
IRAQ NEEDS SUPPORT TO [REDACTED] VIOLENT PAST BEHIND', SAYS UN ENVOY AS SECURITY COUNCIL EXTENDS UN MISSION FOR ONE YEAR

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In a briefing to the Security Council, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), described the countrys challenges as manifold, but pledged the operations continued and strong commitment to assist and support wherever we can.

She urged the Council to recognize that the ongoing political infighting is a costly obstacle, and a full year after national elections, ministerial appointments have yet to be made to the key posts, including Interior, Defence, Justice and Education.

Political parties have not yet shown themselves willing to compromise. It should be understood, however, that political compromise is not a sign of weakness. In fact, it is a sign of political maturity [REDACTED] and a requisite for resilience. Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert said, also adding that with critical laws pending, it was high time for chairs and deputies to be selected for parliamentary committees.

She went on to say that it was no secret that the Iraqi authorities, institutions, mechanisms and systems continued to struggle with deep rooted problems, often hampering swift and robust responses from the Government to pressing needs, such as reconstruction, development and security.

These problems can be schematized, as a range of individual interests and arguments, many of which arise from long-standing grievances and differences between communities, between political entities, between the federal and the Kurdistan Regional Government, she said, warning that this could become entrenched in the form of concealed, private networks of power, operating independently and pursuing narrow objectives and goals.

With this in mind, Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert said it was necessary to spotlight the scourge of corruption, which she described as being pervasive at all levels in Iraq ... taking money that should be spent on public services [and] placing it instead in private pockets, deterring economic activity and hindering business development, which would result in much-needed job creation.

Achieving tangible results [in wiping out corruption] will be crucial, in so many ways, most importantly it will revive public trust which is essential for the further development of Iraqs democracy, she stated.

Moreover, Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert stressed that Iraq can only achieve its full potential with the active political, social and economic participation of women and youth. While UNAMI had recently

organized and participated in a variety meaningful of women and youth events throughout the country, she "warned against change as mere window dressing. At the end of the day, it is all about translating excellent intentions into positive action.

According to the UNAMI chief, although Baghdad is opening up, the security situation will continue to require close monitoring, not only in Baghdad, but throughout the country. Attacks continue, as seen with recent blasts and suicide bombings. Also very relevant: the [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL] threat is still out there.

She called for continued, wide-based international support, support to ensure that Iraq leaves its violent past behind, and to ensure that the country does not slip back into the turmoil from which it so recently emerged. In other words: to prevent ISIL from regaining a strong foothold in Iraq a long-term approach is critical, she stressed.

Among the dominant security concerns she raised were returning ISIL-fighters from Syria to Iraq, along with their families, and the issue of armed actors operating outside State control, engaged in illegal or criminal activities and exerting economic and social influence throughout the country.

Clearly, the activities of these actors undermine state authority, they affect vulnerable communities, they weaken the national economy and sadly, they also prevent the peaceful return of displaced persons, noted Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert, and while she welcomed certain actions, such as the closing down of so-called illegal economic offices, she warned that the road will certainly be long.

It would therefore prove crucial to hold to account all armed actors involved in criminal enterprise or illegal activity.

Ahead of today's meeting, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution in which it decided to extend the mandate of UNAMI until 31 May 2020.

By that action, the Mission is, among other duties, to give priority to providing advice, support and assistance to the Government and people of Iraq to promote inclusive political dialogue and reconciliation at the national and local levels.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/05/1038941>

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