



# Fact Sheet on Iraq National Elections

## 2 March 2010

**Iraq will hold national parliamentary elections on 7 March 2010. Out-of-Country Voting (OCV) is also scheduled to take place between 5 and 7 March in 16 countries. Special Voting will take place on 4 March to accommodate special needs (Iraqi Security Forces, detainees, hospitals).**

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) has been supporting preparations for the forthcoming national elections, which will mark the transition from the first full term of a democratically elected parliament to the next. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has stated his firm belief that the elections “represent an historic opportunity for Iraq and a crucial step forward for national reconciliation,” and that they will also “contribute to Iraq’s political progress and could go a long way towards strengthening Iraq’s sovereignty and independence.”

### LEAD-UP TO NATIONAL ELECTIONS

The pre-election period witnessed weeks of intense negotiations and a protracted debate within the Iraqi Council of Representatives over amendments to the 2005 Election Law. Through its technical advice and mediation efforts, including the good offices of Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Ad Melkert<sup>1</sup>, UNAMI helped the parties to reach an agreement on key amendments. As a result, the revised law was adopted by the Council of Representatives, and subsequently approved by the Presidency Council. On 13 December 2009, the Presidency Council announced that the date for national elections would be 7 March 2010, a slight delay from the original date scheduled in January.

Despite delays in the adoption of the Election Law, the registration of political entities and coalitions continued. A total of 6,529 candidates were nominated by 86 political entities. All candidates were under an obligatory vetting process with reference to their educational background, affiliation with the outlawed Ba’ath party, or conviction on crimes violating honor.

Approximately 18.9 million Iraqis have registered to vote. The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) will establish around 10,000 polling centers throughout Iraq. Each center consists of one or more polling stations, totaling over 50,000. Each polling station is expected to serve up to 420 voters. An estimated 200,000 - 300,000 political agents and national observers are expected to participate in the election (observing voting, count centers and data/tabulation center), which should provide for every polling station in Iraq to be observed. Approximately 300,000 polling staff have been selected by a public electronic lottery based on more than 500,000 applications.

More than 3,000 land convoys and more than 20 international flights are planned to provide logistical support for the movement of electoral materials, with a completely integrated security plan designed by the Election Supreme Security Committee, established by Iraq’s Prime Minister. Overall, approximately 28 million ballots of 19 different types were printed to accommodate regular voting, special needs, absentee and out of country ballots, and 100,000 ballot boxes were procured for the elections.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Melkert succeeded SRSG Staffan de Mistura in July 2009.

## UNAMI'S ROLE

UNAMI has been mandated by the Security Council in resolution 1770 (2007), and most recently in resolution 1883 (2009), to advise, support, and assist the Government of Iraq and the IHEC on the development of processes for holding elections and referenda.

UNAMI has focused on technical advice, capacity building and institutional development of the IHEC, and on advocacy with the Council of Representatives, the Government of Iraq, civil society and political entities. UNAMI worked to build consensus within the Council of Representatives facilitating technical opinions on possible solutions regarding key issues in the draft Election Law, such as the open list system, total number of seats, allocation of seats for governorates, minorities and women, and special remedial provisions.

UNAMI also heads the International Electoral Assistance Team (IEAT), which is comprised of UNAMI, UNDP and UNOPS electoral advisors with the support of other partners. IEAT strives to support processes that enhance the independence, transparency and credibility of the IHEC. Together with its key partners, UNAMI has been supporting the IHEC in all the key areas of electoral management - legal, operations, IT/Database, voter registration, public outreach, including media, voter education and political entities, graphic design, field management, procurement and logistics. UNAMI advisers are co-located with the IHEC and provide day-to-day assistance and support to the Board of Commissioners and IHEC departments, as well as long-term institutional capacity development.

## KEY POINTS

- **The national elections on 7 March will be an important milestone in Iraq's democratic progress**, providing an opportunity for millions of Iraqis to exercise their right to vote and elect a government that will shape their country's future for the next four years. It is therefore essential that **every effort is made to ensure that the elections are broadly participatory and as inclusive as possible**.
- The elections will also **serve to strengthen Iraq's sovereignty and independence** at this key juncture in Iraq's history, as the United States prepares to draw down its military presence in the country.
- **The United Nations does not have a mandate to observe elections in Iraq or OCV**, as it provides technical assistance to the Government of Iraq and the IHEC. However, **UNAMI will undertake its own poll-watching activities**, sending teams to different locations in the country as a confidence-building initiative.
- **The political and security context** in which national elections are held is of critical importance for the success of the whole electoral exercise. It is imperative that the electorate is able to vote in an environment that is **largely free of intimidation and violence**. It is equally important that the **Iraqi review process of all parliamentary candidates standing for election is conducted in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner**, in line with Iraqi law and international standards.
- **Iraqi citizens abroad will be able to exercise their right**. Technical preparations for **out-of-country voting** are ongoing. **Austria, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jordan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Sweden, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America** have been identified for OCV by the Electoral Commission Board. UNAMI has deployed electoral advisers to each of the host

countries to support the OCV operation. OCV will be conducted over three consecutive days, from 5 to 7 March, with registration and voting implemented concurrently.

- **The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), and not the United Nations, is responsible for organizing and conducting elections in Iraq.** UNAMI provides technical advice and capacity- and institution-building support to the Government of Iraq and the IHEC to ensure that elections are held in accordance with international standards and best practices.
- In order to ensure the success of the elections, UNAMI continues to work closely with the Electoral Commission in all areas of electoral management and operational preparations. Upon request from the IHEC and UNAMI, UNOPS has been providing support to national electoral observer networks in training and mobilization of around 29,000 independent national electoral observers. **More than 80 international organizations and diplomatic missions have been invited** by the IHEC to observe the election, and to date, 20 diplomatic missions and 4 international organizations have submitted the required documentation to the IHEC. International observers are being coordinated through the good offices of the European Union as part of technical assistance to the IHEC.
- **A concerted voter education campaign conducted by the IHEC is of paramount importance** to encourage participation and trust amongst the electorate in and out of country and to provide Iraqi voters with timely and comprehensive official information on all aspects of the electoral process. In addition, the **role of the media** in ensuring free and fair dimensions of the election campaign cannot be overestimated.
- The Election Supreme Security Committee has developed a **comprehensive national security plan to enhance security on Election Day** and related operations prior and subsequent to it, as security underpins the entire outcome of the electoral process.
- **Acceptance of the election results is key.** Official results will be released by the IHEC HQ in Baghdad. They include all valid votes cast during in- and out-of-country voting. Final results will be announced only after all formal complaints and audits have been completed and appeals to IHEC's decisions have been heard by the Electoral Judicial Panel. **UNAMI is supporting the Electoral Commission in developing a robust and timely complaints mechanism** to ensure that the credibility of the results is not eroded by a delay in the adjudication of complaints.
- While it is expected that provisional results will be published in the days following 7 March, final results could take considerable time. **Under the Iraqi Constitution, the Federal Supreme Court will certify the election results.**
- In his briefing to the Security Council on 16 February 2010, SRSR Melkert stressed that although the determination of Iraqis to resist the return of the perils of the past is real and strong, **more international attention and engagement is needed** to allow the people of Iraq to determine their future in their own way.
- On the Deba'athification process, the UN stresses the distinction between the legal requirements of the process dealing with the past and its practical implementation. UNAMI has consistently emphasized the need for the process to be carried out in a transparent and consistent manner and implemented in accordance with Iraqi law. For example, based on international best practices, UNAMI strongly advised the Iraqi authorities against excluding political entities, in addition to individual candidates, from participating in the elections. This advice was accepted, thus allowing voters to select from the full political spectrum.

*For more information on the 2010 national elections and on other activities of the United Nations in Iraq, please see UNAMI website at: <http://uniraq.org> and UN News Centre's webpage devoted to Iraq at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=50&Body=Iraq&Body1=>*

*For information on IHEC, please consult IHEC website:  
<http://www.ihec.iq/English/default.aspx>*