the party's leadership reform by electing Bafel Jalal Talabani and Lahur Sheikh Jangi Talabani as its co-leaders on 18 February, along with a new 17-member politburo on 10 March.

20. During the reporting period, political disagreements emerged between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Between 13 and 18 April, the leaders of the two parties issued statements in which they expressed policy differences over security-related and governance issues. On 20 April, the President of the Kurdistan Region stated that efforts were being made to resolve political differences, and called upon all political parties in the Kurdistan Region to prioritize unity.

B. Relations between Baghdad and Erbil

21. Baghdad and Erbil continued their engagement to resolve outstanding issues related to natural resources, revenue-sharing and security arrangements. As at 21 April, the preliminary agreement on oil and revenue-sharing announced on 25 November 2019 had not been confirmed.

22. Despite decreasing oil prices, Baghdad and Erbil continued to affirm that the disbursement of salaries to government employees would not be affected. The Kurdistan Regional Government announced on 26 March that the federal Ministry of Finance had sent the budget share for the salaries of civil servants of the Kurdistan Region to the Central Bank branch in Erbil, noting that civil servants would continue to receive their salaries.

23. Cooperation between the federal and regional authorities on security matters continued. The Minister of Peshmerga Affairs of the Kurdistan Region, Shorsh Ismael, travelled to Baghdad on 24 February and met with the federal Minister of Defence, Najah al-Shammari, to discuss the payment mechanism for Peshmerga forces' salaries and joint operations against remnants of so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). During his visit, Mr. Ismael also met with the President of Iraq to review political and security developments, including Baghdad-Erbil relations.

C. Security situation

24. Remnants of ISIL continued to launch frequent asymmetric attacks against the Iraqi people and security forces, particularly in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din Governorates. The Iraqi security forces continued to pursue ISIL cells throughout these areas. ISIL had doubled its kinetic activity, claiming 370 incidents since January 2020 compared with 187 incidents during the same period in 2019.

25. On 11 March, 18 rockets were fired at Camp Taji, an Iraqi military camp hosting international counter-ISIL coalition forces, causing the deaths of 1 member of the British military and 2 members of the military of the United States of America and wounding 14 others, according to statements by the Iraqi Joint Operations Command and the coalition. The senior political leadership of Iraq immediately condemned the attack. The caretaker Prime Minister ordered an investigation to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice, while both the President and the Speaker of the Council of Representatives reaffirmed that the counter-terrorism operations in Iraq of the coalition were conducted at the invitation of the Government of Iraq. On 12 March, the United States Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, stated that the United States would not tolerate attacks against its personnel, interests or allies, and would "take any action necessary" to protect its forces in Iraq and the region.

26. On 13 March, the United States conducted targeted air strikes against a number of locations in Iraq. In a statement, the Department of Defense asserted that five munitions depots linked to the Forty-Sixth Brigade of the Popular Mobilization

Forces, affiliated with Kata'ib Hizbullat, had been targeted to "significantly degrade" the Brigade's "ability to conduct future attacks against Operation Inherent Resolve ... coalition forces". In a subsequent press briefing, the Commander of the United States Central Command, General Kenneth McKenzie, stated that the United States had "acted in self-defense in response to a direct and deliberate attack".

27. In identical letters dated 16 March addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2020/213), the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations stated that the air strikes conducted by the United States on 13 March had targeted three positions of the Iraqi security forces, including the headquarters of the Forty-Sixth Brigade of the Popular Mobilization Forces, as well as Karbala' International Airport. In the letter, the Permanent Representative stated that the air strikes had resulted in the deaths of a civil servant working at the airport and five members of the Iraqi security and police forces, as well as injuries to several members of the security forces, including the Popular Mobilization Forces. The Permanent Representative also stated that the Government of Iraq condemned "in the strongest possible terms" the air strikes, describing them as a violation of "the sovereignty of Iraq and the provisions of international law".

28. On 14 March, the Iraqi Joint Operations Command reported that rockets had landed in Camp Taji, in what it described as "another blatant attack" and "hostile act". On the same day, the international counter-ISIL coalition reported that at least 25 rockets had struck the camp and had injured three coalition and two Iraqi military personnel. The Joint Operations Command pledged to hold to account those responsible for the attack and urged external actors not to take response measures without the approval of the Government of Iraq. On 15 March, during a telephone conversation with the caretaker Prime Minister, the United States Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo, stated that the groups responsible for the attacks should be held accountable. On the following day, the Joint Operations Command confirmed that two rockets had landed inside the Basmayah training camp, south-east of Baghdad, which hosts members of the Iraqi security forces, the coalition and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. No casualties were reported.

29. On 17 March, Usbat al-Tha'irin, a new group identifying itself as a "Shia resistance movement against the presence of the United States in Iraq", released a video in which it claimed responsibility for the indirect fire attacks against Camp Taji on 11 and 14 March, as well as those against the Basmayah training camp on 16 March, and pledged to continue to carry out hostile acts.

30. On 16 March, a spokesperson for the international counter-ISIL coalition announced that, as a result of the success of the Iraqi security forces in the fight against ISIL, the coalition would relocate troops from smaller bases, which would remain under Iraqi control. On 20 March, the coalition issued a statement in which it noted two reasons for the relocation: long-planned adjustments to reflect success in the campaign against ISIL and short-term moves to protect the force during the COVID-19 pandemic. The coalition added that, to prevent the potential spread of COVID-19, the Iraqi security forces had suspended all training and that, as a result, the coalition would temporarily return some of its training-focused forces to their own countries in the coming days and weeks.

31. On 17, 26 and 29 March and 4 and 7 April, respectively, the international counter-ISIL coalition transferred responsibility for the following bases to the Iraqi security forces: Qa'im base, Anbar Governorate; Qayyarah Airfield West, Ninawa Governorate; the coalition compound within the K1 Iraqi Airbase, Kirkuk Governorate; the Taqaddum (Habbaniyah) Airbase, Anbar Governorate; and the Abu Ghurayb operating base in western Baghdad. The coalition gifted equipment to

the Iraqi security forces at all five locations. On 30 March, coalition forces withdrew from the Ninawa Operations Command compound in Mosul, Ninawa Governorate.

32. Throughout the handover process, the international counter-ISIL coalition emphasized that, while repositioning to fewer bases, its forces would remain in Iraq at the invitation of the Government and would continue counter-ISIL support, advisory and training operations. The coalition stated that the handover of bases had been “long-planned in coordination with the Government of Iraq”. Between 19 and 30 March, individual States members of the coalition issued statements in which they confirmed the temporary withdrawal of troops from the coalition and North Atlantic Treaty Organization Mission Iraq, predominantly citing the suspension of training owing to the COVID-19 crisis.

33. On 2 April, the United States Central Command issued a statement in which it confirmed the deployment of ground-based air defences in Iraq to protect members of the armed forces of Iraq, the international counter-ISIL coalition and the United States from the type of threats already seen against Iraqi bases.

34. On 6 April, the security media cell of the Office of the Prime Minister reported that three rockets had landed in close proximity to the administrative and accommodation buildings of a United States oil company operating in oilfields in the Zubayr area, Basrah Governorate. No group claimed responsibility for the attack and no casualties or material damage were reported. On 18 April, the cell also reported that two rockets had landed in close proximity to an oil facility operated by a Chinese company in Nahrawan, south-east of Baghdad. No casualties were reported.

35. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Defence of Turkey reported continued military activity, which it described as “counter-terrorism action” against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) positions in northern Iraq. On 15 April, the security media cell reported that the Iraqi Air Defence Command had monitored a violation of Iraqi airspace by a Turkish aircraft that reportedly left two residents of the Makhmur camp dead. On 16 April, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq condemned the Turkish attack “in the strongest possible terms”, as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty and a grave breach of international humanitarian law. On the same day, the Ambassador of Turkey to Iraq, Fatih Yıldız, told Turkish media that PKK posed a threat to Turkey, Iraq and the entire region, and that therefore the “counter-terrorism operations” of Turkey against PKK were conducted in accordance with international law and the right to self-defence as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

D. Regional and international developments

36. Iraq continued efforts to strengthen relations with its neighbours and build more diverse partnerships during the reporting period.

37. The Government welcomed several high-level delegations from Belgium, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and the United States. The issues discussed included the strengthening of bilateral ties, national and regional political and security developments, including continued cooperation to counter ISIL, and reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

38. Telephone conversations included calls between the President of Iraq and the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on 3 February to discuss regional issues and bilateral cooperation; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq, Mohamed Ali Alhakim, and his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif, on 2 March to discuss regional issues; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq and his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, on 9 March to discuss regional stability; and the President of Iraq and the

President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, on 19 April to discuss bilateral cooperation and developments in Iraq and the region.

39. On 26 March and 27 April, the United States Department of State announced 30-day extensions of the waiver enabling Iraq to engage, without incurring the imposition of sanctions by the United States, in financial transactions relating to the import of gas and electricity from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

40. On 5 April, the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced the receipt of a letter in which the United States Department of State suggested procedures to open a dialogue between Iraq and the United States on the basis of the Strategic Framework Agreement of 2013. On the same day, the caretaker Prime Minister welcomed the opening of a strategic dialogue as a platform for the two countries to address issues of mutual concern. For his part, the United States Secretary of State confirmed on 7 April that the United States had proposed a strategic dialogue that would be held in mid-June.

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

A. Political activities

41. Following the withdrawal of Mr. Allawi's candidacy for the premiership on 1 March, my Special Representative met, inter alia, with representatives of the Government and civil society, as well as leaders of political blocs and members of the parliament, to promote consensus in order to find a candidate who could secure the required support in the Council of Representatives and meet the demands of the Iraqi people. After Mr. Al-Zurfi's prime ministerial designation on 17 March, my Special Representative met with him and highlighted the need to address the demands of the protesters. Following the appointment of Mr. Al-Kadhimi as Prime Minister-designate, my Special Representative met with him to discuss the health, economic, security and social challenges facing Iraq and the process of forming a Government.

42. On 15 and 16 March, my Special Representative travelled to the Kurdistan Region to meet with political leaders and representatives of the Region, including the President, the Deputy Prime Minister, Qubad Talabani, and the Minister of the Interior, Rebar Ahmed Khalid. During her visit, they discussed the process of forming a federal Government as well as the multiple crises and the priorities of the next Government, including addressing the outstanding issues between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, such as the federal budget, oil and revenue-sharing, and the status of Kirkuk and Sinjar.

43. My Special Representative issued public statements on 12 and 13 March concerning the repeated rocket attacks, including those against the international counter-ISIL coalition, and the targeted air strikes conducted by the United States. In the statements, she condemned the continued loss of life, called upon all parties to act with maximum restraint in keeping with international law and reiterated that the ongoing attacks were a substantial threat to Iraq and its people and that the risk of rogue action by armed groups was a constant concern.

44. Following my appeal of 23 March for an immediate global ceasefire in the face of the global COVID-19 challenge, my Special Representative emphasized to all parties in Iraq that partisanship must yield to the greater cause and the good of the Iraqi people, and called upon political leaders to come together in a spirit of national unity. She also joined other Middle East envoys in appealing to all sides in ongoing conflicts to exercise maximum restraint, reach out across conflict lines, facilitate

humanitarian access and assistance, and work with the United Nations on urgent international response plans and recovery measures.

45. In response to the outbreak of COVID-19, UNAMI joined efforts by the World Health Organization (WHO) and others to support measures taken by the Government to address the pandemic. Together with WHO, which provided assistance, equipment, technical support and training, UNAMI met regularly with Iraqi leaders and participated in a press conference with the Minister of Health, Jaafar Allawi.

46. Meanwhile, UNAMI launched an action plan to combat hate speech in Baghdad on 3 March in the presence of my Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (the United Nations global focal point on hate speech) at an event attended by civil society representatives, lawyers, journalists and other actors. The impact of hate speech on women's participation in public life was the centrepiece of a meeting of my Deputy Special Representative with members of the Women's Advisory Group on 27 February.

47. On 5 March, my Deputy Special Representative briefed the Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women and Peace and Security on the situation of women and girls in Iraq. The briefing covered the recommendations of the Women Advisory Group, made through UNAMI, on the government-led constitutional reform processes; the Mission's technical assistance to the Government on strengthening gender-responsive electoral processes; and other pertinent issues, including protection.

B. Electoral assistance

48. During the reporting period, UNAMI intensified efforts to support the Independent High Electoral Commission in rebuilding its institutional and electoral operational capacities. UNAMI engaged with the new Board of Commissioners to discuss outstanding electoral issues requiring immediate attention, including the restaffing of the Commission, the finalization of the electoral law, and continued United Nations support and enhanced technical assistance.

49. The Mission's Office of Electoral Assistance continued to work closely with the Independent High Electoral Commission, including, where possible, through remote means during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it undertook activities aimed at attaining the requisite capacity for holding elections. On 19 and 20 February, UNAMI supported the organization of a two-day priority-setting session for the Board of Commissioners, held in Sulaymaniyah. Topics included mainstreaming gender in electoral processes, and guiding principles and approaches in electoral management. UNAMI also provided technical support to the committees set up by the Commission to review its by-laws and organizational structure.

50. In addition, three international electoral experts and one national electoral expert were deployed to Baghdad in February and March, through the rapid response fund of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs with support from the United Nations Development Programme. The experts continued to work remotely with their Independent High Electoral Commission counterparts on the Commission's operational planning capacities, website and media set-up, and on planning for its electoral assistance requirements. In addition, they conducted assessments of the information technology infrastructure, particularly in relation to voter registration and results management.

51. The final text of the electoral law, approved by the parliament in December 2019, has yet to be published in the official parliamentary gazette in the absence of a

parliamentary decision on the delineation of constituencies and the apportionment of parliamentary seats among constituencies.

C. Human rights and rule of law developments and activities

52. The deepening COVID-19 public health emergency and related preventive measures gave rise to concerns regarding the population's economic welfare and access to health resources. Furthermore, UNAMI received credible reports of social stigmatization of infected persons in their communities, including verbal and physical attacks against them and their property.

53. Protests were held in Baghdad and a number of other locations against the economic impact of the measures taken by the Government. In Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Governorate, on 3 April, low-wage workers protested against the COVID-19 curfew and its impact on their livelihoods, leading to clashes with the Iraqi security forces, which resulted in 2 people (1 civilian and 1 member of the security forces) being killed and 12 injured.

54. The Government took measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in places of detention, including by sterilizing prisons, distributing sanitary materials and suspending family visits, reintegration activities and schooling in juvenile places of detention. As at 18 April, the judicial authorities at the federal level and in the Kurdistan Region reported, respectively, that 16,045 and 2,300 detainees, both pretrial and convicted, had been released to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in detention facilities. At the same time, more than 27,000 arrests for breaking the curfew were reported by the Baghdad Operations Command between 17 March and 18 April. UNAMI advocacy efforts focused on the strengthened use of judicial discretion for releases; the issuance of a broad special pardon; the end of mass arrests for persons breaking the curfew; and measures to prevent potential violence, including alternatives to family visits and timely information for detainees. On 15 April, the Ministry of Justice sent to the Council of Ministers a letter in which it identified 950 adults and 57 juveniles who would be eligible for a special pardon. A discussion on further expanding the criteria was ongoing at the time of writing.

55. UNAMI closely monitored freedom of expression in the context of government measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Journalists were exempted from the curfew to enable movement to provide media reporting. UNAMI received allegations of several arrests, both in the Kurdistan Region and elsewhere in Iraq, of journalists and social media users who had published comments critical of the Government's response to COVID-19 or the imposed curfew. Furthermore, on 2 April, in response to an article published by Reuters suggesting that the Government had intentionally underreported COVID-19 cases, the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission issued a statement in which it suspended Reuters' licence to operate in Iraq for three months, imposed a fine and requested an official apology, a decision that was confirmed in a letter to Reuters on 11 April. Following discussions between Reuters and the Commission, the Commission announced on 19 April that it had lifted all measures "to allow transparent and impartial work by the media".

56. Following the release of a report on terrorism-related trials in Iraq by UNAMI and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on 28 January, UNAMI and the Supreme Judicial Council agreed to jointly develop guidelines for the conduct of judicial investigations and trials in accordance with international standards. On the basis of recommendations set out in the report, the guidelines will strengthen the judicial response to claims of torture and ill-treatment, and fundamental legal safeguards such as effective legal representation for defendants.

57. During the reporting period, UNAMI continued to receive credible reports of violence against protesters and activists, and cases of disappearances, attributed to unknown armed men. The Mission also documented deliberate killings of activists and high-profile demonstrators in March and April. No information regarding the findings of investigations initiated by the Government or other steps concerning accountability have been made public.

58. Against the backdrop of the use of tear-gas canisters, “hunting guns” and buckshot ammunition against protesters engaged in throwing various projectiles at security forces, the Mission verified that 10 protesters had died and over 367 others had been injured in Baghdad during the reporting period. Compared with the previous period, those figures represent a decrease that can in part be attributed to the fact that the COVID-19 outbreak led to a reduction in the number of demonstrators.

59. The Mission documented the deaths of 36 civilians, including 5 women and 2 children, and injuries to 54 civilians, including 7 children, in security-related incidents between 1 February and 19 April. Most casualties resulted from the use of improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war, rocket or mortar rounds and small-arms attacks allegedly perpetrated by ISIL remnants.

60. The country task force on monitoring and reporting continued to advocate the finalization of a draft action plan to end and prevent child recruitment and use as well as reintegrate children.

61. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons visited Iraq from 15 to 23 February to collect information and identify durable solutions to address the assistance needs and protection concerns of the internally displaced. The visit included meetings with senior government officials in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region, and representatives of the United Nations, humanitarian partners, civil society and the diplomatic community. She also visited internal displacement camp sites and met internally displaced persons inside and outside camps.

62. On 2 March, a court in Baghdad sentenced to death a former member of ISIL for the rape of a Yazidi woman. This was the first case of a former ISIL fighter being sentenced to death for such a rape.

63. UNAMI continued to encourage the national authorities to strengthen democratic governance in the reform of the security sector. The Mission also advocated the enhancement of civilian oversight over and accountability for the security forces’ engagement with the population during the protests, as well as over the enforcement of physical distancing and curfew measures in response to COVID-19.

D. Humanitarian assistance, stabilization and development

64. During the reporting period, the United Nations supported government efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19, while humanitarian programming was adjusted to take into account an additional set of prioritized activities. The provision of hygiene items, the establishment of isolation sites and the scaling-up of awareness campaigns, among other things, were identified as priorities by the humanitarian country team within the broader national health response led by WHO. Health and water, hygiene and sanitization interventions for internally displaced persons were expanded in both camp and non-camp settings, while humanitarian clusters in Iraq developed initial guidance for COVID-19 preparedness and response planning for camps. However, the operations of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, including their contributions to the response to the outbreak, specifically with regard to the

movement of specialized staff and equipment around the country, were inadvertently affected by the Government's measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, and earlier access issues related to delays in granting government authorization for the free movement of humanitarian partners were compounded.

65. In parallel, the United Nations and the humanitarian community continued to deliver regular humanitarian programming to address the needs identified in the Humanitarian Response Plan, which, as at 4 April, had attracted \$64 million in funding, or 12 per cent of the \$520 million sought. The majority of people targeted for assistance were persons who had been internally displaced by ISIL and remained in need of support. As at 27 January, approximately 1.4 million people remained internally displaced at more than 3,000 locations, including 67 internal displacement camps, in 18 governorates. The rate of return of internally displaced persons had slowed significantly in 2019, leading to a substantial proportion of the internally displaced population in Iraq experiencing prolonged displacement. During the reporting period, the United Nations continued to address the longer-term assistance needs and protection concerns of internally displaced persons. These efforts included drafting a plan of action for durable solutions, bridging humanitarian and development approaches, focusing on the return of internally displaced persons to their places of origin where feasible, and identifying alternatives where necessary.

66. The United Nations continued to support stabilization efforts in the five governorates that had previously been under the control of ISIL (Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din). During the reporting period, 16 projects were completed through the Funding Facility for Stabilization. As at 4 April, 2,375 stabilization projects in housing, education, livelihoods and other areas had been completed through the Facility, while 215 others were ongoing, enabling 4.7 million Iraqis to return home as at 29 February. During the reporting period, with the support of the Mine Action Service, the Iraqi Directorate of Mine Action initiated a review of the national mine action standards to reflect the unique explosive contamination environment of the country.

67. Likewise, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) continued to support stabilization and recovery efforts throughout the country. During the reporting period, the International Organization for Migration supported 50 small and medium-sized enterprises (creating 268 new employment opportunities) and 150 individuals who were starting or expanding micro-businesses. UN-Habitat renovated a primary school in Hit, Anbar Governorate, allowing 520 pupils to have access to education.

68. In the education sector, the World Food Programme secured the commitment of the Ministry of Education on 13 February to further expanding school feeding programmes, currently available in 11 governorates, to other areas of the country by September.

69. In March, the United Nations Children's Fund advocated with both the federal and Kurdistan Region Ministries of Planning and Labour and Social Affairs the formulation of a coordinated social policy response that mitigates the risks facing children and young people, especially those already vulnerable owing to poverty or lack of access to basic services. Ongoing work includes a rapid simulation of the secondary impacts of COVID-19 on the poorest Iraqi households.

70. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Health to finalize the national family planning strategy for 2020–2024 and develop the associated action plan. UNFPA also supported the Iraqi Central Statistical Organization in developing an advocacy and communication strategy for the general population and housing census. The strategy provides a road map in order to ensure clear and timely messages related to the census from a development

perspective, and emphasizes the importance of data generation for evidence-based planning and the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

71. Given the rapidly changing social, political and economic context, the United Nations country team, UNAMI and the World Bank completed a common country assessment in March. While the full impact of the current crisis could not be anticipated in the assessment, the structural and systemic challenges that Iraq needed to overcome in order for future development interventions to be successful were explained.

72. In response to COVID-19, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) developed a guidance note focusing on the role of government, civil society and international organizations in ensuring that gender is a fundamental component of their response to the pandemic. Moreover, on 16 April, UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund, UN-Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a joint statement in response to reports of increased levels of domestic violence, in which they urged the Council of Representatives to adopt the law against domestic violence. Furthermore, UN-Women submitted the Iraqi national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) to the Office of the President for endorsement. The plan includes components related to the protection of women in conflict and emergency situations, such as the COVID-19 outbreak. In response to increased reports of domestic violence, the directorate of family and child protection within the Ministry of the Interior instructed the security forces to investigate all such reports and bring perpetrators to justice.

IV. Security and operational issues

A. Update on security arrangements

73. The Department of Safety and Security in Iraq continuously monitored developments throughout the country and implemented risk management measures to enable continued United Nations operations. Regular security advisories and alerts, including broadcasts related to the outbreak of COVID-19, were issued to keep United Nations personnel informed of precautionary measures.

74. There were indirect fire incidents on 2, 5, 17 and 26 March against the former International Zone, where the Government also enforced public access restrictions during the reporting period.

75. During the reporting period, the Department of Safety and Security supported an average of 29 field missions per day across the country, with assessed risk levels ranging from medium to high.

76. 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.

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

77. During the reporting period, my Special Representative formed a crisis working group that met regularly to continually review the impact of COVID-19 on United Nations establishments and staff in Iraq and adopt preventive and mitigation measures. It was decided to institute alternative working arrangements for staff members, reduce the staff presence in the country, establish physical distancing protocols in workplaces, use electronic applications to conduct meetings, suspend

non-critical missions to the field and implement strict measures, including temperature screening, to control access to United Nations premises.

78. Measures were also immediately initiated to enhance the level of medical preparedness. A separate COVID-19 isolation area was created in the United Nations clinic in Baghdad, with its own triage area. A medical support plan specific to the pandemic was developed, along with standard operating procedures for case management. Several staff advisories on hygiene, disinfection and preventive measures were issued. Helplines were also established for the provision of remote psychosocial support to staff. With the cessation of practically all commercial air operations in the region and with a view to the reduction of the staff footprint in the mission area, UNAMI used its aviation assets to transport staff to local transit hubs to connect with onward flights.

V. Observations

79. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the overall situation in Iraq and has compounded political, security, economic, humanitarian and other challenges.

80. I commend the Government on its early and active engagement to join global efforts to contain the rapid spread of the pandemic. However, in order to address the multiple pressing challenges that it faces, Iraq needs a stable and effective Government that can deliver basic services through responsive State institutions. It is my sincere hope that all Iraqi political leaders will recognize the urgency of the current situation and come together in a spirit of national unity to form an inclusive Government that will be able to address the immediate needs and demands of the Iraqi people.

81. Heightened regional tensions continue to endanger peace and security in Iraq. At this critical time for the political process, international and regional partners must exercise restraint, pursue immediate de-escalation, support Iraq in its efforts to maintain security and stability, and prevent the country from becoming an arena for external conflicts. I reiterate that message in my call for a global ceasefire: “Put aside mistrust and animosity” and “open precious windows for diplomacy.” I welcome all steps in this direction, including the recently announced strategic dialogue between Iraq and the United States. Such initiatives must be fully seized upon in order to discuss and reach agreement on all issues of mutual concern.

82. I also encourage the Government to continue to address concerns over violations of its sovereignty through diplomatic and legal means, by working through the United Nations, including the Security Council, and in coordination with other Member States concerned.

83. The economic situation of Iraq has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and declining global oil prices. Improving this situation, including by addressing the country’s existing budget deficit, requires effective national measures, such as accelerating structural reform, fighting corruption and promoting sustainable economic growth and diversification, measures that must be supported by the international community.

84. Continued dialogue between the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government on oil and revenue-sharing also remains essential, especially in the light of the severe economic challenges. Once again, I encourage both sides to reach and implement a comprehensive agreement on all outstanding issues, including the enactment of a 2020 budget law and the governance and security structures of Kirkuk and Sinjar.

85. Credible, inclusive and participatory elections, as demanded by the people of Iraq, are essential to any democracy. The United Nations reiterates its readiness to provide expanded technical assistance and support to the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Government in order to further build electoral capacities. It is also incumbent on the Council of Representatives to reach agreement on outstanding elements of the electoral legal framework.

86. While many measures to contain COVID-19 have been taken, I reiterate my call to protect the most vulnerable from social stigma. Human dignity and rights must be central to all efforts to combat COVID-19, which means that measures must be inclusive.

87. Given the increase in the number of reports of domestic violence during the current COVID-19 curfew, I encourage the Government to take concrete action to ensure that the victims have access to appropriate protection and support services, and that the perpetrators face justice. I also strongly encourage the finalization of the law against domestic violence.

88. Continued violence against civil society activists, human rights defenders and protesters remains a serious concern. I urge the Government to take tangible measures to protect all peaceful protesters, civil society activists and human rights defenders from violence, and to ensure accountability for all violations.

89. I should like to express my appreciation to my Special Representative, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, and the staff of the United Nations in Iraq for their continued dedication to implementing the Organization's mandate under challenging circumstances. I also thank my outgoing Deputy Special Representative and Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, Marta Ruedas, for her leadership and dedicated service during her tenure.
