



Kingdom of Belgium

Intervention of Mrs. Karen VAN VLIERBERGE Ambassador, Deputy
Permanent Representative

United Nations Security Council
The Situation in the Middle East (UNAMI)

New York, 26 August 2020

Mr President,

I would first like to thank you, Ms Hennis-Plasschaert, and your team for your briefing, your leadership and your hard work. As you know, Mrs. Hennis-Plasschaert, you can count on the unwavering of my Country.

Mr President,

On June 6th a new Iraqi government took office, which constituted an important step in order to ensure a swift and effective response to the **multiple challenges** the country is facing.

Mr President,

The new Iraqi government has made the holding of early **elections** one of its key priorities. We welcome the call by Prime Minister AL-KADHIMI for early elections to be held on 6 June 2021. Genuinely free, fair and inclusive elections, in line with resolution 2522, can pave the way to a more stable and democratic Iraq. In this regard, we underline the importance of full, active and meaningful participation of women; and we commend UNAMI's role in advising, supporting and assisting the Government of Iraq in the preparation of the elections.

We are deeply concerned about the exponential rise in **COVID-19** cases in Iraq, which further strains an already fragile health system weakened by years of conflict. We commend the swift and effective response of the Iraqi health authorities and encourage them to keep up this response until COVID-19 is fully contained. It is regrettable to see that COVID-19 related movement restrictions have aggravated existing humanitarian access constraints within Iraq. We call for full and unimpeded humanitarian access to all parts of the country.

The COVID-19 outbreak has also further exacerbated an already dire **economic situation**. We support the Iraqi government in its efforts to bolster economic development, including by private sector development, the fight against corruption and the implementation of administrative reforms.

On the **security** level, we note with concern that, despite the military defeat of Da'esh in Iraq, the group continues to operate as a clandestine network and to carry out attacks. We

hence welcome the renewed engagement of the new government in the field of security sector reform and the fight against terrorism and encourage it to continue the efforts already undertaken in this regard.

With regards to the regional situation, as the special representative mentioned, IRQ is functioning in a uniquely challenging geopolitical environment. It should be able to focus on the achievement of long term stability and the prosperity for all Iraqi's. We call on all actors to respect its national independence and sovereignty.

Mr President,

Freedom of expression and of assembly are cornerstones of democracies and need to be ensured. We commend the efforts of the Iraqi government to address human rights violations against protesters. However, more efforts are needed, in particular when it comes to justice and accountability.

We condemn attacks and intimidation of human rights defenders and civil society activists, such as the one that occurred recently in Basra. Perpetrators must be caught and held accountable.

Finally, Mr. President, Let me briefly turn to the situation of children in Iraq. On 30 July 2020 the UNSC Working Group on **Children and Armed Conflict**, under Belgian chairmanship, adopted conclusions on Iraq by consensus. We look forward to continue working with Iraq in a constructive manner on this important file.

We are deeply concerned about the ongoing killing and maiming of children by landmines and explosive remnants of war and encourage further efforts with regards to the removal of landmines and explosive remnants of war, as well as with regards to mine risk education.

We are also deeply concerned about the situation of children in detention, especially against the backdrop of COVID-19. Detention of children should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time. We call for full respect for due process and international juvenile justice standards.

Thank you.