



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

*Provisional*

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Tuesday, 6 February 2024, 10 a.m.

New York

*President:* Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett . . . . . (Guyana)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Bendjama
China . . . . .	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France . . . . .	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Japan . . . . .	Mrs. Shino
Malta . . . . .	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Kumanga
Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Cho
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. Sowa
Slovenia . . . . .	Mr. Žbogar
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Thirty-ninth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2024/95)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2682 (2023) (S/2024/96)

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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation concerning Iraq**

**Thirty-ninth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013) (S/2024/95)**

**Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2682 (2023) (S/2024/96)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Iraq and Kuwait 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 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/2024/95, which contains the thirty-ninth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of paragraph 4 of resolution 2107 (2013), and document S/2024/96, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2682 (2023).

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

**Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert:** With the conflict raging in Gaza, as well as armed action elsewhere, the Middle East is at a critical juncture. The same is true for Iraq. To be clear: the efforts of the Government of Iraq are focused on avoiding a domestic and regional spillover. Still, continued attacks have become a harsh reality. Those attacks originate from within and outside of the country's borders — attacks which, if they were to continue, stand to undo Iraq's hard-won stability, as well as other achievements made in the past 18 months.

As we all know, history can have a long tail, one that can impact the present. That is searingly true for the Middle East. To fully grasp the current regional and

domestic dynamics therefore, we would need to traverse decades — an exercise this briefing does not allow for. Nonetheless, it is within that context that various Iraqi armed groups — groups acting outside State control — reference as justification for their operations a doctrine that transcends politics and State borders. Other motivations expressed pertain specifically to Iraq, such as calls for Iraqi skies to be “free” and for an end to the international military presence in the country.

However, for Iraq to further continue on its path of stability and progress, an enabling environment will prove essential. And such an environment requires restraint from all sides — yes indeed, from Iraq's armed actors. And, as might be expected, restraint from Iraq's neighbours and other countries is just as crucial.

I have said it numerous times in the past and will say it again: messaging by strikes serves only to heighten tensions, to kill or injure people and to destroy property. A case in point was the attack on 28 January, which killed and injured United States service members. That was seen again with the retaliatory strikes on 2 February, which also resulted in casualties. Rather than resorting to force, all efforts should centre on safeguarding Iraq from in any way being drawn into a wider conflict.

And it is precisely within that context that many expressed shock about Iran's missile attack on Erbil a few weeks ago, which killed civilians, including a little girl. Based on accusations that Iraqi Government has strongly refuted, those actions were sorely at odds with the great efforts made on the Iraq-Iran security agreement, which I highlighted in my briefing in October (see S/PV.9432). Meanwhile, Turkish military operations in the north also continue.

Just because those attacks have become the new normal does not mean they do not seriously compound the risk of new arenas of violence being opened.

When talking about the incendiary potential of retaliatory strikes, we would like to welcome the recent launch of dialogue through the United States-Iraq Higher Military Commission. That dialogue channel opened at a critical moment. The setting of joint objectives could only be a positive development amid rising tensions.

Having said all of that today, I am compelled to reiterate our appeal to all sides to exercise maximum restraint. With Iraq cloaked in an already complex

tapestry of challenges, it is of the greatest importance that all attacks cease. While we are of course aware that many authorities and actors seek to limit further escalation, it is clear that the situation remains volatile. Iraq, and indeed the wider region, remains on a knife's edge, with the tiniest miscalculation threatening a major conflagration.

On a more optimistic note, on 18 December 2023, Iraq held local elections for the first time in 10 years. And in the case of Kirkuk, for the first time since 2005. That electoral process took place in a broadly peaceful and technically sound manner. It marked another milestone in the Government's efforts to break from past cycles of dysfunction. And we truly hope that the re-establishment of local representative bodies, which have been inactive since 2019, will signify another major step forward.

A challenge for future elections will be to rally a higher voter turnout and, importantly, to encourage Iraq's eligible voters to register. While turnout among registered voters for the 2023 governorate council elections was on par with Iraq's national parliamentary elections two years prior, approximately 60 per cent of registered voters did not cast their ballots. That, combined with the fact that millions of Iraqis did not even register to begin with, spotlights the magnitude of the challenge that lies ahead. Building public trust, and thus encouraging the majority of Iraq's eligible voters to participate in the democratic process, will entail continuous and hard work.

Another positive development to report on is that Iraq's Government continues to strengthen the country's finance and banking sectors. Mergers and structural reforms of key insurance and banking entities demonstrate yet again the Government's commitment to nurturing a transparent and compliant financial sector in Iraq. Steps taken to strengthen public financial management, including by establishing a single treasury account, have also been welcomed by the International Monetary Fund and others. Alongside new electronic platforms for foreign currency sales, which I mentioned in my most recent briefing, those initiatives are set to be instrumental in enhancing the transparency and manageability of Iraq's public finances.

Meanwhile, ambitious construction projects continue apace. They have included major housing complexes, which will, I hope, be open to all Iraqis. Similarly, a government commitment to build

1,000 new schools by the end of 2024, if realized, would be a real opportunity accelerator. National incentives for development projects such as special loans and exemptions also indicate the Government's determination to see those and other visions take concrete shape.

Next month, Iraq will become the first country in the region to join the International Labour Organization's Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work. Coupled with the new national social security law, that sets a regional precedent for employee protection that should benefit Iraqi workers, especially women. Such standard-setting and benefit expansion must also be seen as part of efforts to strengthen Iraq's private sector. Those and other reforms, as I have said before, are critical to unlocking a brighter future for all Iraqis, a future in which the country can move from fighting fires to crafting sustainable solutions, and a future in which young people can use their skills and capacities to better their lives and communities, rather than taking to the streets out of desperation — or worse, taking up arms.

Let me home in on a few other issues. I turn first to the issue of climate change. Iraq's participation in the twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in December 2023 produced some promising commitments. Those included a complete phase-out of gas flaring by 2028 and the establishment of a new green sustainable bank to diversify the Iraqi economy away from fossil fuels. A slew of projects to incentivize water conservation and sustainability across various sectors, and promised investments in clean energy exploration also augur well for the future.

When it comes to climate change, cries from global platforms have increasingly formed a crescendo of doom. And, in Iraq, it is not hard to see why. Water scarcity, desertification, forced migration, conflict over natural resources and extreme weather events all combine to paint a rather bleak picture in which existing fault lines come under increasing pressure. But instead of giving into a sense of despair, and as emphasized by Iraq's Prime Minister, focus must now shift to mitigation and adaptation — for instance, through the implementation of inclusive, peace-positive environmental management programmes, the modernization of irrigation infrastructure and immediate steps to reduce oil

reliance. That said, without moving from promises to action, opportunities may quickly slip away.

Secondly, I wish to again highlight existing feelings of exclusion and marginalization, which, as we all know, often lead to recurring cycles of conflict. Managing diversity is never easy but if done well represents a major win in preventing instability, mistrust and violence, and in promoting respect for human rights. Key to that is the rule of law, of course. If justice systems are seen to be treating people in discriminatory ways, tensions among communities can quickly boil over.

As the Council knows, in mid-November, a ruling of the federal Supreme Court suddenly ended the term of Iraq's parliamentary Speaker. Today, nearly three months later, political bickering continues to prevent consensus on his replacement. Needless to say, we can only hope that an agreement will emerge sooner rather than later.

On the Kurdistan region, I regret to report that the region's parliamentary elections have again been held up. Initially scheduled for October 2022, they were postponed to November 2023 then further delayed to February of this year. And we are now awaiting a new date. Let me be clear: these continued postponements do not help already low trust levels, nor do they contribute to Iraq's stability, and wrangling between Baghdad and Erbil on financial and budgetary issues goes on. While we acknowledge that there are various difficult and technical issues at play, this does not change the fact that, in the absence of a sustainable agreement, it is the everyday people who suffer. The recent decision of the federal Government to approve the financing of the region for the month of January, in accordance with the federal budget for the year 2024, is, of course, to be welcomed. However, we can only reiterate that a more permanent solution is desperately needed. In simple terms, if stability is to be preserved, the Kurdistan region must receive funding to pay its civil servants their monthly salaries.

Meanwhile, the United Nations presence in Iraq continues to evolve. The Mission's independent strategic review is ongoing, and the country team has shifted, as the Council knows, from a humanitarian to a development focus. And of course, a new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework is on its way, which will support national priorities and accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We wish to mention that Iraq's Council of Ministers has set 30 July 2024 as the date for the closure of all displacement camps throughout the country, including the Kurdistan region. That decision is welcome, as it defines concrete steps, establishes mechanisms and dedicates Government funding to the goal of ending displacement. Having said that, the United Nations presence in Iraq underscores that this decision should be complemented by solutions for displaced people outside camps. Equally important is ensuring all returns and relocations are informed, safe, voluntary, dignified and inclusive, and pursued in cooperation and coordination with the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Turning to the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives, the Government of Iraq remains undoubtedly committed to this file. But with 308 missing persons still unaccounted for, swifter progress is needed. That must involve the dismantling of bureaucratic hurdles and immediate follow-up on outstanding issues. There is also a clear need to redouble efforts to locate and return missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives. What we are essentially saying is that it is in everybody's interest to show a sense of urgency so as to bring this important file to a close.

What is needed now? As I have said many times, no Government can go it alone. Hence, we can only hope that each and every one of Iraq's politicians will continue working to put the country on the clearest path to success, in the best interests of all Iraqis, whatever their affiliation, background or ethnicity. And the same goes for any other actor, in or outside Iraq. They are expected to support that objective, rather than to thwart it. One thing is for sure: the need for sustainable progress, for real reform and for better living standards will not decline. Iraq's population grows every year, driving even more demand for jobs, housing, water and other essential services. While many of the plans on the Government's books hold the key to meeting those needs, they will become more and more difficult to realize with each year that passes, and so the time to act is now.

In conclusion, let me once again stress the importance of an enabling environment and thus the urgent need to cease attacks, whether they originate from within or outside of Iraq's borders. And, as stated many times in past years, that must include reining in armed actors operating outside State control. It is quite

simple. The enormous risks and potential devastating consequences of continued escalation cannot be overstated. Again, that is true for Iraq, the region and beyond.

Last but not least, in December 2018, I arrived in Baghdad. Now, five years later, it is almost time for me to say goodbye. I expect to depart from this position at the end of May. This is not easy, I have to say. Through the many highs and lows, Iraq simply has become part of me. That said, today's briefing could very well be my last address to the Security Council on Iraq. While it is tempting to look back and reflect, I am of course conscious of time constraints. But please allow me to use this opportunity to thank both the Council and Iraq's authorities for their support and to express my vast appreciation for each and every one of my United Nations colleagues in Iraq. Most importantly, I wish to thank the people of Iraq for their boundless hospitality, their generosity and their kindness. Wherever I go, they will always have a special place in my heart. And I can only hope that one day, inshallah, people from around the world will get to know the real Iraq, a country of immense beauty, a country of rich diversity and culture where there are so many opportunities to grasp.

Let me end by publicly paying tribute to all Iraqi men and women for their sacrifices, their strength and the depth of their commitment to building a prosperous, democratic and peaceful Iraq. Long live Iraq.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing.

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

**Mr. Camilleri** (Malta): I thank Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert for sharing her insights with us. Let me begin by offering Malta's support to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which she leads. We value the contribution of UNAMI to building a peaceful and prosperous Iraq.

We look forward to engaging with the findings of the independent strategic review. In that vein, we underline our support for the efforts of Mr. Volker Perthes and stress the need to avoid exerting any undue pressure on that process.

Respect for Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and democratic process is essential for enhancing domestic and regional stability. It is fundamental for

all parties to act with restraint to avoid any further escalation. Furthermore, as the conflict in Gaza continues, we remain gravely concerned about a regional spillover, including to Iraq.

On the domestic front, the Governorate Council elections held on 18 December represent an important step for the democratic process. We congratulate the 76 women elected as part of the 25 per cent minimum constitutional quota. The establishment of a High Committee to Support Women's Political Participation is an important step. We hope that the election will lead to the prompt establishment of new local governments that are able to deliver socioeconomic progress. Malta welcomes the Independent High Electoral Commission's continued preparation for parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Holding those elections is essential to fostering democratically empowered institutions. On that note, enhanced dialogue in addressing outstanding issues between Baghdad and Erbil remains crucial.

Malta stresses the importance of promoting social justice and equality and enhancing efforts to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights. We also encourage the Council of Representatives to expedite the adoption of the anti-domestic violence bill.

We are deeply concerned by the grave violations committed against children, in particular killing and maiming, and the high incidence of those casualties caused by explosive remnants of war. We support the continued assistance of the United Nations Mine Action Service to the Iraqi Government on demining and explosive ordinance risk education, as well as comprehensive victim assistance.

We reaffirm our support for the work of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in ensuring accountability for atrocity crimes committed by Da'esh in the country. Those include crimes of sexual and gender-based violence.

Malta welcomes the Government's commitment to engage in regional and international cooperation to address the multifaceted impacts of climate change. There is undoubtedly a need to foster regional cooperation to adequately address those transboundary challenges. At the same time, we also highlight the critical need for urgent assistance from the international community.

In conclusion, amid ongoing humanitarian needs, achieving durable solutions for internally displaced persons remains critical for long-term stability. We therefore urge the international community to remain committed to supporting the humanitarian and development priorities of Iraq and its people.

**Mr. Dai Bing** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing and welcome the representatives of Iraq and Kuwait to today's meeting.

During the reporting period, the Iraqi Government smoothly conducted Governorate Council elections and took practical steps to promote economic reform, fight corruption, create jobs and improve public services, which China appreciates. The efforts by all Iraqi factions to enhance solidarity, achieve reconciliation and promote development serve the fundamental interests of the Iraqi people.

We support the central Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government in continuing to strengthen dialogue and consultation on outstanding issues and in seeking sustainable solutions. We support Iraq's efforts to develop good neighbourly relations with countries in the region and support Iraq and Kuwait's consistent efforts to make progress in the search for missing Kuwaiti nationals and missing Kuwaiti property.

Since its inception in 2003, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has made important contributions to the reconstruction and development of Iraq. Given the steadily improving domestic situation in Iraq and the ever-growing governance capacity of the Iraqi Government, UNAMI should, in the light of the evolving situation in Iraq, make timely adjustments.

We count on the Secretary-General, in accordance with resolution 2682 (2023), to conduct an independent strategic review of UNAMI, fully heed the views of the Iraqi Government and come up with recommendations for streamlining and optimizing the Mission's mandate and rationalizing the allocation of personnel and resources. The Security Council should, based on full respect for the sovereignty and aspiration of the country concerned, carefully study the future of the Mission.

For some time now, the Palestinian and Israeli conflict has continued to escalate. Iraq has also been affected by the spillover effect, with multiple attacks

taking place inside the country. The security situation is indeed worrisome. We call on all parties, especially major countries with influence on the situation, to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq; stay calm and exercise restraint; refrain from acts that exacerbate tensions and play a constructive role in de-escalating the situation.

**Mrs. Shino** (Japan): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, for her detailed briefing and dedicated work over the past five years.

We are greatly concerned about the steep uptick in attacks conducted by non-State armed groups since last October. Those risks are undermining the country's stability and regional security, as well as stalling its development. Japan echoes the Secretary-General's call on all concerned parties to urgently act to de-escalate tensions.

Maintaining good neighbourly relations remains a cornerstone of stability for Iraq and the region. It is encouraging to see Iraq continuing its active engagement in building confidence among neighbouring countries through dialogue. Japan welcomes the steady cooperation between Iraq and Kuwait on missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property.

In this difficult time, political stability and progress in Iraq is critical. Japan welcomes the fact that the provincial council elections were held in an orderly manner last December, as scheduled, and hopes that the Kurdistan region's parliamentary elections will also take place in accordance with the specified timeline.

At the same time, a comprehensive approach to peace, which includes investing in development and addressing humanitarian issues, is an irreplaceable foundation for stability in Iraq. In that vein, we continue to underscore the importance of finding durable solutions for internally displaced persons and returnees, as well as repatriating people from Al-Hol camp.

Lastly, we would like to recall that the Security Council requested an independent strategic review in its resolution 2682 (2023), adopted in May last year, and the report is scheduled to be submitted no later than 31 March. Given the political developments in Iraq, as well as the rapidly changing security situation in the

region, the review should provide a strong foundation on which the Council can deepen its discussion under the agenda item from a long-term perspective and with a view to benefiting the people of Iraq. We look forward to receiving the report and to the discussions that will follow.

**Mr. Bendjama** (Algeria): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, namely, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and my own country, Algeria, as well as Guyana (A3+1).

We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing. We also welcome the participation of the representatives of Iraq and Kuwait in today's meeting.

We commend the steadfast commitment and tireless work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) as it continues to play a crucial role in supporting Iraq's national priorities and efforts to advance peace, stability and democratic governance. Today we will focus on three important areas — the political, security and human rights situations.

On the political front, the A3+1 congratulates Iraq on holding governorate council elections in 15 federal provinces for the first time in 10 years, on 18 December 2023, as scheduled, as well as the provincial council elections in Kirkuk, which had not been held since 2005. We commend the Independent High Electoral Commission and the security forces for their efforts and contribution to the success of the elections, despite the challenging environment. We also note the information given in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/96) that more than 1,600 female candidates were registered, nearly one third of the total, representing a level of engagement for women that should be highlighted.

The A3+1 is encouraged by the Government of Iraq's commitment to improving public services and carrying out important economic and financial reforms. The efforts of Iraq to pursue economic diversification and social protection are encouraging, as is its continued implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals with the aim of meeting the aspirations of the Iraqi people. We welcome UNAMI's advisory support to Iraq's constitutional and legislative processes, strengthening governance and accountability, fostering support for internally displaced persons and enhancing the role of women and young people in peacebuilding and nation-building initiatives.

Turning to the security situation, the A3+1 commends the continued commitment of the Iraqi security forces in responding to threats from Da'esh. We have noted with deep concern Da'esh's continued attacks, including on personnel and assets of the Iraqi security forces. It is important in that regard to highlight the significant progress that the Iraqi forces have made in combating the scourge of terrorism. That fight is not just for Iraq — it is for all of us. By standing together and supporting the Iraqi people and their Government, we can ensure that Da'esh's shadow will fade and Iraq will emerge stronger. It is in the interests of the whole region and the international community to see a safe and stable Iraq. Apart from that, the A3+1 remains gravely concerned about the increasing strikes against Iraq's sovereign territory. The regional spillover from the ongoing situation in Gaza, including into Iraq, risks undermining and undoing the country's progress. We call on all the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to take urgent steps for the de-escalation of tensions in the Middle East. We also reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire and full, rapid, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian aid to Gaza, which is of paramount importance in ensuring regional stability.

On the human rights front, the A3+1 commends UNAMI's efforts to promote human rights in Iraq, and in that regard we have taken positive note of the progress made by Iraq in upholding the rights of the child. However, we remain deeply concerned about the instances of casualties among children due to explosive remnants of war, and we therefore emphasize the importance of continued technical support to Iraq for the removal of remnants of war and unexploded ordnance.

We believe that addressing ongoing humanitarian needs and achieving durable solutions for internally displaced persons will be critical to Iraq's long-term stability and prosperity. We therefore congratulate Iraq on the progress achieved in returning displaced persons from the Al-Hol camp in Syria to the Al-Jadaa camp in Iraq, and we support the rehabilitation operations for their return and safe social integration. As Iraq navigates a pivotal phase in its history, characterized by ongoing recovery and State-building, we urge the international community to continue to support its people and their legitimate aspirations for peace and prosperity.

Finally, the positive changes achieved over the past two decades are evident. Iraq today is an important partner in the fight for regional development and

stability in the Middle East. We remain encouraged by UNAMI's ongoing efforts and stand committed to supporting action that advances progress and sustainable development in Iraq, in keeping with the priorities of the Government and the people of Iraq.

**Mr. Eckersley** (United Kingdom): I would like to welcome the representatives of Iraq and Kuwait to the Chamber. Let me start by thanking the Special Representative for her briefing and for the important work of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). I would like to highlight four points of particular importance for the United Kingdom.

First, we commend the progress being made by Iraq across the breadth of political and economic issues set out by the Special Representative. We deeply value UNAMI's contribution to that progress. We look forward to discussing the outcome of the strategic review led by Volker Perthes on the future shape and function of UNAMI, in discussion with relevant stakeholders, including, of course, the sovereign State of Iraq.

Secondly, Iraq has the potential to play a strong stabilizing role in the region. To do so, it is critical that its territory not be used by Iranian proxies to destabilize the region. We offer our condolences to the families of those killed in Iran's 15 January strike on Erbil. We urge Iran to de-escalate tensions in the region. We reiterate our commitment to the Global Coalition against Da'esh, which operates within Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi Government, as well as our commitment to a secure and sovereign Iraq.

Thirdly, we congratulate Iraq on holding its first provincial elections in a decade. We look forward to the holding of elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq without further delay and encourage all relevant actors to take steps to ensure that the necessary preparations are made to guarantee that the elections are free, fair and timely. We hope that a sustainable outcome on the transfer of budget allocations from Baghdad to Erbil can be agreed, and we encourage the relevant political parties to play a constructive role to support that.

We welcome the Special Representative's update on missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property. We reiterate the United Kingdom's commitment to the work of the Tripartite Commission. We call for further progress to resolve that long-standing issue.

In conclusion, I wish to express the United Kingdom's sincere thanks to Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert for her outstanding work on Iraq since 2018. We commend her powerful and hopeful words, as she departs, on the future of a stable and prosperous Iraq.

**Mrs. Broadhurst Estival** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing, and I welcome the presence among us this morning of the representatives of Iraq and Kuwait.

France welcomes the efforts of the Iraqi Government to carry out the reforms expected by the Iraqi population and calls for their continuation. France welcomed the smooth holding of provincial elections on 18 December — the first to be held since 2013. We welcome the support provided by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to the Independent High Electoral Commission. The recent announcements relating to the designation of new local authorities are encouraging, and France hopes that parliamentary elections can be held in Iraqi Kurdistan as soon as possible.

We encourage Iraq to continue its reforms, as announced by the Iraqi Prime Minister, particularly in terms of diversifying its economy, fighting corruption and impunity, and protecting human rights. Concerning relations between Baghdad and Erbil, France calls for the resumption of dialogue, particularly regarding the sharing of revenue from oil resources and security issues, which is in the interest of both parties.

France will carefully examine the conclusions contained in the strategic review to take place in March. The strategic review, requested by the Security Council, is independent, and we will carefully examine its conclusions and recommendations. France welcomes the essential role played by UNAMI in providing assistance to Iraq in many areas, with full respect for its sovereignty. We thank the Special Representative and congratulate her on the exceptional commitment she has demonstrated in the service of Iraq and its people throughout her mandate over the past five years.

As a strategic partner of Iraq, France will continue to listen to the Iraqi authorities regarding the future of UNAMI. Our common goal is for any evolution of its mandate to be successful, and we will work together with Iraq and the United Nations to achieve that. France is very concerned by the allegations of

the misappropriation of funds allocated to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Iraq and thanks UNDP for having initiated an investigation to shed light on the facts and for taking all necessary measures in that regard.

France is very concerned about the impact of regional tensions on Iraq. The conflict in the Gaza Strip has repercussions throughout the region, particularly in Iraq. France is continuing to work to prevent a regional conflagration. France is committed to the security and stability of Iraq and of the autonomous region of Kurdistan within it. I recall our strong condemnation of the attack carried out in December 2023 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as well as the 15 January strike on Erbil claimed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Those violent and destabilizing actions constitute violations of Iraq's sovereignty and must stop. We call on Iraq's neighbours to cease all interference in the country's internal affairs. France also recalls that diplomatic facilities must be protected.

In conjunction with its partners in the Global Coalition against Da'esh, France will continue to stand alongside Iraq in its fight against terrorism, with full respect for Iraqi sovereignty and for as long as such support is requested. In that regard, we also wish to commend the work accomplished by the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant since its creation and the effective contribution it has made to the fight against impunity.

France welcomes Iraq's announcement of its willingness to resume discussions with Kuwait regarding the territorial dispute between the two countries. France also reiterates the importance of close cooperation between Iraq and Kuwait on the issue of missing Kuwaitis and third-country nationals.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Like my colleagues, I wish to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing and, above all, for her five years of intense work, expressed through her commitment to the country in and for which she served. I think "powerful and hopeful words" was a beautiful description. I would also like to welcome the presence of the representatives of Iraq and Kuwait among us today.

The briefing by the Special Representative and the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2024/96) demonstrate the progress made by Iraq in

the fields of reconstruction and reconciliation, work that has been skilfully supported by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). We encourage the Iraqi Government to maintain its commitment to economic reforms, the fight against corruption and the improvement of public services.

I would like to focus on four points.

First, at the political level, an important step for democracy in Iraq was taken with the first provincial council elections to be held in 10 years. The fact that those elections took place in an orderly manner and that the quota of women provided for by law was reached is positive. Provincial councils must now work to meet the legitimate aspirations of the population, such as access to quality public services. At the same time, we hope that the legislative elections in the Kurdistan Region can take place swiftly. Switzerland also calls for an intensification of dialogue on the issues outstanding between Baghdad and Erbil. Additionally, the continued implementation of government plans to diversify the economy will provide the population with economic prospects, which is also essential for stability and peace in Iraq.

Secondly, on the security front and at the regional level, we are concerned about the growing repercussions of the hostilities in Gaza on the region. In Iraq, security incidents have increased sharply over the past four months. In order to achieve de-escalation, it is important that all parties show maximum restraint, that the Iraqi State control the use of force on its territory and that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq are respected. In recent years, Iraq has developed a dynamic of dialogue and cooperation in the region. Those efforts remain important in the current context. We also welcome Iraq's desire to find a regional approach to address the negative effects of climate change and water scarcity.

Thirdly, the promotion of the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms remain essential. In that regard, providing civil documentation for all individuals is crucial for access to basic services. That is a precondition for realizing the right of all children to education, among other things. Switzerland is also categorically opposed to the use of the death penalty and is concerned about the restriction of the right to freedom of expression.

Finally, we welcome the ongoing efforts regarding the file on missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals.

The United Nations, through the work of UNAMI, is well placed to provide ongoing support to Iraq in all of the abovementioned areas and, consequently, to sustain peace in the country. That is particularly important in a volatile regional context. As also noted in the New Agenda for Peace, special political missions are an essential part of the Council's toolbox. We look forward to hearing the results of the independent strategic review of UNAMI, which will serve as a basis for reflections on the future of the Mission's mandate.

**Mr. Montalvo Sosa** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I wish to welcome the presence of the representatives of Iraq and Kuwait in the Chamber today.

I am grateful for the information provided by Special Representative Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert. I also thank her for her dedicated efforts throughout her mandate.

Ecuador congratulates the Government of Iraq for the positive results of the provincial elections and the exemplary organization of the process. For the first time in 10 years, within the framework of a democratic and participatory electoral process, authorities have been elected in 15 federal provinces.

As stated in the Secretary-General's report (S/2024/96), 76 of the 285 seats will be occupied by women, and my delegation hopes that this percentage will increase in future as a result of the Iraqi Government's efforts to implement the second national action plan on women and peace and security.

We are concerned about the presence and operation of terrorist and other non-State armed groups, as well as about the expansion of hostilities due to regional instability. My delegation joins the calls of the Secretary-General and other actors to reduce the escalation of new threats to peace and security in the region.

A definitive ceasefire and attacking the root causes of violence, terrorism and violent extremism are imperative to protect the lives and safety of the civilian population. It is necessary to consolidate regional alliances in the fight against terrorism and to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries in order to build confidence, boost the economy and promote investment, in full respect for Iraq's sovereignty.

Ecuador joins those who have deplored the death and mutilation of civilians, especially children, as a result of crossfire and the detonation of explosive remnants of war, as well as the persistence of practices of ethnic,

racial and gender-based discrimination and limitations on freedom of expression and the institutionalization of the death penalty.

The humanitarian situation of internally displaced persons and refugees, including women, children, persons with disabilities and ethnic or religious minorities, who are in a situation of extreme vulnerability, is also regrettable. The support of the international community is needed in the implementation, in Iraq, of durable solutions to promote voluntary return and reintegration in dignified and safe conditions,

My delegation renews its appreciation for the active collaboration of the Head of UNAMI with Government authorities, federal and Kurdistan Regional Government officials, representatives of civil society and other stakeholders, as well as her efforts to promote and support the reconstruction of the social fabric, integration and reconciliation.

Finally, Ecuador hopes that the results of UNAMI's independent strategic review, requested by the Council, will contribute to enhancing the support of the United Nations country teams in Iraq in areas such as capacity-building in order to advance demining and the consolidation of institutions that support the pursuit of justice, accountability and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, for her briefing on the situation in Iraq in the context of the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

Based on the assessments voiced by the Special Representative, it is clear that the Republic of Iraq continues to experience a difficult stage of socioeconomic and political recovery, against the backdrop of ongoing regional tensions, an unprecedented escalation of violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone and terrorist threats posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

Under those difficult circumstances, we applaud the tireless efforts of the Ministerial Cabinet, led by Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani, to improve the situation in the country and welcome the long-awaited elections to provincial councils, held on 18 December. At the same time, we note that the electoral process in 15 provinces

was conducted in an orderly manner and without significant violations, which will make it possible to form new local authorities within an acceptable time frame in order to improve the quality of public services and strengthen public trust, among other things.

In that regard, we expect that all players within Iraq will continue to demonstrate a responsible approach and will strive to resolve existing disagreements exclusively through dialogue, in the interests of all ethno-religious communities and social groups.

We are convinced that only inclusive dialogue will facilitate the holding of parliamentary elections in the Kurdish Autonomous Region. We recall that any attempts by external forces to benefit from disputes are unacceptable.

We consistently support the continuation of the political dialogue between the federal centre and the Kurdish Autonomous Region to resolve all existing disagreements, the resolution of which is key to ensuring prosperity, stability and peace in the friendly nation of Iraq. We are convinced that further improved relations between them will benefit the economic development and political stability of all of Iraq.

Despite the success achieved by Baghdad in the security sphere, the situation on the ground remains tenuous, due, *inter alia*, to the attempts by the United States to transform the territory of Iraq into an arena for settling geopolitical scores and advancing parochial internal agendas, against the backdrop of Washington's failed policy on resolving the situation in the Middle East and the presidential election campaign in the United States, which is gaining ground.

For example, on 3 February, the United States Air Force, on the orders of Joe Biden, carried out a series of air strikes targeting Iraq and Syria, striking 85 targets and firing over 125 missiles. At the same time, Washington, as always, attempted to unjustifiably cover up its crimes, exploiting Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as alleging that it coordinated actions with the Iraqi authorities. Meanwhile, the Iraqis characterized the United States operation as "yet another egregious aggression" and a violation of the sovereignty of their country, and characterized Washington's statement about its alleged coordination with Baghdad as "a deliberate lie aimed at misleading public opinion and avoiding legal responsibility".

Yesterday, at a Security Council meeting (see S/PV.9452) initiated by our delegation, on the United States aggression against Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, we heard from the Iraqi delegation that the presence of the international counter-Da'esh coalition led by the United States in Iraq became a justification for its involvement in regional and international conflicts and posed a threat to the security and stability of the country. Our American colleagues, as evidenced in their statement, continue to view themselves as the self-proclaimed arbiters of human fates and global gendarmes who are allowed to engage in all lawlessness and violate international law at will. For Washington, international law simply does not exist; it is supplanted by the so-called "rules-based world order," and such rules are formulated by the United States itself.

We emphatically condemn the egregious act of United States aggression against sovereign States, which pose additional risks and continue to fan the flames of instability in a region already "on fire". At the same time, we consistently are of the view that it is possible to effectively counter terrorist challenges and threats only through the broadest possible coordination of counter-terrorism efforts in a manner that respects the sovereignty of the Iraqi State and coordinates all actions with Baghdad.

In conclusion, I once again express my support for the multifaceted efforts of UNAMI and thank Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert for her long, tireless and dedicated work since 2018, when she was appointed as the Special Representative, aimed at improving the sociopolitical life and functioning of the Iraqi State, including her efforts to organize and hold elections.

**Mr. Žbogar** (Slovenia): I would also like to thank Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), for her comprehensive and very informative briefing today. I also want to thank her for her dedicated work and for helping the United Nations help Iraq to achieve a better future. I think that her briefing today shows that she cares, and I believe that is the most important quality for a foreign representative in a country. We also welcome the presence of the representatives of Iraq and Kuwait among us today.

I would like to reaffirm Slovenia's support for a stable, sovereign, prosperous and democratic Iraq. The country and its people have come a long way and

are looking forward to consolidating a prosperous and democratic future in which human rights are respected and upheld. Today's briefing and the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2024/96) are a testament to Iraq's progress. I want to make four points.

First, on the political front, we welcome the commitment of the Government of Iraq to reforms that include protecting human rights, providing basic social services, fighting corruption, building accountable institutions and implementing sustainable economic reforms. Regional and transboundary cooperation on climate and water security, particularly regarding desertification and drought, is crucial to stability and resilience. We encourage the Government of Iraq to pursue further implementation of the reforms with a view to meeting the aspirations of the Iraqi people.

The recent regional elections, conducted in an orderly and peaceful manner, mark another important milestone in Iraq's progress. At the same time, we echo the Secretary-General's call on all stakeholders to advance the orderly, peaceful and credible conduct of parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, which have once again been postponed. The efforts to strengthen the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all aspects and at all levels of the country's political, electoral and peace and security processes should continue.

Secondly, I listened with great attention to the Special Representative's message of concern about the impact of climate change on peace and security in Iraq. Slovenia is particularly concerned about the impact of water scarcity on agriculture and food security. But the Special Representative said that climate action is also an opportunity to be proactive that can complement and strengthen the peace process. The Iraqi Government can engage with its regional and international partners to strengthen the early-warning system. The work of preparing a national adaptation plan offers the possibility of creating stronger resilience, as well as of including marginalized communities in environmental peacebuilding.

Thirdly, Slovenia appreciates UNAMI's support to Iraqi institutions, and we are looking forward to the independent strategic review of the Mission and its recommendations.

Fourthly, and regrettably, the security situation remains volatile, and to use the Special Representative's words, we are at a critical juncture for Iraq. Da'esh has

been contained but not eliminated, and the increasing attacks by militias on the presence of the Global Coalition against Da'esh in Iraq represent an alarming trend. We therefore join the call for restraint on the part of all, both within and outside Iraq.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our commitment to Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to express our gratitude for its efforts to bring greater stability to the region by facilitating dialogue with its neighbours. Dialogue, cooperation and respect for international law are more important than ever today. The Council has a duty to support Iraq as it continues its journey towards a stable and prosperous future, and Slovenia will engage in the deliberations on the future of UNAMI's mandate with that aim.

**Mr. Cho** (Republic of Korea): I too would like to thank Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing and hard work over the past five years and to welcome the participation of the representatives of Iraq and Kuwait in this meeting.

As a country that has been a long-standing partner of Iraq and that dispatched more than 3,000 troops to Iraq for peacekeeping and reconstruction between 2004 and 2008, the Republic of Korea is fully committed to supporting the Iraqi people's efforts to achieve stability, prosperity and security. In that regard, my delegation sincerely congratulates the Iraqi Government and its people for holding long-overdue provincial elections in December in an orderly, peaceful and credible manner. They were the first provincial elections held in Iraq in 10 years and they represent a major step forward in Iraq's endeavour to achieve stable democracy. We hope that the success of the elections will lay the groundwork for inclusive political dialogue and national reconciliation, for which the Iraqi people have been waiting for so long, and we look forward to seeing the Kurdistan region's parliamentary elections rescheduled as soon as possible. In particular, we commend the ongoing engagement of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) with the Government of Iraq to support the elections and ensure the safe political participation of women. The election of women to 76 of the 285 seats in the provincial elections is an important stepping stone in their meaningful participation in Iraq's political process.

We also welcome the Iraqi Government's measures to empower women in both the political and social arenas. My delegation stresses the importance of

accelerating the implementation of the 2021 Yazidi survivors law as part of the national reconciliation and reintegration efforts, ensuring accountability for atrocities committed by Da'esh, including sexual and gender-based violence, and upholding the survivors' rights to reparations. We also recognize the Iraqi Government's continuing engagement with the Kuwaiti Government and other international agencies to address the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-party nationals and missing Kuwaiti property.

Turning to the economic front, my delegation commends the Iraqi Government's ongoing efforts and UNAMI's assistance in implementing fiscal and anti-corruption reforms, as well as advancing its development programmes. Iraq has taken a leading role in promoting regional cooperation through the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, encompassing the areas of energy, the environment, water management and transport. In addition, we note that more than 130,000 people have faced climate-related displacement across Iraq since 2016 and welcome the Iraqi Government's efforts to combat the adverse impacts of climate change and water scarcity. We encourage UNAMI to support those efforts, with the help of its climate security adviser, by promoting conflict-sensitive adaptation and mitigation actions and facilitating regional cooperation.

We are deeply concerned about the continuing provocative actions of the various non-State militant groups in Iraq. Iraq's security and stability are all the more important in view of the growing apprehension regarding the potential spillover of the Gaza crisis in the region. Additional escalations should be stopped. We emphasize that any attempts to exploit the fluctuating regional situation at the cost of stability in Iraq and the region are unacceptable. In that connection, my delegation appreciates the Iraqi Government's continuing dialogue with neighbouring countries to address the transborder security situation. At this critical juncture, my delegation fully supports the independent strategic review team, led by Mr. Volker Perthes, to assess UNAMI's tasks and priorities in adapting and responding to the current threats to Iraq's peace and security, building on the significant contributions that the Mission has made over the past 20 years.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert for her briefing, and I would also like to welcome the representatives of Kuwait and Iraq to the meeting.

The United States welcomed Iraq's progress towards stability last year, along with the assessment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and last October's briefing (see S/PV.9432) that Iraq was well positioned to seize the opportunities in front of it. We welcome that progress again today. The United States remains committed to working with the Government of Iraq to strengthen and deepen our long-term whole-of-Government partnership in pursuit of a secure, stable and sovereign Iraq.

Unfortunately, Iran-aligned militia groups threaten to undermine Iraq's hard-fought gains since the territorial defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS)/Da'esh seven years ago. Since October 2023, those groups have attacked United States and coalition forces in Iraq, Syria and Jordan more than 165 times. Tragically, three United States soldiers were killed and dozens more injured on 28 January, when Iran-aligned militia groups attacked United States forces stationed in Jordan to take part in the fight against ISIS. I said it yesterday (see S/PV.9542) and I will say it again: this loss is devastating. It is unacceptable. And attacks like it cannot continue. Many similar attacks in Iraq on United States and coalition forces hosted on Iraqi bases have resulted in casualties, including among our Iraqi partners, who have the lead in our shared fight against ISIS/Da'esh. Armed groups operating outside of State control represent a significant challenge to the Iraqi Government's authority and for the Iraqi people, threatening to upend the stability that Iraqis have fought hard to achieve. We eagerly await recommendations in the forthcoming independent strategic review on how the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) can help to further Iraq's plans to build a sustainable future for its citizens and adapt to its political transition and ever-changing security risks.

UNAMI has shown itself to be a capable partner, and it is clear that it still has important work to do. We strongly support the continuation of UNAMI's mandate through streamlining programmes and prioritizing activities that can be completed within a reasonable time frame and make a difference on the ground. UNAMI has already provided invaluable assistance across the spectrum of social and economic challenges, including on elections, promoting and safeguarding human rights, combating climate change and governance reform, just to name a few. A highlight: Iraq held provincial council elections on 18 December 2023 that were generally orderly and peaceful, thanks in part to

UNAMI-trained election staff and equipment available at polling stations. We encourage UNAMI's further preparations with Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission to support the Iraqi Kurdistan region's parliamentary elections later this spring without further delay. We strongly support the continuation of such technical assistance to the Commission. We also encourage UNAMI's continued support to the Government of Iraq in its efforts to protect human rights and combat impunity for violations. To that end, we would encourage the Iraqi Government to ensure that the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights is appropriately empowered and resourced.

The United States looks forward to an inclusive and consultative discussion on the future of UNAMI's mandate, including indicators for what an orderly and responsible completion of UNAMI's mandate might look like after the release of the independent strategic review. We also welcome the Iraqi Government consulting with a broad cross section of Iraqis across the political spectrum and with civil society to ensure consensus on the way forward on UNAMI's future. As penholder for the upcoming mandate renewal and a partner in the region, the United States will continue to engage with the Government of Iraq and looks forward to continuing the discussion with Member States during consultations.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

**Mr. Al-Fatlawi** (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Madam President, for presiding over this meeting.

At the outset, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), for her briefing on the report she submitted to the Secretary-General (S/2024/96), while noting that Iraq has submitted its comments on everything that was mentioned in the report. I would also like to sincerely thank all those delegations that, in their statements and interventions, commented on the recent developments in Iraq.

I also welcome the delegation of the State of Kuwait, as it is the first time that it participates in the Council's briefings on UNAMI's work over the past 21 years.

The Government of the Republic of Iraq continues, at the level of its foreign affairs, to pursue productive

diplomacy and lay the groundwork for an empowered Iraq in its foreign relations with its region and the international community. We seek to regain our leading role, which is a historic and natural one, in the region and the world. That is reflected in the approach that Iraq has adopted on regional and international openness and the number of visits that were conducted by senior Iraqi officials to the countries of the world, or those that were made by officials from brotherly and friendly countries to Iraq. Moreover, Iraq continues to actively participate in international meetings and forums in a manner that is in line with the Government's approach in laying the groundwork for a new phase of building and construction, as well as seeking to accede to multiple international conventions and treaties in various areas.

On the domestic front, the Iraqi Government is exerting exceptional efforts at different levels to raise the living standards of citizens and to improve their security. It has adopted several measures to deal with poverty and unemployment and to combat administrative and financial corruption. We continue to offer services and establish economic and financial reforms. The Government also succeeded in restoring an important constitutional pillar regarding decentralization. It fulfilled its promise to hold provincial elections on 18 December 2023, after they were delayed in 2013. It also held provincial council elections in Kirkuk, which had not been held since 2005. That is an important accomplishment for the Government because that city is a miniature Iraq, with its diverse components.

I would now like to give the Council an overview of the most important developments in Iraq over the past four months.

Regarding the relationship between the federal Government in Baghdad and the Government in the province of Kurdistan, both parties are working on maintaining a stable relationship between them in all aspects and will continue to focus on enhancing political cooperation by stressing the importance of partnership, accord and balance, which the Constitution is based on. We continue to coordinate between the central Government and the Kurdistan Government to arrive at agreements and understandings on core issues, and discussions are held with relevant officials in the federal Government on a group of issues and files relating to the salaries of the provincial employees, as well as the federal budget law and the cost of oil production in the province of Kurdistan. Moreover, negotiations continue between both parties to reactivate the Iraqi-Turkish oil

pipeline, which has not been operational for almost a year.

As for the security file, Iraq seeks to establish balanced ties with its neighbours based on good-neighbourliness, mutual interests and respect, non-intervention in the internal affairs of others and respect for sovereignty. We stress the need not to export internal State problems abroad, because that would harm the stability and security of the entire region and would be negatively reflected on the economic situation.

Iraq reiterates its principled and firm position on the question of Palestine, which is in line with the general Arab position, in calling for putting an end to the war on Gaza and allowing for the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid. We reiterate our warning about the danger of continuing and expanding the conflict.

Iraq and the United States conducted a first round of talks on the future of the presence of United States forces and other coalition forces in Iraq. We discussed means to draw up a timeline and agree on executive steps to end the mandate of the international coalition through bilateral discussions in a manner that would guarantee a smooth transition. Iraq notes that it will continue to cooperate with the international coalition in terms of armaments, training, consultations and data exchange, as well as tracking down and exposing the funding of terrorist networks. Security bodies in Iraq attach great importance to intelligence work and to drawing up solid security plans to deal with security challenges and to combat what remains of Da'esh and all forms of terrorism, as well as to develop means of addressing them based on intelligence information and plans to address terrorist attempts and violations. Moreover, the Iraqi security forces give the utmost importance to the presence of commanders and leaders in the field to work with them in preventing terrorism, protecting power installations and vital infrastructure and impeding terrorists from jeopardizing security and stability throughout the provinces. Iraqi security and intelligence agencies are committed to combating drugs and targeting their sources and dealers through proactive operations, the development of a national strategy and remedial and preventative measures to address that scourge.

As for Turkish and Iranian violations and acts of aggression, Iraq condemns and categorically rejects all the Turkish, Iranian and United States attacks against Iraqi territory in various areas, which have led to a

number of civilian martyrs and the injuring of many others and damaged private and public property under tenuous justifications. Those attacks violate Iraq's sovereignty and threaten the security of its people and contravene the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. While Iraq reiterates its constitutional commitment to ensuring that its neighbours do not come under any threat emanating from its territory, we reaffirm that we will not allow any party to compromise our reputation as a country that is able to ensure its own security and sovereignty, as well as its installations and public and private property, and is committed to ensuring the safety and security of diplomatic missions.

In terms of the Government's programmes, the Iraqi Government continues to focus on strategic plans and projects that are in line with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. We are poised to establish a five-year national development plan to meet Iraq's need for meaningful development, based on sound foundations, in important sectors such as infrastructure and clean energy projects. Furthermore, the Government of Iraq accords special importance to the Iraq Development Fund, aimed at providing an integrated investment environment in the country, while taking advantage of the support provided by the United Nations Development Programme and the United States Agency for International Development. We are continuing to build a network of economic relations that are based the mutual interests of Iraq and the countries of the world. The Iraqi Government continues to ensure that its development plans and the five-year plan will have positive results for vulnerable segments of society by providing housing, education, health services and better incomes and mitigating climate change.

The Government has devised and allocated the needed funds to strategic plans and continues to work meaningfully on reducing poverty and unemployment, while improving the food basket and focusing on education, health, the provision of services and infrastructure and the establishment of a support fund for the most vulnerable areas. The Government has started to implement infrastructure projects and developed capacity-building programmes for administrative and human resources within State institutions. The Government continues to implement dozens of important development and strategic projects, including the Al-Faw seaport and the Karbala

oil refinery. We have also laid the groundwork for the Basra-Shalamchah railway project with Iran. We continue to work on developing Iraq's strategic Development Road project, which will transform Iraq into a hub for international trade between East and West. There are also projects being rolled out to build roads and bridges that will ease the current congestion and transport burdens all over the country. The Government of Iraq has signed several fifth-round contracts with the French giant Total Energies to realize four huge oil, gas and renewable energy projects. We have also launched a sixth round of licenses to set the stage to eradicate gas-burning practices and their negative impact on the environment.

We also enacted a series of basic amendments in domestic reforms to eliminate bureaucracy and create an investment environment for both Arab and foreign investors. We established the Iraqi Fund for Development with the aim of establishing an integrated investment environment. The Government also established a meaningful agenda to strengthen the private sector's participation in major projects. Among the steps that the Iraqi Government has taken to improve the financial and banking sectors, electronic payments and the business environment, Iraq has joined a non-funding programme of the International Monetary Fund to support economic reform in the country. This year, the Iraqi State Company for Maritime Transport has benefited from a Japanese loan, aimed at enhancing and developing its fleet. To that end, it will implement a new plan to build ships with wider and larger holds in order to meet the country's transport needs in terms of the supplies and goods required to support other sectors throughout the various Ministries and companies working in the country, which will bolster the Iraqi economy.

With regard to combating desertification and dealing with climate change, the Iraqi Government has developed a plan to prioritize combating both phenomena. It has adopted a climate strategy leading up to 2030, which will limit gas emissions to reduce harm to the environment. We are providing farmers with incentives to use modern irrigation methods and renewable energy sources. Iraq participated actively and meaningfully at the twenty-eighth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Dubai. Furthermore, we have resumed work on Baghdad's Green Belt project after a 20-year hiatus. The project will cover 3,948

dunums to the west of the capital, where millions of trees will be planted, and 12 March has been designated as Arbor Day in Iraq. We also continue to give special attention to environmental monitoring, and we require owners of business and industrial activities to apply for environmental permits from the Ministry of Environmental Affairs to ensure that they comply with environmental regulations before they are granted operating licenses. The Ministry of Water Resources plans to take advantage of rain water by building 36 small dams to be distributed between the Western Desert and Wadi Samawah areas as well as the northern, southern and eastern regions of the country in order to combat water scarcity.

With regard to the relations with the sisterly State of Kuwait, we continue to cooperate bilaterally on issues of interest to both States. Concerning the issue of missing persons, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Iraqi Ministry of Defence have continued to work on a joint analysis of satellite imagery and aerial footage made available by the United States to identify four individuals and their possible interment locations in Iraq, including the city of Samawah, Tall Al-Shaykhiyah, Faydat Al-Azayiz, Karbala and Khamisiyah. We have also examined the available footage of four locations in Kuwait based on coordinates provided by the United States and the United Kingdom, which are helping collect additional information on possible interment sites.

As for locations in the State of Kuwait, the ICRC and Iraq continue to analyse satellite imagery and aerial footage made available by the United States, and, at the 127th meeting of the Technical Subcommittee of the Tripartite Commission, the United States reiterated its commitment to providing additional footage and looking into the possibility of expanding the scope of witnesses called from among United States veterans and allowing access for the ICRC to its archives. Moreover, a security committee was formed by the Prime Minister to support efforts to identify the location and/or the remains of Kuwaiti missing persons and third-party nationals and conduct interviews with first-hand witnesses to ascertain the possible location of interment sites in Samawah. Based on the testimonies of first-hand witnesses and analysis of available footage, the Iraqi Ministry of Defence and the ICRC have declared their intention to visit a fourth possible interment site. Furthermore, with regard to the Karbala location, Iraq has continued to search for potential witnesses,

including people who had previously worked with the deceased main witness, emphasizing the importance of expanding the scope of activity to governorates such as Basra in order to identify former security officers who may have information about possible detention and execution sites.

On 8 October, Iraq transferred to the State of Kuwait, through the International Committee of the Red Cross, 22 genetic profiles of human remains that had been discovered in Najaf. In April 2022, we worked on an electropherogram coordination with data points, as requested by Kuwait.

On 9 October, technical consultations were held prior to the 127th meeting of the Technical Subcommittee to address technical issues related to the transfer of genetic profiles. The Technical Subcommittee adopted the general recommendations offered by the International Committee of the Red Cross for the sharing of genetic data under the framework of the Tripartite Commission. During the 128th meeting of the Technical Subcommittee, the State of Kuwait acknowledged the completion of the process of identifying the 22 genetic profiles, which had yielded no positive matches.

The Government of Iraq is eager to research and investigate the handover of any property and documents belonging to the Kuwaiti National Archives and to return them to the State of Kuwait, and it has paid monetary rewards to any person who could locate or provide information concerning their whereabouts.

In conclusion, I would like to thank His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, for the firm position of the United Nations in support of Iraq and respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We also express our gratitude for the efforts made by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) over the past 21 years since its establishment, and for the efforts made by United Nations bodies and international organizations operating in Iraq.

We express our hope that Iraq's demands made in May 2023 regarding the review of the Mission's mandate will be met, with a view to scaling back the Mission in the lead up to its drawdown. That should be done through constructive discussion between technical experts from Iraq and the United Nations, taking into account the positive developments and changes that Iraq has undergone in various fields and defining the

nature of the country's relationship with the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

Iraq received Mr. Volker Perthes, head of the independent strategic review, who was appointed by the Secretary-General in accordance with resolution 2682 (2023). He conducted several rounds of consultations and meetings with Iraqi officials and with governmental and non-governmental parties, and he listened to Iraq's point of view and position on the matter.

We were frankly surprised to learn today that Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert was ending her duties, as she has made us feel that she was part of Iraq. Through you, Madam President, we express our sincere gratitude for her earnest efforts over the past five years, and I am fully confident that her rich experience in Iraq will benefit her in her future endeavours, and the mark she made in her relationship both with Iraqi national and governmental institutions and with United Nations agencies will remain.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

**Mr. Albanai (Kuwait):** Allow me to extend to you, Madam President, and the Republic of Guyana our sincere congratulations on assuming the presidency of the Security Council. On behalf of the State of Kuwait, I would also like to offer my congratulations to the four incoming newly elected non-permanent members of the Security Council, namely, the fraternal country of Algeria, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia.

It is timely that the Council is bound for Colombia tomorrow and is expected to remain there until 11 February. By doing so, the membership will see first-hand the issues it has been grappling with and the peacebuilding efforts and progress achieved. We commend the Council's mission, and we cannot overstate the value of this practice. The exposure of Council members and engagement with the people that its decisions affect humanize conflicts and offer a perspective rarely evident through reporting alone. To facilitate that, it is important to remind the Council that it may consider different formats and consider inviting country-specific chairs of the Peacebuilding Commission to participate as observers, which could lend insight to mandate development.

I recall that, during my country's membership of the Council and its chairmanship of the Informal Working

Group, a note by the President dated 27 December 2019 (S/2019/990) was issued, highlighting the importance of Council missions for understanding, assessing and preventing the escalation of conflicts. I therefore urge the Council to continue that practice, be it through fully encompassing large missions or smaller groups of Council members. It is also worth considering the inclusion of regional and subregional organizations and taking into account conducting missions to countries with developing crises.

*(spoke in Arabic)*

I would like to note that this is the first time that the Permanent Mission of the State of Kuwait participates in a meeting of the Security Council concerning the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), as we believe and are convinced that this a humanitarian file and not political in nature. The reason I am participating in this meeting today is to convey our concerns to the Council.

The issue of Kuwaiti and third-country prisoners and missing persons and the return of national property, including the National Archives, is one of the main pillars of the State of Kuwait's foreign policy. What we say before the Council today is not just a slogan that we utter. My country links its words with deeds. During our non-permanent membership in the Security Council, specifically during our presidency of the Council in June 2019, we submitted resolution 2474 (2019), the first of its kind on missing persons in times of armed conflict. The resolution was adopted unanimously by the members of the Council at the time. We look forward to working with the Republic of Korea, which will preside over the Council in June, on the fifth anniversary of the adoption of that resolution, and with all members of the Security Council, to see how the anniversary can be commemorated and to emphasize the importance of that resolution and the topics it addresses.

Resolution 2474 (2019) was a direct result of our bitter experience with the brutal invasion of the State of Kuwait in 1990 and of our firm belief in the humanitarian nature of that issue, which must be one of the Security Council's priorities. Accordingly, we have drawn upon our own journey in that area to serve all humankind by shedding light on a matter that had not previously been addressed in Security Council resolutions. Here I would like to reiterate that every aspect of this issue is humanitarian in nature. We have

not politicized it in the past and will not do so in the future. However, I come before the Council today to clarify the mechanisms and history of that file and our specific concerns in relation to it.

The Security Council has fulfilled its responsibilities with regard to the agenda item on the situation between Iraq and Kuwait. Since 1990, the Council has gradually employed all the means and powers at its disposal, such as the establishment of a peacekeeping mission, and the creation of a mechanism on the issue of compensation and mechanisms for the demarcation of the borders between the two brotherly countries, in accordance with resolution 833 (1993).

The Security Council in particular, and the United Nations in general, have a remarkable success story, as the Council has demonstrated that if the right tools are used, it is capable of imposing and upholding the law and is even competent to apply it, whether under Chapter VI or Chapter VII of the Charter.

Regarding the issue of Kuwaiti prisoners, missing persons and third-country nationals, as well as the return of Kuwaiti property, including national archives, the Security Council adopted resolutions 686 (1991), 687 (1991) and 1284 (1999), which gave a high-level coordinator the responsibility of following up on the file. Those competencies were then transferred to the mandate of UNAMI under resolution 2107 (2013). It is worth mentioning that the Security Council and the other parties concerned have played a balanced and pivotal role in the search for and identification of the remains of Kuwaiti prisoners and missing persons, in addition to Kuwaiti properties. We would be remiss if we did not thank our brothers in the Republic of Iraq for lending a helping hand and for their understanding of the importance, sensitivity and specificity of that file for the entire Kuwaiti population over the years. We urge our brothers in Iraq to continue their cooperation. As long as the file remains outstanding, the wounds of the Kuwaiti people, particularly those of the families of the prisoners and the missing, will not be healed until that purely humanitarian issue achieves closure. I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her briefing, in which she addressed the importance of accelerating progress in that sensitive file and of closing it forever.

The State of Kuwait, which former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called a centre for humanitarian work, is a small country in size but a big giver. Those

are not mere words of praise designed to waste the Council's time. I want to demonstrate that we have embraced our bitter experience with prisoners and missing persons and used it to benefit humankind as a whole. We have harnessed all the experience and capabilities we have gained and learned with a view to helping all the countries, institutions and organizations that have sought our advice. We are fully prepared to serve that humanitarian cause inside the Security Council as well as outside it.

In conclusion, it should be noted that there are two separate reports relating to UNAMI before the Security Council. The first is the report on its work and mandate in Iraq (S/2024/96), and the second, the one that concerns us and that is also part of the Mission's mandate, is on the Kuwaiti prisoners, missing persons and nationals of third countries, in addition to national properties (S/2024/95). I would like to confirm that the delegation of Kuwait to the United Nations is fully prepared to work with all Council members, including the five countries that recently joined the Council. All

cooperation mechanisms, whether they are periodic reports, briefings or something else, are vital. In that context, I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, and her team for their tireless work and concrete efforts to implement her mandate in Iraq as well as this particular file. I also want to stress the importance of the file within the scope of the work of the Council. It is important to continue to submit periodic reports about it to the Council. Halting any of the mechanisms that have proved to be successful and effective could undermine and negatively affect all the extensive efforts that have been made in that regard since 1991.

**The President:** 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 11.45 a.m.*