



Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

8739th meeting
 Tuesday, 3 March 2020, 10 a.m.
 New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Zhang Jun (China)

Members:

Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
France	Mrs. Gueguen
Germany	Mr. Heusgen
Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
Niger	Mr. Abarry
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Gonsalves
South Africa	Mr. Matjila
Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
United States of America	Ms. Norman-Chalet
Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Twenty-fifth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2020/133)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) (S/2020/140)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): As this is the first public meeting of the Security Council for the month of March, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve, Permanent Representative of Belgium, for his service in the presidency of the Security Council for the month of February. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing our deep appreciation to Ambassador Pecsteen de Buytsverve and his team for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Twenty-fifth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2020/133)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) (S/2020/140)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Iraq to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2020/133, which contains the twenty-fifth report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2020/133), and document S/2020/140, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2470 (2019).

I now give the floor to Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert.

Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert: Iraq has not left the headlines in recent months, as domestic, regional and international events have continued to take their toll on the country. While we will explore these events today, I choose to begin with hope: the hope of a people that remains united in its determination for a more just and prosperous future; the hope of a sovereign nation that refuses to become a battleground for conflicts that are not its own; and the hope that Iraq may very well find itself at the most opportune moment for genuine and lasting political reform in a generation.

But for this to materialize, political leaders and communities will have to step up to the plate by placing the country's interests above all else and building domestic strength. Within this context, it is important not to sugar-coat the current harsh reality. The many brave Iraqis who continue to pay an unimaginable price for their voices to be heard deserve recognition of the intolerable abuses they have been subjected to: killings, abductions, violence, intimidation and threats. These abhorrent human rights violations are ongoing and fly in the face of all that is decent. They have no place in a democracy, any democracy.

Yes, of course, we recognize the challenges of operating within a fluid, puzzling security context with multiple actors. However, as I have stated many times, the ultimate responsibility for the people's safety and security undeniably rests with the State. It is therefore imperative to put an end to these abuses. Moreover, it is imperative that perpetrators be brought to justice. Impunity ends where accountability begins.

Let me emphasize that justice and accountability are a matter of burning importance to the many Iraqis who have lost their loved ones or seen them injured for no other reason than having expressed their frustration with poor economic, social and political prospects.

Justice and accountability should also be a pressing matter for the State of Iraq. The rule of law must be strengthened if public trust is to take root.

As I have stated time and again, Iraq's problems did not occur overnight, nor will they be solved in an instant. Yet times of crisis also present opportunities. I sincerely hope that the political leaders of Iraq will recognize that they are now at a crossroads where they must choose either to stand idle or to place themselves at the service of their countrymen and women; but I have to say that the critical window of opportunity is closing fast.

The participation of Iraqi women in the ongoing public protests is unprecedented and marks a new page in the history of women's grass-roots mobilization in Iraq. Political leaders should heed that call.

Turning to the streets, the security picture is undeniably complex and most challenging to manage. We witness ambiguously identified armed entities with unclear loyalties. We see groups or individuals using the cover of peaceful protesters and/or security forces to muddy the issues, thereby misleading the public, harming the country's interests, confusing the scene and causing casualties. All of this is part of Iraq's tough reality. As Secretary-General Guterres recently stated, the large number of armed groups operating outside State control is preventing the country from functioning as a normal State. However, it bears repeating that this is not something political leaders should hide behind. On the contrary. They must dismantle or formally integrate those armed entities under full State control without delay. In other words, this is no excuse for political and governmental inaction.

After five months of protests and the many people injured or killed, it should be clear that peaceful protesters, backed by a silent majority, will not budge on their aspirations. That should be the first and last concern of the political class. Let me be clear: delivering on the demands of the people will require a collective effort. I again emphasize that no Prime Minister can go it alone. Every single political actor and leader is fully responsible for restoring the critical confidence of the public in their Government and its institutions.

In late November, the Prime Minister announced his resignation, which was soon approved by Parliament and the President. The designation of a new Prime Minister and subsequent attempts to form a new Government ultimately failed due to distrust and disunity. That led to a complicated situation in which the Prime Minister-designate was not able to obtain sufficiently broad support to form his Government within 30 days.

Within the past three days, we saw the withdrawal of the candidacy of the Prime Minister-designate — accepted by the President — and the announcement by the previous and current caretaker Prime Minister that he was stepping back from most of his duties, while calling on Parliament to seek early elections in December 2020.

Under the Constitution, the President now has another 15 days to nominate a new Prime Minister-

designate, whose Government and programme would also be subject to parliamentary endorsement. While political consultations are ongoing, the question remains whether political parties will find a new consensus-candidate within those time limits.

Clearly, all of that prolongs uncertainty and causes significant challenges, thereby further eroding public trust. One way or another, the road ahead remains fraught with difficulties. I already mentioned the pressing need for accountability and justice. Another top priority is corruption, which is perhaps the greatest source of dysfunction in Iraq and, sadly, a core feature of Iraq's current political economy. It is built into everyday transactions.

A related feature of Iraq's political economy is its reliance on patronage and clientelism. That has resulted in a ballooning, inefficient public service that functions more as an instrument of political favour than as a servant of the people. A cynic would describe this payroll corruption as the perfect electoral mobilization strategy, where, perversely, low turnout benefits those pursuing their own narrow, partisan and/or transactional objectives. It is important to tackle the system as precisely that — a system rather than just a series of individuals or occurrences. Each bribe or favour serves to reinforce the existing structure. As a result, full systemic reform will be necessary. No one understands that better than the Iraqi women and men whose opportunities for a more prosperous life continue to be undermined by a system that ignores them.

Iraq is by no means a poor country but, as I said, private and partisan interests conspire to divert resources away from critical investment in the way forward. Iraq's massive oil wealth has financed a crude rentier system that sees enormous revenues converted to salaries in unproductive sectors.

While external factors such as regional tensions and oil price fluctuations will certainly continue to weigh on the national economy, there are internal factors that Iraq can control — reducing bureaucracy, increasing the ease of doing business and strengthening the rule of law and anti-corruption mechanisms. Those measures can all incentivize the domestic private sector while attracting foreign investment. Those steps are necessary to build a healthy environment that is conducive to broad-based, fairly distributed growth and employment generation.

Iraq must also build, repair and upgrade critical infrastructure and broaden its revenue base to reduce its dependency on hydrocarbons. The good news is that agriculture is already showing promise as a candidate for investment. An agricultural revival, in the birthplace of agriculture, will not only improve employment and social cohesion but also strengthen Iraqi food security.

In that context, I would also like to highlight the creative resilience of the Iraqi people because, if one looks beyond the statistics and legal structures, we observe — on the streets — plenty of commercial activity. One can only imagine what this spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship could achieve if freed from the burdens of red tape and bribes.

An important aspect of corruption is illicit financial flows. They help explain why Iraqis continue to await roads, hospitals, schools and legal employment opportunities, and also contribute to further destabilization by providing channels for the financing of organized crime and violent extremism.

With regard to violent extremism, we cannot ignore the continued threat of terrorism. Although the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has been defeated territorially, in the past two months it has continued its attempts to increase its military operations in north-eastern Diyala, northern Baghdad and areas of western Iraq. It goes without saying that ISIL must not be allowed to regroup and recruit. While constructive negotiations between Iraq's Government and its allies have been ongoing since the voting on the parliamentary resolution on the presence of foreign troops, Iraq's allies continue to assist the Government and its institutions in the fight against ISIL. It is obvious that a strong State with a monopoly on the use of force is best equipped to face those multiple security threats. Of course, an equally powerful tool against violent extremism is fairness and justice.

I would now like to touch upon the need for free, fair and credible elections. While the electoral reset is a top priority for many, broad, fundamental systemic reform and a strong Independent High Electoral Commission will prove crucial. In other words, the newly appointed Electoral Commission will need to demonstrate greater resolve in adhering to the principles of transparency, accountability, independence and professionalism as it rebuilds the Commission's institutional capacities and kick-start technical electoral preparations.

Moreover, in order to firm up the electoral calendar, there is an immediate need to complete the electoral legal framework. Parliament must act on pending, urgent elements of the electoral law, in particular constituency demarcation and seat apportionment, which will, hopefully, bring voters closer to the candidates and make future elected representatives accountable to their constituents.

Turning to Baghdad-Erbil relations, notwithstanding an encouraging preliminary deal between the Kurdish Regional Government and the federal Government on oil-revenue sharing, we continue to await a final, long-term and sustainable agreement on this file, as well as on security cooperation and Sinjar.

I think we can all agree that the volatile domestic and regional climate took an extraordinary toll on Iraq in the past months. To point out the obvious, the state-to-state violence we saw play out across Iraq earlier this year was received as a clear and substantial threat to the country. The modus operandi and rules of engagement have shifted, and the risk of rogue action by armed groups with unclear reporting lines is a constant concern. Beyond the immediate security threat, that also takes critical political attention away from urgent unfinished domestic business. However, as I have stated before, regional security developments should not eclipse domestic priorities and rightful demands for reform. The question is whether Iraq will flourish as a venue for peace and understanding or suffer as the arena of external battles.

I will now turn to the issue of missing Kuwaitis, third-country nationals and Kuwaiti property, including the national archives. Hopes were renewed in January when new human remains were discovered and exhumed from a third grave in Samawah. Despite a very challenging operational context, the Iraqi Ministry of Defence has demonstrated commendable focus on that important file, leading the excavation efforts with assistance from the International Committee of the Red Cross. I truly hope that the DNA identification of the newly discovered human remains and of those that are still being analysed in Kuwait will prove positive and bring closure to the families and relatives of those who went missing nearly 30 years ago. The contribution of the Tripartite Commission members through the provision and analysis of satellite imagery, supported by witness information, proved crucial in locating the Samawah sites. I would like to urge all members of the

Commission to continue their steadfast support to the efforts under way for other potential burial sites.

It was my intention to conclude with words of hope, but the ongoing political indecisiveness and dissension, leading to a further paralysis in decision-making, unfortunately do not give cause for immediate optimism. The country and its people continue to be pushed into the unknown. Also, the repeated pattern of parliamentary sessions failing to reach quorum is exactly the opposite of what the country needs, especially during a period of acute political crisis. The fundamental mandate of an elected representative is to be present, to be counted and to vote.

As I said last time (see S/PV.8676), out of the ongoing political crisis, a fairer, stronger and inherently more resilient Iraq can emerge. But again, for that to materialize, political leaders will have to act fast, placing the country's interest above all else. Iraq must and can find strength in diversity, recognizing a cohesive society as more than the sum of its parts. Putting out one fire after the other is no strategy. Iraq must move from constant crisis management to sustainable and stable politics, building resilience through deep and broad systemic reform. As we all know, strength at home is a prerequisite for strength abroad.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Norman-Chalet (United States of America): Mr. President, I wish you and your team every success as you assume the monthly rotating presidency of the Security Council. I thank Belgium for its presidency last month.

I also very much thank Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert for being here, for her informative briefing and for her leadership. We also extend our thanks to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the entire United Nations country team for the indispensable work they carry out in support of Iraq's security, stability and prosperity.

Iraq still stands at a crossroads — as it did when we were briefed last December (see S/PV.8676) — and, as the Special Representative said, it is in fact still in the headlines. Iraqis are choosing their new political leaders as a result of their legitimate demands regarding economic opportunity, good governance, electoral

reforms and responsiveness to all Iraqis. We call on Iraq's next leaders to urgently deliver those reforms, which will combat corruption and promote fair and free elections. We also call on them to protect demonstrators and hold their killers to account, transparently and in accordance with the rule of law and Iraq's Constitution. Such reforms should be embraced because they are in Iraq's national interest. Doing so will limit the influence of destabilizing armed groups outside State control, attract foreign investment and ultimately help convert Iraq's rich natural resources into a higher quality of life for all Iraqis.

Iraqis continue to demand a sovereign State that affords them dignity and to resist Iranian coercion, and, in the face of outrageous killings, beatings, kidnappings and torture, the reformist movement endures. That violent assault on the freedom of peaceful expression and assembly has no place in a democracy. The United States will continue to use all available national tools to promote accountability for corruption and serious human rights abuses. That includes our recent national designation of four Iraqis implicated in serious human rights abuses and corruption.

I should note that we still face threats by Iran-backed militias, even following the attacks against United States and coalition forces hosted on Iraqi bases, which killed an American earlier in the year. Iran-backed militias besieged the United States Embassy in Baghdad for nearly 26 hours in recent days, and there continues to be rocket attacks on it, as recently as the last 48 hours. We underscore the Government of Iraq's special duty under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of diplomatic facilities.

Together, Iraqi and coalition forces continue to jointly pursue the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS) on the battlefield. We should be mindful that ISIS remains a threat and we call on the international community to assist Iraq in its critical counter-terrorism efforts.

Looking ahead, if Iraq's new leaders do not address the people's legitimate economic and governance grievances, the country could reverse years of progress towards stability and prosperity for a new generation of Iraqis. It is because of those high stakes that the work of UNAMI and Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert is so crucial. We call on Iraq's new leaders to fully embrace UNAMI's mandate in promoting inclusive

political dialogue and reconciliation, advancing structural reforms, facilitating regional engagement and addressing long-standing issues between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

In a country as full of potential as Iraq, it is hard to isolate a single priority today, but I wish to draw the Council's attention to the topic of credible early elections, as several Iraqi leaders have called for. As part of its mandate, UNAMI's technical electoral assistance, in coordination with the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission, will be critical in the months ahead. We encourage UNAMI, alongside locally based non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to assist Iraq towards an inclusive electoral process. I would also like to stress the value of UNAMI's work, as directed by its mandate, in the monitoring and documenting of human rights abuses and violations. That paper trail is essential to promoting accountability for those responsible for violence against peaceful protesters.

We are increasingly concerned about the lack of progress and humanitarian access for NGOs. Humanitarian NGOs, including many United States partners, have been unable to carry out life-saving activities for all Iraqis of all faiths and ethnicities over the past three months owing to a backlog of access requests. We commend UNAMI's engagement on that issue and call on the Iraqi authorities to urgently find a solution.

On the unresolved issue of Kuwaiti and third-country missing persons, property and archives from the first Gulf War, the United States is strongly committed to the efforts of UNAMI, the Tripartite Commission and the International Committee of the Red Cross to make further progress. The recent discovery of remains in Samawah, as was mentioned this morning, is one step towards healing and reconciliation between Iraq and Kuwait.

Iraq's political landscape may seem challenging in the immediate term, yet we remain optimistic that Iraq's new leaders will put the interests of all Iraqis first and believe that they can deliver structural reforms to chart a new prosperous course for Iraq, with UNAMI and the international community standing by its side.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I wish the delegation of China well as it takes up the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. I would also like to thank Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, Permanent

Representative of Belgium, for the Belgian presidency of the Council in February, although we did not win a prize.

With regard to today's topic, I welcome the Ambassador of Iraq. We are glad to have him in the Chamber today. We naturally recognize the difficult situation his country is facing. We heard Special Representative of the Secretary-General Hennis-Plasschaert's account, which was at the same time hopeful and sobering, and I very much appreciate her briefing. I would like to pick up on her theme of hope, which is a theme to which we can subscribe.

We hope, first of all, that the country will be kept out of regional tensions. After the very dangerous escalation we all witnessed in January, it is, for us, very important that we now see a de-escalation. We appeal to all stakeholders inside and outside the country to exercise maximum restraint. Iraq must not be dragged into regional confrontations; rather, it should be allowed to focus on post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and growth and on utilizing the economic potential it has, as Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert has outlined.

Speaking of hope, the demonstrations we witnessed were also a sign of hope. We witnessed that there is a very vibrant civil society. There are many women now active in the country, which we support. We also support and appreciate the mostly peaceful demonstrations. But it is really unfortunate that we also had to witness the excessive use of force. As Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert described it, we witnessed abhorrent human rights violations. I can only echo what she and the United States representative said before, the perpetrators have to be brought to justice. We cannot allow impunity.

Returning to the theme of hope, we also hope that there will soon be a new Government. The responsible politicians have to overcome the political divisions and indecisiveness in their country. The country needs a united political class. As Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert has said, no prime minister can go it alone. Only when we have a new, strong Government will it be possible to rein in the criminal activities of armed groups, many of whom were responsible for the killings, kidnapping and violence against unarmed protesters and journalists. These criminal gangs have to be dismantled and reintegrated.

In addition, I echo what the Special Representative of the Secretary-General said about the fight against corruption. It is unacceptable that it is, as she said,

built into everyday politics. I also echo the call for providing access to humanitarian non-governmental organizations and relief workers.

Let me end on the theme, again, of hope. If there is a new Government, if there is good governance, if the new Government allows civil society to flourish, if there is an inclusive electoral process, there is hope for the country and hope for an economic recovery. If the country is kept out of regional tensions, the fight against terrorism and extremism will also be successful.

Let me end, having seen the Ambassador of Kuwait in the Chamber, by expressing appreciation for what he said about the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq on the Kuwaiti missing. It is very important that, even after so many years, this work continues to be conducted.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and I wish you every success. I would also like to highlight the excellent way in which the Belgian delegation conducted the work of the Council in February.

We thank Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing and for the hard work she is doing with her team in these complex circumstances. We welcome her to New York.

First, with regard to the political situation, we support the efforts of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to find a solution to the political impasse by promoting dialogue among the parties on Iraq's political and social spectrum, boosting institutional strengthening and providing assistance for electoral processes. We welcome the adoption of the new law on the Independent High Electoral Commission for the appointment of nine electoral commissioners, including the election of a woman to the executive board.

On the other hand, we note with concern that a consensus has not yet been reached on the election of the prime minister and the formation of a Government. We therefore call on political actors to reflect on their decisions and to place the well-being of the population, not partisan or personal interests, at the centre of their objectives. We also urge them to take into consideration social demands for a Government restructuring that guarantees functional institutions, the provision of

quality basic services, employment opportunities and growth in an inclusive society free from corruption and impunity.

We reiterate our call on the authorities to respect the right to free expression, protest and peaceful assembly and to refrain from all acts of violence and repression against demonstrators, within the framework of respect for their fundamental human rights. Furthermore, we hope that investigations will continue with a view to identifying and prosecuting the perpetrators of acts of violence during the demonstrations.

With regard to security, we regret the events that took place at the beginning of the year as a result of clashes between two nations allied with Iraq. The high levels of tension at the national, regional and international levels generated by this situation led in turn to the decision by parliament to call on the Government to cancel support for the international coalition to counter the Islamic State. We hope that this decision will not reverse the successes achieved so far in the fight against terrorism, opening the door for the remnants of the Islamic State to regain their strength anew. We urge the parties to show maximum restraint, avoid any destabilizing actions or inflammatory rhetoric that could deteriorate the already fragile situation of this nation, and respect the territory and sovereignty of Iraq.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we commend the rehabilitation and aid-delivery efforts made by United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, despite the operational and security challenges they face. We stress the importance of continuing to address the needs of internally displaced persons and refugees and to provide durable solutions that facilitate their return in a safe, voluntary and dignified manner.

In conclusion, we hope that UNAMI's efforts will facilitate national reconciliation through dialogue among political actors and other sectors of society, allowing for comprehensive reform that addresses the population's demands and opens the door to the development, peace and security desired in Iraq.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We congratulate you, Mr. President, and our Chinese colleagues on assuming the duties of the presidency of the Security Council. You can always rely on the support of our delegation. We thank Belgium for its presidency of the Council in February. It was a short month, but a very busy and intensive one.

We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert, for her briefing. We support the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the work of which has provided useful assistance to reconciliation processes with respect for the country's sovereignty.

We are closely monitoring developments in Iraq. On 1 March, as Council members know, the prime minister-designate Mohammed Allawi withdrew his candidacy to form a Government. The President of the Republic, Barham Salih, must now, in consultation with leading political forces, determine a new candidate for Head of Government. We trust that this process will take place in a timely manner and in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

We understand that Iraq's leadership faces the difficult task of including and taking into account the entire spectrum of the political, social and ethno-religious landscape of the country. We are convinced that inclusive dialogue would help to overcome the internal disagreements in Iraq, which is fundamentally important to the country and the entire Middle East region. For our part, in our contacts with all the political forces in Iraq, we encourage them to join forces to address all issues on the domestic agenda and reach mutually acceptable agreements.

The country continues to see mass protests demanding political and socioeconomic reforms. As we have heard from Iraqi officials, the authorities see these protests as a form of democratic self-expression and are committed to their obligation to ensure freedom of peaceful assembly. We note the reduction in the level of violence and we commend the forces of law and order. We call for all parties to continue to show restraint. At the same time, we believe it unacceptable for outside forces to use the protests as a lever to exercise pressure on the domestic situation.

The authorities are drafting plans to implement reform, but without a stable, functioning Government, that will not be possible. The same goes for solving the broad range of problems that has built up over the years due to objective reasons. Iraq has to rebuild after the events of 2003 and the subsequent gruelling war against terrorists. It is important for the international community to support Baghdad in devising comprehensive measures to rebuild the economy and improve the social sphere.

We welcome the ongoing dialogue aimed at rebuilding mutual understanding between Baghdad and Erbil. We are confident that further improvement in relations between them will help Iraq strengthen its security and effectively realize its economic potential, for the good of the entire Iraqi people.

We note with concern that the terrorist threat in the country remains high. The situation is compounded by an intensification in the number of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant terrorists slipping over from Syria into Iraq. We are convinced that this challenge can be effectively countered only through the broadest possible coordination of counter-terrorism efforts. At the same time, we believe it necessary for all those involved in the fight against terrorism in Iraq to support the sovereignty of the Iraqi State and coordinate their actions with Baghdad.

We are concerned about the possible negative impact of the artificially exacerbated situation in Iran on the domestic political situation in Iraq. Iraq cannot be dragged into a regional confrontation. We reiterate our consistent refrain that Iraq must not become an arena for the settling of geopolitical scores. The country has the right to build and develop normal relations with its neighbours and no one has the right to undermine those relations. We all witnessed the dangerous escalation at the beginning of the year, when the region found itself on the brink of conflict as a result of the illegal killing by the United States in Baghdad of the Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani and Iraqi officials. That act, committed without Iraq's knowledge, undermined the stability and security of a sovereign State Member of the United Nations.

We once again stress the need to launch dialogue mechanisms in the region instead of sanctions and threats. In this connection, we recall once again that the Secretary-General has a mandate to craft security and confidence-building measures in the region, in accordance with resolution 598 (1987). We stand ready to cooperate on that basis with all interested regional and international partners in the framework of our proposed concept for collective security in the Persian Gulf region and other constructive initiatives.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): Let me join others in welcoming you to the presidency, Sir, and say that the United Kingdom looks forward to working with you and your delegation. I also thank the representative of

Belgium for an excellent stewardship of the Council's business during the month of February.

Let me start by thanking the Special Representative for her briefing and her continued efforts, together with those of her Mission, to support and advise the Iraqi Government. Their work is important and, as we have all heard, it is a difficult time. She has our staunch support.

While Iraq has made notable progress in recent years, as many speakers, including the Special Representative, have said, the past few months have been challenging. Regarding the latest setback, the resignation of the Prime Minister, I agree with the representative of the Dominican Republic — we need to appeal to Iraq's leaders at this time to put the Iraqi people and the sound governance of the country first.

The delay in forming a new Government that will command the confidence of the Iraqi Parliament and people is regrettable. The United Kingdom calls on all Iraqi leaders to put the national interest first and to work together constructively to support a new prime minister. Iraq urgently needs an inclusive and representative Government committed and able to deliver on the demands of the Iraqi people. That aim is all the more important given the clear dissatisfaction with the status quo shown by the large-scale demonstrations in Iraq since October last year. Thousands of Iraqi citizens have protested to voice legitimate demands for political, economic and social reforms, but hundreds have been killed and thousands injured. The Iraqi people have the right to protest peacefully, and we are deeply concerned by the disproportionate use of force by security forces, including the use of live fire, and human rights abuses, including attacks on journalists. The United Kingdom urges the Iraqi authorities to follow through on their commitments to conducting credible investigations into the violence and holding those responsible to account. We also unequivocally condemn attacks on diplomatic premises. It is vital that protests remain peaceful.

I would like to tell the Iraqi Ambassador that the United Kingdom stands ready to support Iraq in delivering crucial reforms that address popular concerns. We welcome the progress made on electoral reforms and urge the Government of Iraq to continue engagement with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the international community to ensure that the new electoral reform law delivers on

protestors' demands, including for credible, free and inclusive elections.

As the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/140) highlights and as the Special Representative outlined, Da'esh remains a persistent threat to Iraq's security, as well as to the region and the wider world. We therefore hope that Iraq and the international community can continue to work closely together to address that common threat. The Global Coalition to Defeat Da'esh continues its support to and close partnership with the Iraqi security forces, in full respect for Iraqi sovereignty. I am proud that British troops in Iraq have trained over 100,000 members of the Iraqi security forces.

Militia groups continue to threaten Iraq's stability and risk escalating regional tensions. We condemn the storming of the United States Embassy in Baghdad on 31 December and the continued attacks by militia groups on military bases and diplomatic premises. The Government of Iraq has a duty to ensure the safety of all diplomatic premises in Iraq, but we urge all parties — and I want to stress that this includes Iraq's neighbours — to show restraint and to avoid dragging Iraq into a conflict, which is not what the Iraqi people need. We are deeply concerned that 1.4 million Iraqis remain displaced and over 4 million Iraqis will need some sort of support and assistance this year. Reports of forced and undignified returns of displaced persons are troubling, and I take this opportunity to recall that under international conventions all returns must be safe, dignified and voluntary.

The United Kingdom is ready to support Iraq in delivering durable solutions, including on reconciliation, reconstruction and provision of services. It is particularly important that political instability and the protests do not distract from or prevent action being taken to address the grievances that drove the rise of Da'esh.

Having heard the briefings today, we all know that recent months have been difficult for the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi people. There has been progress on key issues, including regional outreach, discussions between Baghdad and Erbil and reconstruction through the Funding Facility for Stabilization. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General said, there are grounds for hope and we should not overlook the progress. But I want to echo what was said by the German representative in particular about corruption and the importance of tackling it.

My last point relates to the Iraq-Kuwait file. I pay tribute to the work of the Kuwaiti representative, who is in the Chamber. As the United States and German representatives said, the recent developments on the file are very welcome. The United Kingdom remains committed to helping to strengthen relations between Iraq and Kuwait through the work of the Tripartite Commission, which we support.

We stand ready to continue to support the next Government of Iraq as it continues to deliver on the legitimate demands of protesters and to implement crucial reforms. We urge maximum restraint and peaceful dialogue on the part of all sides. There is space for hope and for a brighter future for the Iraqi people.

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, congratulate China on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March, during which it can count on the French delegation's cooperation. I also thank Belgium for its outstanding leadership of our work last month. I would also like to start by thanking Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for her briefing and particularly for her excellent work, together with her team, in the service of peace in Iraq.

Iraq, which has suffered repeated trials in its recent past and which is a country with which France maintains strong and long-standing ties, is at a crossroads. The country is strongly affected by regional tensions. It must complete the fight against Da'esh. It must also meet the aspirations that the Iraqis have been voicing since last October and continue to make progress on the path to democracy and justice.

In order to meet all those challenges, one goal is essential. It is important to ensure that Iraq is fully sovereign and that it rapidly recovers its institutional stability and has the means to address the various challenges. It is crucial that Council members stand by the Iraqi people and their authorities to achieve that. In that spirit, I would like to highlight two key messages today.

My first message is one of support — above all, support for the Iraqi people, who must be able to express their legitimate demands without fear for their security, in accordance with the constitutional principles of Iraq. The human toll of the demonstrations is extremely high, with more than 500 dead and thousands injured.

As mentioned in Geneva during the forty-third session of the Human Rights Council, France is especially concerned about the arbitrary arrests, assassinations, forced disappearances and indiscriminate use of force against people exercising their right to peaceful protests, documented in particular by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). It is the responsibility of the Iraqi authorities to ensure the safety of demonstrators and to guarantee the freedoms of expression and assembly and the right to protest. In that regard, we urge them to heed the recommendations of UNAMI.

In that difficult context, Iraq must have a Government that is able to implement the reforms expected by the Iraqis, in particular with regard to combating corruption, providing good services to the population and holding fair and transparent early elections. Women must play their full role. We will work alongside the Iraqi authorities in implementing such reforms.

Lastly, I would like to express our full support, as I said, for the United Nations Mission and for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, whose courageous and effective commitment I would like to commend. It is essential for UNAMI to continue its work in support of the Iraqi authorities, particularly in the area of electoral assistance. Its efforts to encourage dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil is also valuable.

With regard to the sensitive issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti national archives and property, the progress made following the discoveries at the Samawah site is encouraging and once again underline the importance of resolute progress towards a settlement. We will ensure that UNAMI continues to have adequate resources and the proper mandate.

My second message is a call for international mobilization. Iraq needs the active support of the Security Council and its other international partners. We must mobilize first to do everything possible to ensure that Iraq remains free from regional tensions and preserves its sovereignty. A stable Iraq is essential to creating the conditions for lasting de-escalation in the region.

We must also ensure mobilization in the fight against Da'esh. We all know that the fight is not over. The international coalition is committed to continuing its support to the Iraqi authorities to prevent any

widespread resurgence of terrorism in the country, while taking into account the changing political environment.

Lastly, there must be international mobilization to deal with the humanitarian emergency and the challenges of stabilizing and rebuilding the country. That is all the more vital in order to counter the risk of a resurgence of Da'esh and to promote reconciliation among the various sectors of the Iraqi population. Particular attention must therefore be paid to the areas liberated from Da'esh as well as to the conditions necessary to allow the voluntary, safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons. In that context, it is important to ensure that non-governmental organizations have access to Iraqi territory so as to facilitate the effectiveness of their work.

Given all these challenges, Iraq can count on France's commitment at its side. It can also count on the European Union (EU), whose High Representative has been given a mandate by the Council of the EU to contribute to de-escalation efforts in the region. Iraq must also be able to count on a Security Council that is united and committed to supporting it on the path to reconstruction and peace.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): Let me first congratulate you, Mr. President, and the people of the People's Republic of China on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for March. I pledge my delegation's support and cooperation in your work. We would also like to thank Belgium for its excellent presidency in February. We would like to thank Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), for her briefing and, through her, her colleagues on the ground for their steady work in very difficult circumstances.

Iraq has been ravaged by numerous cycles of conflict, crippling sectarianism and, most destructively, the threat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Following the military defeat of ISIL, Iraq continues to face severe security challenges as a result of violent extremism and the transnational nature of the threat.

The mandate of UNAMI remains crucial in coordinating United Nations efforts to support Iraq. South Africa supports the mandate of UNAMI in assisting the Government's efforts and the electoral processes in Iraq. South Africa welcomes the reforms proposed by the Government of Iraq to improve

governance structures and the implementation of service delivery to its people. We also support the drive for an inclusive Government that will bring together the diverse elements of Iraqi society in governance structures. We believe that national reconciliation and unity in Iraq are vital to promoting lasting and sustainable peace in the country.

With regard to the security situation, South Africa joins others in condemning the recent incidents that occurred in Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din, resulting in casualties and the destruction of crops. That is indicative of the deadly threat that persists in the country, which requires continued support and sustained efforts by the international community to bolster the Iraqi Government's efforts to gain full control of the security situation in the country.

Peace and security are fundamental prerequisites for Iraq to develop and grow its economy and provide basic services to all its citizens. In that regard, South Africa supports the full consolidation of control by the Iraqi army over its territories and the efforts of the Government to eradicate the threat posed by ISIL.

South Africa urges continued cooperation between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government in order to promote peace and stability throughout the country.

On the important role of women during the political transition in Iraq, South Africa welcomes the new electoral law and the appointment of a female Chief Executive Officer of the Independent High Electoral Commission. Women in Iraq continue to play a vital role in calling for political and economic reform. We welcome the upsurge in women's activism in Iraq, as this augurs well for the future of the country.

South Africa also joins the Secretary-General in encouraging the Council of Representatives to disseminate the text of the electoral law and to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the text.

South Africa welcomes the latest developments regarding missing Kuwaitis, and all efforts to identify any potential mortal remains of Kuwaiti citizens are highly appreciated and help to bring closure to and end the pain of the Kuwaiti people. We congratulate the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Iraqi Government for efforts to identify such mortal remains.

The situation in Iraq has improved substantially in the past 17 years. The country was devastated by a conflict that resulted from misguided military misadventures. Today the country is going through a period of reconstruction and development as it rebuilds itself, which will require support on the part of the international community. The international community must do its part to assist Iraq on this journey while respecting the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. For their part, the people of Iraq must strive for an inclusive political process that will set the country on a path to lasting peace, prosperity and development.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We wish you every success. We also commend the Belgian presidency during the month of February. We would like as well to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert, for her valuable briefing. I also welcome the presence here today of His Excellency the Ambassador of Iraq.

Tunisia is closely monitoring the situation in brotherly Iraq and has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/133). We hope that Iraq's institutions and the various components of the Iraqi political scene will be able to move beyond this sensitive phase to reach consensus on forming a Government and achieving calm and stability in the security situation, through the collective efforts of all actors, peaceful dialogue and prioritized general interests above all else.

Iraq is facing many challenges, including the effects of a tense regional situation. With the support of the international community, Iraq has been able to defeat the Da'esh terrorist organization and protect its internal security, sovereignty and territorial integrity. All of that has contributed to regional and international peace and security.

Today Iraq needs continued international support in order to consolidate stability and bolster the efforts to bring about reconstruction, economic development, reform, anti-corruption, strengthening of democracy and holding elections. That would lead to achieving the aspirations of the brotherly Iraqi people to security, stability and prosperity. In that context, we support the call made by the Secretary-General to the various regional and international parties to maintain their

commitments in terms of supporting Iraq. We also reaffirm the need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and to not interfere in its internal affairs.

Despite a relative improvement in the Iraq's economic situation, the Secretary-General's report refers to the continued need for delivering humanitarian assistance to those who need it in the country during this year. For that reason, we call on the various parties involved in the humanitarian efforts to continue their support to address the needs of the Iraqi people.

Given the importance of the issue of missing Kuwaiti persons and others from third countries, as well as missing Kuwaiti property, especially the Kuwaiti national archives, we express our satisfaction at the constructive cooperation that is noted in the twenty-fifth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of paragraph 4 of resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2020/133). That cooperation among the Iraqi and Kuwaiti authorities, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international partners will make it possible to achieve further progress on this issue and to resolve various other issues related to it.

In conclusion, we reiterate our support for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the positive role that the Mission is playing in supporting Iraq during this important phase of its history. Notwithstanding current difficulties and complexities, there are indicators in terms of Iraqis' determination to completing the reform process, entrenching democratic practices and achieving economic and social recovery, as well as strengthening the role of Iraqi women in managing public affairs.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and I thank Belgium for the excellent job it did in February. I also welcome our good colleague the Ambassador of Iraq to the Council and would like also to thank Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert for her informative briefing. I wish also to extend my appreciation for the continued work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq under challenging circumstances.

Iraq is facing significant challenges on its way to peace, stability and prosperity. In the context of increasing regional tensions, the continued support of the international community for Iraq's security and reconstruction remains crucial. All actors have to

respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. At the same time, I call on the Government of Iraq to continue engaging with international stakeholders.

In that context, we also condemn the numerous rocket attacks on the military bases hosting foreign troops as well as the United States Embassy in Baghdad.

Another challenge Iraq is facing is the continued political crisis. I urge all political parties and factions in Iraq to urgently resolve their differences and agree on a consensus candidate for Prime Minister. It is high time to put national interests first and overcome the prolonged political crisis. Hopefully, a new Government will be formed promptly, which will make it possible to respond to the legitimate aspirations of the Iraqi people.

It is vital that the Government continue with credible economic reforms, create jobs, provide basic services, improve governance and take effective measures to counter corruption and implement the rule of law. A greater presence by women and young people should also be secured when appointing new ministers. I also call on Iraq to complete the electoral reform process and to continue engaging with the United Nations in that regard in order to ensure free, credible and fair elections.

It is deeply worrisome to hear continued reports of human rights violations in the context of public demonstrations, which have now entered their sixth month. The use of live ammunition against unarmed protesters, threats against activists and journalists and detentions without due process have not stopped. I call on all actors to exercise maximum restraint, and I stress the Government's responsibility to protect peaceful protesters and to conduct thorough investigations into violations.

Taking note of the latest report by the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Iraq (S/2019/984), I commend the important steps taken by the Government of Iraq to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts. I look forward to further efforts in that regard.

There is also a need to find a sustainable solution to the situation of internally displaced persons, as their voluntary, safe and dignified return is not secured. I encourage the Government of Iraq to engage with the United Nations and respective non-governmental organizations in efforts to bring about reconciliation and social cohesion.

In conclusion, it is crucial that all Iraqi political actors put aside their differences and engage, with the support of the United Nations and international partners, to overcome the multiple challenges they are facing and respond to the legitimate aspirations of their people for stability, security, prosperity and peace. They can count on our support.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency this month. I assure you of our full support. I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq for her briefing and, above all, for her important work and that of her team in this difficult situation.

As the Special Representative indicated, Iraq today indeed faces particular and significant challenges. As it emerges from the conflict, the country has embarked upon the long road to reconciliation. Meanwhile, the Government must respond — in the short term and in a very difficult context — to the aspirations of its people.

The freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly are fundamental rights that must be respected. They are crucial for advancing democracy. We condemn the use of violence, including by the security forces, in the context of the protests that began in the fall. As we have said before, we also expect that all human rights violations during the protests will be investigated and, if necessary, prosecuted.

We call on all parties to engage in constructive dialogue in order to form a new Government that meets the legitimate aspirations of the people. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq has an important role to play in assisting the Iraqi authorities in that endeavour.

I once again stress that the challenges are significant. We hope that the future Government will be able to continue the efforts of the previous Government, in particular with regard to the fight against corruption, economic recovery, job creation, security sector reform, reconciliation and the provision of basic services to the population. In addition, the Government should continue its important and courageous security sector reform initiatives so that it can eventually restore its monopoly over State authority.

We have been very concerned for several weeks now about the lack of humanitarian access following the decision taken by the Iraqi authorities at the end of

2019 to put an end to the system of access letters for non-governmental organizations. That has had alarming consequences for the delivery of humanitarian aid in the country, as repeatedly emphasized by the United Nations Resident Coordinator. We therefore call on the authorities to immediately resolve that problem.

Although the Islamic State is defeated militarily, the causes that enabled Da'esh to develop have not been eliminated. We must do all we can to avoid its resurgence, which implies continuing military and stabilization efforts. In that connection, we commend the important work and role of the Global Coalition against Da'esh, and hope that the international community and Iraq can continue their joint work. As the Special Representative stated, Iraq finds itself in a volatile regional environment. We call on all actors to show restraint.

Finally, as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we recently reviewed the Secretary-General's latest report on the situation of children in Iraq (S/2019/984). Of course, most grave violations took place during the conflict, but it is clear that many challenges remain in that regard. The Working Group is committed to issuing conclusions in that regard.

Mr. Abarry (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I welcome China's presidency of the Security Council and assure you, Mr. President, of my country's support. We wish your presidency every success.

I cannot proceed without reflecting on our happy memories of Ambassador Pecsteen de Buytswerve and his excellent presidency. Among Belgium's main achievements during its presidency was its level of representation in the form of its King, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. I therefore congratulate the Ambassador and his team for their excellent work.

I also commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq for painting this picture of Iraq, including reasons for hope and causes for concern. I also note the presence of Ambassador Bahr Aluloom and hope his statement and information to the Council will be illuminating.

On reasons for hope, the Niger welcomes the recent calm in Iraq and encourages the Iraqi authorities to continue their efforts to foster friendly relations with neighbouring countries, while broadening their partnerships at the regional level. The Niger very much

hopes that the political process, which has experienced some difficulties of late, will lead to the establishment of institutions that guarantee the country's stability with the appointment of a new consensus Prime Minister.

The Niger remains convinced that a sustainable process must include Iraqi women. In that regard, we welcome the consultations with the Women's Advisory Group on Reconciliation and Politics, whose demand for representation at all levels of political and economic governance remains legitimate. That political process must seek solutions to the many challenges Iraqis are currently facing.

In addition to the terrorist threat, corruption poses an equally dangerous threat because it saps the country of the means to rebuild. My delegation expresses its concern about the way the protests have been managed and reiterates its commitment to respect for public freedoms, including the freedom to protest.

The Niger also calls on the Iraqi Government to take measures to overcome the existing administrative and security difficulties so that the violations against children documented in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2019/984), so aptly pointed out by the Committee Chair, Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve, cease and so that children can obtain civil status documents and have access to education after so many years of violence that have deprived them of schooling.

It is most regrettable that the transnational threat of terrorism remains in the country, with Da'esh continuing its rapid rebuilding. The Iraqi authorities, with the support of their partners, must continue the fight against terrorism while ensuring respect for the rights of individuals.

As the Special Representative said, Iraq has come a long way. The efforts made, however minimal, must be appreciated, supported and encouraged. Although the responsibility for building a peaceful, stable and prosperous Iraq lies with Iraqis — and they have the means to achieve that — the country must cease to be the scenario for confrontation, the use of force and external interests. To that end, Iraqis need our support now more than ever.

In conclusion, the Niger congratulates and encourages the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and her team for the convincing results achieved during her mandate.

Ms. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): Saint Vincent and the Grenadines congratulates you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. We also recognize the presence of the representative of Iraq in the Chamber. We thank Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert for her insightful briefing. Since taking up our seat on the Council, this is the first time that we can officially extend our gratitude to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for its indispensable work. We therefore welcome this opportunity and reaffirm our support to her and her team.

UNAMI's mandate provides a platform to support the Government of Iraq in tremendous ways, including in the advancement of political dialogue. We welcome UNAMI's engagement with the Women Advisory Group for Politics and National Reconciliation in Iraq to solicit input on the Government's ongoing constitutional review. Meaningful participation by women in political processes and economic and social planning is essential for achieving peace that extends beyond silencing the guns. On that note, it would be remiss of me not to mention the appointment of a woman as Chief Executive Officer of the Independent High Electoral Commission as indicative of the kind of transformation required to secure a more just organization of Iraqi society and polity. Similarly, we recognize as progressive UNAMI's engagement with young civil activists. We appreciate that UNAMI has created a platform for dialogue between local youth representatives and senior local political figures.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines commends the constructive cooperation between UNAMI and the Government of Iraq regarding missing Kuwaiti persons and third-country nationals. We note the success of those efforts, as catalogued in the most recent report (S/2020/133). We encourage the Government to continue building on the progress made with regard to the return of missing Kuwaiti property, including the search for Kuwaiti books and national archives.

We remain concerned about the ongoing protests and the allegations of abuses. While the establishment of a committee to investigate reprisals against protesters is a positive move, we urge greater progress in holding individuals and groups accountable. In addition, we encourage steps towards the formation of a Government.

In our efforts to assist the Government of Iraq, we recall relevant international principles, namely, those of sovereignty, non-intervention and non-interference. Those are the pillars upon which we can peacefully coexist. Iraq, as a sovereign State, has full authority to oversee its domestic affairs in accordance with international law, free from any external interference. That right, deeply embedded in our rules-based system, must not be abrogated in practice. It must be respected by all States, including those that operate in Iraq, and, therefore, within the parameters set out by the Government. In that regard, the Government of Iraq's commitment and efforts to work constructively with UNAMI are commendable. It is a mutually reinforcing and beneficial relation that should be encouraged.

Too many Iraqis have suffered at the hands of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). We remain deeply concerned that ISIL's remaining elements continue to carry out attacks. The complete eradication of those spoilers is critical in safeguarding reconciliation and redevelopment in Iraq.

We wish to reiterate that issues related to conflict and development must be addressed concurrently. There is a need to combat poverty, unemployment and inequality, and for the urgent economic and social reconstruction of Iraq. Sustainable reconciliation and reconstruction are achievable only when accompanied by efforts to safeguard human security. The international community remains duty-bound to provide the Republic of Iraq with all of the support necessary to materialize its future possibilities across the peace, security and development nexus.

We end by reaffirming our support to UNAMI and the Government of Iraq as they work towards achieving a lasting and positive peace.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): We extend our best wishes to you, Mr. President, for a successful presidency of the Security Council this month and assure you of our full support and cooperation. We express our thanks and appreciation to Belgium for its excellent presidency in February. We welcome the Ambassador of Iraq to this briefing and extend our appreciation and thanks to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing, her first since we joined the Council. We heard a lot of hope, which we share, for a better future for Iraq, first in terms of stability then in terms of forming a new

Government. Iraq is embarking upon a new course to national reconstruction and economic development.

We are encouraged by the progress Iraq has made in recent months, as reported by the Secretary-General (S/2020/140). We are happy to see that the Government of Iraq is taking a number of measures to meet the legitimate demands of its people, is continuing efforts towards national reconciliation, is investing more resources in reconstruction and is strengthening relations with countries in the region. We welcome the adoption by the Council of Representatives of the new laws on the Independent High Electoral Commission and on elections.

We express our appreciation for the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to assist the Government and the people of Iraq. We note UNAMI's efforts in the implementation of resolution 2107 (2013) and encourage the parties to continue their cooperation on that issue. However, the situation in Iraq remains challenging, especially in the context of increasing regional tensions. We share the concerns of the Secretary-General that, during the reporting period, various forms of violence continued in Baghdad and several other governorates, that the formation of a new Government has been delayed and that the living conditions of people in some areas remain worrisome, with about 1.8 million people in acute need. At this very important stage in Iraq, we wish to stress the following points.

First, we call on the parties concerned to make further efforts to overcome their differences in order to facilitate the formation of a new Government for the sake of stabilizing the political situation. The Government of Iraq should be keen to introduce reforms to meet the aspirations of its people, which should be carried out in parallel with policies that foster national reconciliation, unity and stability.

Secondly, addressing the economic difficulties in Iraq should be a priority. We are of the view that the Government of Iraq has the primary responsibility for the course of economic development but that international support and assistance are very important. We call on the United Nations, international organizations and Member States to continue to assist Iraq in that regard for the long-term stability of the country.

Thirdly, UNAMI plays an important role in Iraq at this point in time. We therefore support and

encourage the Mission to continue to work effectively, in accordance with the mandate assigned to it by the Security Council, to assist Iraq with reforms and in achieving an inclusive political process.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): At the outset, let me join others in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. Please be assured of my delegation's full support for your presidency. I would also like to extend my delegation's appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Belgium, His Excellency Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, and his whole team for their excellent presidency in the month of February. I would also like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert for her comprehensive briefing.

There have been many encouraging signs of progress in the reconstruction and reform process in Iraq. We welcome those developments, as we are convinced that, if we all invest more broadly in the people of Iraq, success will be attainable. To that end, Indonesia reaffirms its support for Iraqi sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and would like to underscore the following points.

First, with regard to the importance of stability and security in Iraq, stability and security are the prerequisite conditions for successful post-conflict recovery and economic development in the country. In recent months, we have witnessed how fragile those conditions are; any miscalculation could derail any progress that has been achieved so far. However, we are encouraged that the parties are exercising maximum restraint and remaining committed to supporting Iraq in its quest for peace and prosperity. Conflict and military operations are not an option for a country that has been affected by war for so long.

Indonesia strongly supports Iraq's effort to combat the remnants of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) with the support of the international community. The focus must now be on eliminating every threat posed by ISIL in the country. We believe that the support of all, particularly neighbouring countries, is crucial, and we commend Iraq's efforts in continuing to strengthen its relations with its neighbours.

Secondly, with regard to Iraq's nation-building efforts, my delegation would once again like to voice its support of Iraq's journey to democracy and prosperity for its people. We urge that the measures undertaken by

the Government to meet public demands be continued. We also support the steps being taken in connection with electoral reform and welcome the adoption of the law on the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and the appointment of the new IHEC Chief Executive Officer, who is a woman. We encourage the appointment of more female officials in the upper ranks of governance. We also hope that the designation of a new prime minister and the formation of a new cabinet will soon be realized, with a view towards swift action being taken to develop and implement reforms that meet the aspirations of all groups, including minorities.

Thirdly, with regard to the humanitarian file, as reported by the Secretary-General (S/2020/140), recent political upheaval posed some operational and security challenges for humanitarian operations. In that regard, we call on the Government of Iraq to continue to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance by United Nations agencies and partners. Indonesia also continues to express its support for vigorous efforts aimed at making further progress concerning missing Kuwaiti persons and third-country nationals, as well as the return of Kuwaiti property, including the archives. Not only is that an important humanitarian concern, it is also of great importance for further reconciliation between the two countries.

In conclusion, we would again like to express our support for the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. We encourage its various reconstruction and reform programmes in support of the people and the Government of Iraq undertaken in pursuit of its mandate.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

First of all, I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing. Once again, I would like to express to my good friend, the Permanent Representative of Belgium, and his team my appreciation for their outstanding work during their presidency of the Security Council last month. I also thank all the speakers for their kind words and their confidence in China. I look forward to working closely with all delegations in our joint effort to complete the tasks before us in the month of March by discharging our responsibilities in the best way possible.

At present, the peace, stability and reconstruction of the State of Iraq is at a critical stage. Against the looming backdrop of escalating tensions in the Middle East and the Gulf region, it is particularly important to safeguard Iraq's national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. All countries should fully respect the will of the Iraqi people and support the Iraqi Government in properly addressing the internal and external challenges and in achieving economic recovery, peace, stability, national reconstruction and national reconciliation. In that regard, I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, a good atmosphere should be created for political dialogue and national reconciliation in Iraq, as the internal political process in the country is at an important juncture. The international community should support Iraq in independently managing its own internal affairs and responding to the challenges it faces by playing a constructive role, creating an enabling environment and firmly opposing interference in Iraq's internal affairs. Any military action on Iraq's territory must be subject to the consent of the Government of the country so that Iraq may avoid becoming a victim of geopolitics.

Engaging in peaceful and meaningful dialogue towards inclusive reconciliation and harmonious coexistence is in the fundamental interest of the Iraqi people. We welcome the further improvement of relations between the central Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government, as well as the continuation of their communication and dialogue on oil, revenue-sharing and security arrangements.

Secondly, we should support Iraq in consolidating the achievements in counter-terrorism and safeguarding national security. Iraq has made great sacrifices for the international cause of counter-terrorism. Yet the threat of remnant forces of terrorism still exists, and the efforts to address the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and their families are in urgent need of support from all parties. The international community should fully respect Iraq's sovereignty and jurisdiction and support the country in bringing terrorists to justice, in accordance with relevant domestic laws, and in preventing the return and spread of terrorist forces and activities. We should support the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in actively working under its mandate and in close consultation with the Government of the country concerned.

Thirdly, we should actively promote Iraq's economic recovery and accelerated reconstruction. Development is the fundamental guarantee for peace. Speeding up economic reconstruction, augmenting public-service capacity, improving democracy and responding to people's aspirations are important tasks for Iraq in its current state of development. The international community should firmly support Iraq in exploring a development path that fits its own national conditions and fulfil in earnest its commitments to continued support and assistance for Iraq, help the country with its economic recovery, alleviate the humanitarian situation and effectively protect the rights of vulnerable groups, including women and children.

China supports the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq in actively continuing its work and hopes that it will, in accordance with its mandate, support the Iraqi Government's efforts aimed at achieving stability and development, and respect Iraq's ownership of its own affairs. China supports any effort that is conducive to maintaining stability and development in Iraq. We will continue to work under the Belt and Road Initiative framework by actively participating in the reconstruction of Iraq's energy and infrastructure sectors, inter alia, helping the country strengthen its capacity-building, training more professional and technical people, and enhancing its capacity for self-development. China will also continue to provide humanitarian items and economic aid to Iraq and help the Iraqi people cope with various difficulties and challenges, improve the humanitarian situation and achieve lasting peace, stability and development.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me, Mr. President, to congratulate the delegation of the People's Republic of China on assuming the presidency of the Council this month. We wish you every success. I also thank the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Belgium for his distinct leadership of the Council last month.

I welcome the briefing of Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). My delegation has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General dated, 20 February, on the implementation of Security

Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2020/133), and his report dated 21 February, on the implementation of the Security Council resolution 2470 (2019) (S/2020/140).

Iraqis have been protesting for five months, demanding change, economic reform and end to corruption. The protestors have succeeded in making their voices heard by the Government and political, religious and society actors alike.

Concerning the conflict in the region, it is no secret that Iraq was targeted in January. These violations were a breach of our sovereignty and have had a negative impact on the stability in the country. Regarding counter-terrorism, our security forces continue to fight the remnants of the terrorist organization Da'esh after having liberated all our cities, to the extent that no Iraqi territory is now controlled by terrorists, thanks to the sacrifices of all kinds made by these forces and with the support of the international community. Iraq is now on the cusp of a new era of stability and looking forward to new prospects for joint work in order to achieve the socioeconomic life that the Iraqis deserve.

Despite the difficult situation in Iraq of recent times, there have been intensive political consultations in the past few months to meet the legitimate demands of protestors in terms of achieving the desired reforms, which are also supported by the highest religious authority in the country. On that basis, on 1 February President Barham Salih of the Republic of Iraq mandated Mr. Mohammed Tawfik Allawi to form a new Government. In a letter addressed to the President dated 1 March, Mr. Allawi apologized for not being able to form a new Government. The President of the Republic will mandate another candidate to form the Government, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the periods specified therein.

With regard to preparations for prompt elections in our country to meet the demands of the protestors, a law drafted by the Independent High Electoral Commission was enacted on 5 December 2019, which ensures the holding of fair and free elections with greater transparency, in line with the reforms demanded by the people. Nine new members — seven judges and two counsellors — were elected to the Board of the Independent High Electoral Commission, in the presence of the representatives of the United Nations, the media, non-governmental organizations and unions. A woman judge was selected to Chair the Board of Commissioners, an unprecedented and

important step towards promoting the participation of women in high-level State decision-making processes. It is also an incentive for the participation of women in the political process.

Turning to the electoral law of the Iraqi Parliament, late last year the latter adopted this law, which is considered to represent an important change vis-à-vis the previous electoral laws. The new law ensures a more just representation of segments of society through new mechanisms for electoral constituencies, and the broader participation of young people in political life. The law reduces the minimum age of eligibility for election to Parliament from 30 to 25 years.

Iraq looks forward to the international community playing an important role in assisting us in holding the coming elections by providing necessary technical assistance. In this respect, we call on the United Nations to provide all technical resources necessary to ensure the success of these upcoming elections, in accordance with the mandate of UNAMI.

Iraq recognizes the importance of and is committed to upholding basic rights and international obligations, notably human rights, such as the right to life, the right of peaceful assembly or demonstration, and the freedom of expression. The Government continues to carry out its responsibilities to protect the Iraqi people. My Government therefore condemns and rejects any form of violence.

The security forces instructed by the Government have exercised the utmost restraint when dealing with the unfortunate incidents during the demonstrations. Some elements of infiltrators have sought to undermine and subvert the peaceful movement of the protestors, seeking to defame the security forces and the peaceful protestors at the same time. The instructions to security forces from their leadership prohibit the use of live ammunition against protestors in any form or their being targeted directly with tear gas. The number of casualties has recently declined, despite continuing protests in the central and southern provinces of Iraq. This can be attributed to the strenuous efforts of the caretaker Government to implement the package of reforms it has announced. There is now significant cooperation between protesters and security forces to ensure peaceful protests and to block infiltrators.

Meanwhile, the Government has made efforts to restore stability and ensure normalcy despite the situation in my country. The Baghdad Operations

Command and the Mayoralty of Baghdad have successfully restored normalcy and opened markets and streets, as well as gradually lifting security restrictions in Baghdad, particularly in the International Zone and the rest of the cities and provinces.

The applicable Iraqi Constitution provides for the non-interference in the domestic affairs of other States and for Iraq to resolve all conflicts peacefully. It also emphasizes the need to preserve Iraq's vital interests. My Government therefore rejects being a battleground for regional conflicts. Respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq is a steadfast national demand that should not be disregarded under any pretext or in any circumstances.

Earlier this year, in four letters addressed to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General (S/2020/15, S/2020/26, S/2020/55 and S/2020/84) Iraq condemned the attacks that had violated its sovereignty in breach of the principles of international law. At the same time, we emphasized that Iraq was committed to ensuring that its territory was not used to target any other State.

We acknowledge the importance for the international community to stand by Iraq and to assist it in addressing any violations committed on its territory through legal and diplomatic means. Regional and international partners of Iraq should support the country in its efforts to restore stability and achieve reconstruction. We therefore call on the Security Council to emphasize the need to respect Iraq's sovereignty, not to undermine its security and to assist its efforts to ensure stability.

With regard to the attacks on the United States Embassy in Iraq and the Consulate of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Najaf, my Government has rejected and condemned such violations and set up investigation committees. I reaffirm before the Council that my Government is committed to providing the necessary protection to all accredited diplomatic missions in Iraq, in accordance with the provisions of the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic Relations and on Consular Relations of 1961 and 1963, respectively.

Remnants of the Da'esh terrorist organization continue to constitute security concerns. The movement of its elements from Syria to Iraq continues to threaten the security and stability of my country. That should be addressed through joint international efforts, which requires the international community to continue to cooperate in the fight against terrorism, support the

Iraqi security forces and train them. In that regard, I would like to thank all members of the international community that provided assistance to the Iraqi security forces, without which my country would not have been able to repatriate 80 per cent of internally displaced persons to their places of origin.

With regard to dealing with the elements of Da'esh detained by the Iraqi authorities, our country has informed their countries that they are being held by the relevant Iraqi authorities and that the rights of all accused persons during investigation and prosecution are fully guaranteed. We also ensure their right to meet representatives of their embassies during all stages of the trial pending sentencing.

Iraq asserts that any assistance in terms of military training, advanced technology and the weapons needed to fight the Da'esh organization should be at the request of the Government, in accordance with bilateral and multilateral agreements.

Concerning the repatriation of families of Da'esh elements to their countries, Iraq still needs to develop programmes for their return to their homelands. In that regard, the countries concerned must take urgent decisions pertaining to the return of those families to their countries in coordination with the Iraqi Government. That issue is a great burden for my country.

My country thanks Turkey, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Germany, France, Sweden, Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, Algeria and Uzbekistan for their response to the request by the Iraqi authorities to receive their nationals who were members of the Da'esh terrorist group, which amounted to 828 extradited persons. From this rostrum, my Government urges other countries that were approached to take back their nationals who are women, young people and children under the age of criminal legal responsibility.

In order to completely eradicate terrorism, Iraq looks forward to cooperating with sisterly and friendly countries as well as regional and international security organizations. It hopes for further support from the international community in combating terrorism and acquiring technical assistance for criminal investigations and identifying sources of financing for the Da'esh organization and the accounts of persons and entities that collaborate with Da'esh.

Regarding victims of terrorism, there is still an urgent need to step up efforts for the rehabilitation and reintegration of men, women and children affected by terrorism, particularly in the liberated areas. My Government seeks through various relevant institutions, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Women's Empowerment, under the Office of the Prime Minister, to establish, in cooperation with United Nations specialized agencies, all programmes for reintegrating such people into society, including those in camps and detention centres. Iraq looks for more cooperation and support in that area.

Cooperation between Iraq and Kuwait is among our top priorities regarding our relations with the sisterly State of Kuwait and in cooperation with the United Nations. We stress that my country is fully committed to implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions and will spare no efforts to fulfil its obligations towards the international community. In that regard, I am pleased to inform Council members of recent developments concerning this issue, particularly regarding resolution 2107 (2013), paragraph 4. My Government has achieved the following.

Iraq is making efforts to implement its obligations regarding missing Kuwaiti persons and property. As Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert said, the remains of 21 missing persons were found in Al-Muthanna governorate on 29 January. We hope that the ongoing analysis will yield positive results. A number of remains were also handed over to the Kuwaiti side on 8 August 2019. In that respect, my Government urges the fraternal Kuwaiti side to inform it as soon as possible about the results of efforts to determine the nationality of the persons whose remains were handed over.

We stress Iraq's commitment to continuing its efforts to meet its financial obligations in terms of compensating Kuwait, in connection with which Iraq paid an additional amount of \$250 million on 28 January.

Progress was made in the relations between the central Government and the Regional Government during the recent period. Successful consultations have been held between officials from both sides, in particular after their meetings, which led to an initial agreement on the federal budget for 2020 as well as on issues related to oil revenues. The federal Government is seeking to conclude talks with the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq so as to reach a final agreement

between the two parties following the formation of the new Government.

In closing, I thank the Secretary-General for his support for Iraq through emphasizing the need to respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We also thank the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Head of the Mission for their efforts in this respect. We hope that following the full defeat of Da'esh, the international community will continue its support for Iraq and its people in order for them to remain strong and steadfast as well as to meet their aspirations. My Government thanks France, Germany and Denmark for supporting Iraqi development projects and Iraq's efforts and those of the Mission in the area of mine clearance.

Allow me to end my statement by reiterating my Government's commitment to work seriously to ensure the welfare and prosperity of our people through the implementation of our international and national obligations, as well as to uphold good governance in accordance with the Constitution and our national laws, with a view to achieving the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have a high priority on our Government's agenda.

I would note here the statement made by the Ministry of Planning of Iraq on 16 February indicating that the poverty rate in Iraq decreased over the past two years, 2018-2019, compared with 2014. This shows that the Government attaches great importance to developing our country's economy and creating job opportunities despite also combating terrorism. We are confident that the international community will work relentlessly to support my Government's efforts in that regard, because international security is contingent on domestic security in every State of the world.

I should also like to thank the members of the Council for supporting Iraq's sovereignty, addressing all the challenges facing it and rejecting its being turned into a battleground for third parties.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.