



United Nations Assistance Mission

# For Iraq







## Iraq Election 2010

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*Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Ad Melkert. Photo: UN*

**A**s media and politicians, local and foreign alike, continue to analyse the future of Iraq in light of the outcome and the aftermath of the country's 2010 parliamentary election, I would like to congratulate and salute the true winners of an historic election. These are the millions of Iraqi women and men who, despite all the threats and challenges, cast their vote and said, "No" to those attempting to hijack their future and "Yes" to the aspiration for a better life.

Against all predictions of the sceptics, over 12 million Iraqis from all walks of life chose to forge their country's future. No Iraqi citizen willing to embrace democracy, peace and development was left behind, including internally displaced persons, refugees in neighbouring countries, hospitalised patients, detainees, the Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraqi Diaspora.

In this magazine, dedicated to Iraq's 7 March parliamentary election, you will read testimonies from some voters that speak volumes about the determination of the people of Iraq to take ownership over the shaping of their country's future and turn the Iraq they strive for into reality.

Credit also goes to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) for its outstanding leadership. From organising the election to conducting the Baghdad recount, the Commission was up to the task and beyond. It is indeed becoming a highly professional and independent institution that the country can count on for future elections.

Candidates nominated for the 2010 election were by the thousands and the political debate was vibrant. The media involvement in covering the event and informing the public was unprecedented in the history of the country and, possibly, in the region. This is a milestone that needs to be acknowledged in a place where during the long dark years such a scenario was inconceivable.

I want to thank the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq's (UNAMI) team for a job well done in assisting the IHEC during the entire electoral process. On behalf of UNAMI, I wish to convey to the Iraqi people that we are proud and honoured to have been called upon to provide technical support and advice on an impartial basis for the sixth time since 2005.

The 7 March Iraqi election was an unquestionable historical achievement for all Iraqis. But Iraq won only a battle and it is yet to see the ultimate victory: the establishment of an irreversible democratic State where inclusiveness, representation, participation and equal rights are the rule of governance.

Iraqi political blocs continue their negotiations on their way toward government formation. Concerns about the length of time this process is taking might be justified. On the other hand, there is the reality that the creation of a sustainable partnership government requires considerable time, like in other countries with similar systems. Expediting agreement on the very much needed programme of action of the government to address the many expectations of the Iraqi people will now be crucial.

The future of Iraq belongs to the Iraqis. It is their sovereign right to shape their country's future. The role of the international community is to provide support in order to solidify democratic, economic and social progress. Iraq's journey toward the fulfilment of its people's aspirations stretches still a long way ahead. Constructive engagement by neighbouring countries and the wider international community is what Iraq needs and deserves.

On the basis of its mandate by the United Nations Security Council, UNAMI continues to stand ready to further provide impartial assistance to all Iraqi parties in support of their efforts to promote stability, democracy and prosperity.

Saying "yes" to the aspiration for a better life for all Iraqis: this is what the election expressed both as a great achievement and as a challenging task ahead.

***Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq,  
Ad Melkert***

# High hopes defeat fears

By Aicha Elbasri, UNAMI PIO



Voting in Kirkuk, northern Iraq. Photo: UNAMI PIO

**Iraq's parliamentary election took place amid fear of violence, fear of sectarianism, fear of irregularities and many other fears. However, the tenacity of the Iraqi people to move their country forward defeated all such fears.**

Preparations for Iraq's second parliamentary election began with heated debate over the amendment of the 2005 Election Law. Allocation of seats and representation of Iraq's religious and ethnic minorities created tension in the lead up to passing the Election Law. Points of divergence included whether to use an open list or the closed party list system under which assembly members were elected in 2005, and what voter list would prevail in Kirkuk.

Many feared the delay of the election, which was originally slated for 16 January 2010, would open the door to renewed violence and sectarianism in Iraq. But Iraqi lawmakers decided otherwise. They reached an agreement and passed a new Election Law on 6 December 2009, thus paving way for the parliamentary election in 2010. The official electoral campaign started on 12 February 2010 amid fear of escalated violence. Thousands of candidates campaigned intensely across the country for 325 seats in the new parliament, despite continued violence.

In addition to the traditional use of television, radio, billboards, posters, songs and flag-waving rallies, for the first time in Iraq, online campaigns counted in the coun-

try's election. Election fever mobilised the entire society including the media, ordinary citizens in and outside Iraq, and internally displaced persons, while women joined the campaign trail in an unprecedented manner.

As the campaign reached its end on 5 March, two days before the general election, many feared that the destructive forces opposed to Iraq's democratic process could respond to the election with bloodshed.

But millions of Iraqis had shown that they would not be deterred by the mortar, rockets and roadside bombs that thudded across the capital on Election Day. In the first three hours of polling there were approximately 40 explosions in Baghdad. In the face of these attempts at intimidation by insurgent groups in a failed effort to undermine the democratic process, Iraqis defeated their natural fear for their lives. They demonstrated that Iraq is prepared to settle its differences using the power of the ballot rather than the bullet.

The massive turnout that exceeded 62 per cent and the meticulous organisation of the election by the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) made the 2010 election a historical victory for the Iraqi people. However, as Iraqis went to the polls, fear was still in the air. This time, Iraqi candidates and political parties feared vote-rigging and irregularities.

Following the announcement of the results by the IHEC, more than 300 appeals on the

**“For anyone living and working in Iraq, there is a common feeling that the worst is behind and the future can only be one of hope”**

preliminary results were submitted to the Electoral Judicial Panel; which ordered on 19 April 2010 a partial recount of all votes cast in Baghdad province, accounting for 68 seats in the Parliament.

Media run headlines reporting that Iraqis fear Baghdad recount could change Iraq election results. However, the transparent and highly professional manner in which the IHEC conducted the recount confirmed the proper conduct of the entire election. Elected leaders could then embark on another challenge: the formation of the government that holds the promise of Iraq's first democratic transition.

Once again, talks about violence, sectarianism, deadlock and other fears resurfaced with a feeling of *déjà vu*. Indeed, from debating the amendments of the Election Law to announcing the results of the recount, the 7 March election carried a great deal of fears that were defeated all along by Iraqis' determination and resilience.

Fyodor Dostoevsky once contended: "Taking a new step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most". The new step and the new word for Iraq is democracy. However, as the democratic process takes root in the country, Iraqis are learning to let their hopes defeat their fears.

For anyone living and working in Iraq, there is a common feeling that the worst is behind and the future can only be one of hope. ■

# Election timeline

## 2009

**8 November:** Following intense negotiations and a protracted legislative debate, the Iraqi Council of Representatives adopted several amendments to the 2005 Election Law.

**18 November:** The amendments to the 2005 Election Law were vetoed by Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi on the grounds that the seat distribution formula and population data used to determine the total number of seats for the Council of Representatives, and the distribution per governorate, were discriminating against out-of-country voters.

**6 December:** A revised Election Law was adopted by the Council of Representatives, and subsequently approved by the Presidency Council.

**13 December:** The Presidency Council announced that the national election would be held on 7 March 2010.

## 2010

**7 January:** The Accountability and Justice Commission announced that 15 political entities would be excluded from participating in the upcoming national election.

**14 January:** The Accountability and Justice Commission informed the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) that it had disqualified 496 candidates, which then increased to 511 candidates. These excluded candidates had the right to appeal the decision.

**3 February:** The Court of Cassation ruled that the review of appeals filed by excluded candidates would be postponed until after the election, thus allowing them to run in the election. The Accountability and Justice Commission and several political parties rejected the Court's ruling.

**7 February:** The Court of Cassation reversed its ruling and announced it would review all appeals filed before the start of the electoral campaign period on or around 12 February.

**12 February:** Start of the electoral campaign, with a one-week delay on what the Election Law stipulates.

**3 March:** On the eve of the special needs voting scheduled for 4 March, the Accountability and Justice Commission provided the IHEC with a list of candidates to be struck from the ballot. However, IHEC did not remove the names of the candidates. The Accountability and Justice Commission appealed the decision with the Electoral Judicial Panel after the election.

**7 March:** General election for the Council of Representatives took place, following the special needs voting held on 4 March for police and military personnel, detainees and hospitalized persons. Iraqis residing in 16 countries voted between 5 and 7 March.

**“The national elections for the Council of Representatives were a testament of the Iraqi people’s determination to exercise their democratic right to vote and elect a Government that will shape the country’s future for the next four years”**

*United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon*



**21 March:** Some political entities called for a manual recount in four of the 18 Iraqi provinces. The State of Law Coalition requested a recount in Baghdad stating that its own investigation had revealed manipulation of up to 750,000 votes.

**26 March:** The IHEC released the preliminary election results, which showed that the Al-Iraqiya bloc headed by former Prime Minister Allawi, led with 91 seats. Prime Minister Maliki's State of Law

Coalition ranked second with 89 seats, while the Iraqi National Alliance won 70 seats. The Kurdish Alliance won 43 seats.

**29 March:** The Accountability and Justice Commission transmitted to the Electoral Judicial Panel its further list of 52 candidates for disqualification. The Commission also requested disqualification of nine candidates whom the preliminary election results indicated had won seats. In addition, more than 300 appeals on the preliminary results were submitted to the Electoral Judicial Panel.

**19 April:** In determining the appeal lodged by the State of Law Coalition, the Electoral Judicial Panel ordered a partial recount of all votes cast in Baghdad governorate, accounting for 68 seats in the Parliament.

**3 May:** Start of partial recount process that was completed by 14 May. In total, 430 complaints were received by the IHEC with respect to the recount process. After consideration, the IHEC Board of Commissioners dismissed complaints that alleged irregularities relating to polling or counting.

**16 May:** The IHEC announced the results of the recount and the seat winners, confirming the recount of votes had not changed the seat allocation of the 7 March Council of Representatives Election. Political entities and candidates had the right to appeal to the Election Judicial Panel within three days including the final day of announcement of the recount results. The Election Judicial Panel had ten days to decide on each case.

**25 May:** The Electoral Judicial Panel rejected final appeals submitted before the deadline against the results of the March election.

**26 May:** Following certification of the ruling by the IHEC, the Commission announced that it forwarded the election results of all 18 governorates to the Federal Supreme Court for certification. The Supreme Court sets no deadline for the certification of the results.

**02 June:** The Federal Supreme Court wrote to the Presidency Council and the IHEC informing them of the certification of the names of the 325 winners, thereby completing the electoral process and triggering a 15-day period within which the Council of Representatives is to be convened for the first time.

**14 June:** Inauguration of the Council of Representatives.

# Landmark election

By Randa Jamal, UNAMI PIO



Faraj Al-Haidary, IHEC Chairman

**Interview with Mr. Faraj Al-Haidary, Chairman of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC).**

**“ We hope the UNAMI electoral assistance team will continue working with us because we still need their expertise. Some say we need them for another two years, but I think we need them for another five to ten years ”**

**For Iraq: How different was the 7 March 2010 parliamentary election from previous elections?**

**Chairman Faraj Al-Haidary:** The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) in Iraq has conducted several elections including in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the provincial election. All these elections are important, but the parliamentary election of 7 March is viewed as the most significant, especially in light of the current transition in Iraq, the increase of Parliament seats from 275 to 325 and the existence of over 500 political groups. The international community was particularly interested in this election since it is crucial to the democratic process. It is unfortunate that the recount and other issues delayed the certification process, including the formation of the government. What matters now is that the results have been certified and we look forward to the future.

**For Iraq: For the first time in Iraq, the IHEC had to resort to a recount. How do you describe this experience and what lessons were learned?**

**Chairman Faraj Al-Haidary:** Conducting a recount came as a result of the complaints that were filed with the Election Judicial Panel, but there was no hard evidence for initiating a recount. We were hoping that the Election Judicial Panel would listen to us before it would take any decision to order the recount. However, since it ruled that a recount be conducted, we went ahead with it. The process was complete within two weeks. The fact that the results did not change proved that the election was transparent and credible, in line with international electoral standards. I think, had the Judicial Panel listened to the Commission's technical opinion, it would not have requested a recount in the first place. The political parties that ordered the recount did not know much about the technical details of our work.

**For Iraq: The United Nations has been helping Iraq prepare and conduct electoral events for the past six years. How do you describe past and future IHEC collaboration with the UN?**

**Chairman Faraj Al-Haidary:** Personally, I cannot thank enough the members of the UNAMI electoral assistance team for their

professionalism. They have played a significant role supporting us in the areas of logistics, operations and providing technical advice. They even provided moral support as true team players. We hope the UNAMI electoral assistance team will continue working with us because we still need their expertise. Some say we need them for another two years, but I think we need them for another five to ten years. The team also helped us in ensuring that a transparent process is prevalent, from inception to completion. UNAMI was there to also confront invalid accusations against the IHEC on the local, regional and international level. Unfortunately, a campaign was launched against the IHEC by some political forces and UNAMI was there to support the transparent process that the Commission undertook in preparing and conducting the election.

**For Iraq: Can you tell us about IHEC's preparations for the upcoming Kurdistan governorate council election?**

**Chairman Faraj Al-Haidary:** The IHEC recently received a letter from the parliament of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on the Election Law, indicating that the election in the region should be held before the end of October 2010. We have requested an official letter from the President of KRG, or from the Parliament, that would call on IHEC for its assistance and expertise to conduct the election. We are ready to help the KRG in every possible way to conduct a transparent and a credible election in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

**For Iraq: What are the challenges that you faced as lead Commissioner during the recent election?**

**Chairman Faraj Al-Haidary:** I faced several challenges. Providing explanations countering criticism and accusations was not an easy task. Having to comply with all the requests, including conducting a manual recount, was not easy either. One of the most challenging tasks was my several attempts at convincing the various sides that a manual recount was not necessary, particularly after all the meticulous preparations that went into this election. Despite all these challenges, I believe that I managed to maintain high morale in dealing constructively with all the issues that evolved, keeping in mind the unity of the Commission in the decisions being made. ■

# Democratic debate over new Election Law

By Aicha Elbasri, UNAMI PIO



Iraqi Parliament in session. Photo: www.themajlis.org

**“Although the debate appeared intense at times, it was always conducted with dignity and focused on Iraq’s democratic and political progress”**

**D**ebate over the amendment of the 2005 Election Law and delays in the passage of the revised Election Law marked the 7 March 2010 election, which was originally scheduled for 16 January, as stipulated by the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq. Despite disrupting the electoral calendar, the intense and protracted negotiations were hailed as a sign of healthy political debate ushering in a new democratic era.

The 2005 parliamentary election was held on the basis of proportional representation with a closed list system in which voters selected a party or a coalition list that in turn selected the individual party member to fill the parliament seat. The provisions of the 2005 Election Law was not popular with Iraqi lawmakers mainly because voters could vote only for political parties, not individual candidates.

The Election Law also allocated seats among the provinces on the basis of population, with one seat for every 100,000 people. This allocation was perceived as problematic by lawmakers and political leaders especially in the absence of a national census. The last Iraqi census dates back to 1957. In addition, the 2005 Electoral Law allocated a total of 230 seats to the provinces, while 45 seats - so-called “compensatory seats” - were to be contested according to the proportional representation at the national level. The allocation of these “compensatory seats” among provinces was deemed complex and somewhat controversial.

While applying the open-list system instead of the closed list system, the January 2009 provincial election was still held on

the basis of the proportional representation.

As debate over amendments to the 2005 Election Law began, strong differences of opinion among political blocs in the Council of Representatives emerged. In particular, Lawmakers disagreed on whether the electoral system would rely on open or closed lists and on how to deal with concerns over who has the right to vote in Kirkuk - arising from allegations of demographic manipulations of the voter registry lists by different ethnic communities.

On 8 November, after several weeks of intense negotiations and technical assistance from the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), an agreement was reached in the Council of Representatives. A total of 141 parliamentarians voted for amendments to the Election Law. Ten days later, in a surprise move, Vice President Mr. Tariq al-Hashemi announced his intention to veto the law on the grounds that the seat distribution and population data used to determine the total number of seats for the Council of Representatives, as well as their distribution per governorate, were discriminating against out-of-country voters.

After weeks of heated debate, Iraq’s Council of Representatives held a special late-night session on 6 December 2009 and unanimously voted in favour of a revised Election Law.

Hailing the new Election Law as “broad based and inclusive”, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq (SRSG), Mr. Ad Melkert said: “Although the debate appeared intense at times, it was always conducted with dignity and focused on Iraq’s democratic and political progress”.

UNAMI has worked with Council of Representatives’ members representing all political parties and entities to facilitate a process leading to a broad agreement. Throughout the debate over provisions of the Election Law, UNAMI expressed its strong support to the efforts undertaken to clarify voting for Iraqis abroad, as well as the inclusion in the Law of the distribution of seats among the governorates.

The amended Election Law introduced new provisions including:

- ◆Iraqis were able to cast their votes for either a political party, a coalition or an individual candidate on the basis of an open list system that allows for direct representation and greater transparency.

- ◆The number of seats in the parliament increased from 275 to 325, including three additional seats for provinces in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Eight of the remaining 15 seats were allocated to minorities and seven seats to smaller parties.

- ◆Iraqis living abroad were allowed to vote for representatives of their home provinces in a special out-of country voting system.

- ◆Minority seats were distributed as follows: five seats to be contested within a single national district reserved for Christians; one seat each reserved in Nineveh for Yazidis and Shabakis; and one seat reserved for Sabean Mandeans in Baghdad.

- ◆The Council of Representatives should comprise at least 82 women, in accordance with the constitutional 25 per cent quota system. ■

# Iraq's IDPs get to express a choice

By Randa Jamal, UNAMI PIO



Chikuk IDP Camp. Photo: UNHCR

**I**nternally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are estimated at approximately 1.5 million. Enduring hardship, lack of opportunities and scarcity of resources, they strive to make ends meet while remaining optimistic about the future. Many of them took part in the 2010 parliamentary election hoping that the next government will bring them security, stability and employment opportunities.

Kawthar Talib, a 25-year old widow, cares for three boys since her husband was killed in Abu Ghreib in 2006. She lives on the outskirts of Baghdad in an area called Chikuk camp known for harbouring many other widows. Kawthar's personal tragedy did not deter her from voting.

"Voting for my country's future is necessary. Even though it took me more than an hour to get to the voting centre, it was worth it", she says with a smile. Kawthar also believes that IDPs must participate in elections. She speaks highly of the employees of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) who visited Chikuk camp and provided IDPs with information on voting procedures, locations of various voting stations and material promoting voter education.

"My hope is for the new government to

provide us with security, change and job opportunities". She grimly murmured, "My children and I feel vulnerable and we yearn for better living conditions".

Kawthar also hopes that the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) will continue extending humanitarian assistance to IDPs. In fact, Kawthar has two sisters who were also widowed in 2006. They had no choice but to live with their children in her family's one bedroom house. "There is no space for me, my sisters and our children in the one bedroom house; but Chikuk is our only option right now", she lamented.

Lamya Buttress shares Kawthar's feelings about life in the IDP camp: "Chikuk camp is the best option for the time being", says Lamya, a 30-year old widow who has been caring for her seven children since she lost her husband in a tragic incident in October 2006. Back then they used to live in Ba'quba in Diyala province, which she and her family had to leave for the Chikuk camp - the "widows' refuge".

Lamya credits the IHEC staff for her voter education and feels strongly about casting her vote. She played an active role during the March election as a political agent representing the Al-Shaheed Al Mihrab entity of the Iraqi National Alliance, who observed

**"I hope it [the election] will bring those in power to extend a hand to us, the widows and the vulnerable [...] I hope for job opportunities for us to become less dependent on NGOs and international organizations"**

the voting process on Election Day. "Television Ads on the parliamentary election were also instrumental in raising awareness", she stressed. "However", she complained, "some faced problems trying to find their names on Election Day and had to go to several voting centres". Later in the day, a centre opened at the Al Qassem Ibn Al-Hassan school. While a large number of voters managed to cast their ballot, others did not".

"I hope the election will bring those in power to extend a hand to us - the widows and the vulnerable", said Lamya. She also aspires for better security, increased freedom and income generating opportunities for women and youth in the camp, which would make them less dependent on NGOs and international organisations.

Other IDPs like 39-year-old Ahmad Abdulkareem, feel that voting is necessary to bring about security, infrastructure, job opportunities and attention to marginalised groups. "It was useful that IHEC staff visited our area and told us where to vote and gave us instructions on how to vote", he emphasised.

Now living in Mujama' Al-Manar in Doora area of Baghdad, Ahmad hopes the security situation will improve to allow him and his family to return to Basra where they lived prior to the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003.



Similarly, 35-year-old Qais Zaboun perceived a well organised election for Chikuk's IDPs. Originally from Ghazalia area of Baghdad, Qais and his family were displaced in 2006. Unlike Kawthar, Lamyaa, and Ahmad, Qais received voter education through Mussassat Iraq Al Salam Al Insania - an Iraqi humanitarian institution based in Chikuk. "They told us about the locations of voting stations and ensured that our names were registered", he said. "On behalf of those who were not informed, the NGO liaised with the IHEC. This helped the unregistered voters to vote, using conditional ballots, at Al Qassem Ibn Al-Hassan voting centre", he added.

"This NGO, along with UNHCR, provided us with services and humanitarian assistance. They cleaned up the entire area and delivered Non Food Items, including furnaces and blankets", added Qais. Crediting the voter education programme, Qais said that he is now more knowledgeable about the conduct of an election and the meaning of expressing a choice. Concurring with the views expressed by IDPs in Chikuk camp, Qais has great expectations for the new government to provide all Iraqis with secu-

rity, stability and job opportunities. "For now we hope to stay in Chikuk and continue to receive UNHCR visits on a regular basis. It is better for us to stay here, for our own protection", he stressed.

With a mandate on protection, humanitarian and emergency assistance, the UN refugee agency played a significant role in ensuring that IDPs get to vote. The UNHCR Representative for Iraq. Mr. Daniel Endres said, "We drew the attention of the IHEC and UNAMI to the locations of approximately 1.5 million IDPs".

In addition, UNHCR assisted the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) in the registration of IDPs. The lists of registered voters were later used by the IHEC for the registration of IDP absentee voting. UNHCR also mobilised for support awareness campaigns through MoDM, Endres said.

Endres also stressed that the IHEC did not spare an effort to ensure that Iraq's IDPs participate in the electoral process, including the most recently displaced groups. For example, one week before Election Day, Christian Iraqi families fled violence in Mosul to

other parts of Ninewah's province. To ensure they would be given a chance to vote, two voting centres were established in Qaraqosh and Tilkaif, areas in which the IDPs were displaced.

In total, the IHEC opened 1,100 polling stations for IDPs registered for absentee voting, while 541 polling stations were opened for absentee voters to make a choice using conditional ballots. Once the eligibility of those who voted by conditional ballots was verified by the Governorate Election Office Count Centre, IDPs' votes were counted.

Ultimately, Ahmad, Kawthar, Lamyaa and Qais had a chance to cast their vote and actively participate in shaping a future Iraq. Despite lacking better security, stability, and job opportunities and having suffered from decades of conflict and sanctions, the Iraqi spirit is not dampened - they remain increasingly optimistic about their country's future. ■

## 2010 Election: Facts & Figures

Iraq is divided into 18 electoral constituencies based on governorates. Each governorate represents one electoral constituency.

- ◆ In December 2009, the Council of Representatives amended the national Election Law to increase the number of parliamentary seats from 275 to 325.
- ◆ The allocation of seats under the Electoral Law was considered to be highly complex, accommodating four different minority groups (Christians, Shabak, Yazidi and Sabean), seats reserved for a national level constituency, and a constitutionally imposed women's quota of 25 per cent.
- ◆ The election process was divided into three separate and parallel events, all of which were administered by the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) with the support of UNAMI. The IHEC implemented special needs voting for police and military personnel, detainees and hospitalized voters in Iraq on 4 March; out-of country voting between 5 and 7 March for Iraqis residing in 16 countries; and the general election day for all Iraqi registered voters.
- ◆ To increase the participation of eligible voters, special polling centres were identified to accommodate Internally Displaced People who registered with the IHEC to vote for the governorate from which they have been displaced.
- ◆ Over 6,000 candidates were nominated by 86 political entities. All candidates went through an obligatory vetting process with reference to their educational background, affiliation with the outlawed Ba'ath party, or criminal convictions.
- ◆ Approximately 18.9 million voters have registered to vote. The IHEC established around 10,000 polling centres throughout Iraq. Each centre consists of one or more polling stations, totaling over 50,000. Each polling station had the capacity to serve up to 420 voters.
- ◆ A Voter Registration Update was conducted in August and September 2009 to give voters the opportunity to check/correct details on the Voter List. More than 574,000 voters requested services and over 935,000 voters visited voter registration centres for these purposes.
- ◆ An estimated 300,000 political agents and national observers participated in the election.

# Iraq's elections progress

By Randa Jamal, UNAMI PIO



Craig Jenness, Director of the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division

**Mr. Craig Jenness currently serves as the Director of the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs in New York. As the former Head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Election Observation Mission to Georgia, Mr. Jenness ensures that the UN system delivers high quality and impartial electoral advice and assistance to member states that ask the UN for assistance.**

**The UN currently assists election authorities in more than 50 countries to organize transparent and credible elections. Having served in Iraq in 2005 as the UN Chief Electoral Advisor and member of the Election Commission, Mr. Jenness speaks to For Iraq on the recent Iraqi parliamentary election.**

**For Iraq: In your opinion, how do you assess the 7 March 2010 parliamentary election?**

**Craig Jenness:** This is the sixth electoral event the UN has supported in Iraq; and they get better each time. It is gratifying to see how far the electoral commission has come. Their processes, including the numerous checks and balances to ensure accuracy, transparency and to deter fraud are extensive and in line with global best practices. Compared to 2005, the process was conducted in far greater security; the campaign was more open and competitive and voters were given a broader range of political philosophies from which to choose. The high participation - despite attempts to intimidate voters - was very impressive and speaks volumes about the courage of Iraqis and their embrace of democracy.

**For Iraq: If Iraq is to hold an election in the near future, what needs to be conducted differently?**

**“As the UN General Assembly has said many times - there is no single model of democracy”**

**Craig Jenness:** Of course no election is perfect, and there is still room for progress. Some improvements may be technical. I believe, for example, that the electoral commission will explore ways to speed up the results tabulation process. Another example is to do more to ensure an increased participation for women.

**For Iraq: Can you describe the relationship between the International Electoral Assistance Team and the IHEC?**

**Craig Jenness:** The relationship is pretty simple. The IHEC and its staff are the decision makers and the do-ers. The UN staff are advisers. These are Iraqi elections - not UN elections. We have a common goal of course - to put in place an electoral process and systems that meet international best practices. We share the same objectives and often agree on what should be done. But the IHEC does not always follow our advice. Do we mind that they don't always follow our advice? Not at all; it shows their independence. And, as the UN General Assembly has said many times - "there is no single model of democracy".

Some countries use electronic voting machines; while most countries use paper ballots and count ballots at the polling stations, with a few counting ballots in central locations. There are many valid ways of doing things - so long as the process is fair and transparent, with the rule of law and basic rights respected.

I am very proud of the UN electoral team. It is a small group - only about a dozen - but they manage to do a lot because of their expertise, hard work, and commitment. They have excellent support from UNAMI and the SRS. And the team leader - Ms. Sandra Mitchell - is one of the best in the world. I cannot fail to mention here a word of praise and gratitude to others - especially the excellent team of election experts from the International Foundation for Election Systems who have been our partners since 2003 in supporting the electoral commission.

It has been an honour to work with so many talented and capable Iraqi colleagues. Some are already sharing their experiences as UN experts in other countries, and I hope

more will share their experience in the region and around the world.

**For Iraq: There are outcries regarding fraud. Are there technical measures that you would introduce to curtail and/or combat such allegations?**

**Craig Jenness:** The process has been very transparent as compared to other elections around the world. I believe, on average, there were at least five Iraqi agents and observers in each polling station. They monitored the voting and the count afterwards. If there were major problems, these would have been seen. Less than one per cent of polling stations were the subject of a complaint on polling day. That means 99 per cent of polling stations did not have a problem that resulted in a complaint. I know there were concerns about the tally process. Although the process was slower than originally planned - due partially to IHEC adding new checks at the last minute - our advisers were confident the tally was accurate. But even that can be checked - tallied results are available per station and can be easily checked against the numbers recorded by agents and observers who watched the count at the polling stations.

Personally, I do not feel the IHEC could have done much more. But there is always room for lessons to be learned and improvements to be made. For those who suspect fraud, they could use the existing legal and constitutional processes to resolve their concerns. It is right for anyone that questions the process to have their concern looked at seriously and fairly.

The IHEC looked at all complaints seriously. Most were dismissed as incorrect or lacking in evidence. Some concerns were legitimate - the IHEC eventually excluded results from about 300 stations. In Iraq, ultimately, the Supreme Court will certify the results.

**For Iraq: Is there a message you would like to send to Iraqis, in general?**

**Craig Jenness:** I would have only two things to offer. First, I am grateful to so many Iraqis - both with and outside the electoral commission - for the warmth and openness we have been shown. The Iraqi reputation for being gracious hosts is well deserved. Second, I believe Iraqis should be very proud of their elections. So many Iraqis I spoke to said they were voting not just for themselves, but for a peaceful and prosperous future for their children. I encourage Iraqis to hold those elected - whether in government or the equally important role of opposition - accountable to this vision. If they do not, let them know in four years at the ballot box. ■

# Journey of a UN election staff

By Aicha Elbasri and Randa Jamal, UNAMI PIO



Zoran Trajkovski, UNAMI Election Staff, with Iraqi colleagues at the IHEC in Baghdad.  
Photo: UNAMI PIO

**“I never thought that from my native city Skopje, I would make it one day to Baghdad...Iraqis are indeed the most courageous people I have come across”**

**F**or 35-year old Zoran Trajkovski, from Macedonia, assisting countries to successfully conduct an election is more than just a job. It is the greater cause that made him leave behind a promising medical career to join the international electoral support teams in Macedonia, Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Chatting in colloquial English to his Iraqi colleagues and tossing in a few Arabic words, Zoran seems to be in his element. Sitting at his modest desk at the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) plunged into darkness by one of Baghdad's regular power cuts, Zoran recalls the journey that brought him from Skopje to Baghdad.

“My interest in the conduct of elections began when federal Yugoslavia started to disintegrate at the beginning of the 1990s, when fear entered our lives. Thanks to the September 1991 election which proclaimed the independence of Macedonia, my country avoided violence and entered a new era of democracy. I was in my early twenties and the power of the ballot impressed me more than anything else.”

It was indeed a turning point in Zoran's life. Trained in dentistry, medicine and refugee mental health, he decided to join the humanitarian community. He first served for Action Against Hunger, a UK based NGO that provided humanitarian assistance to refugees who fled the war-torn Kosovo.

“I first encountered the United Nations in Macedonia during the Kosovo crisis. My international experience grew while working for *Movimondo*, an Italian NGO, where I was in charge of coordinating humanitarian assistance with the UN. I appreciated the way the world body was providing vitally needed humanitarian assistance without political consideration because saving lives demands nothing less. I also observed that integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity, my personal values, are also the UN's essential

and enduring beliefs. I knew then that I was made to serve the United Nations anywhere in the world.”

In 2004, Zoran joined the International Organization for Migration Electoral Support team as an officer in training and responsible for managing external relations for refugees in Iran. Having worked in the past for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe helped Zoran acquire extensive experience in planning and implementing large scale training programmes, conducting diplomatic negotiations and handling media and external relations.

“These areas are crucial to the success of any process that requires delivering public messages and mediating agreements amongst various stakeholders. Communication and the media can contribute to improved voter education, citizen participation and the management of conflict.”

Zoran's assignments in Iran and Afghanistan offered him a unique exposure to different contexts in which the United Nations provided electoral support that was politically neutral, socially impartial and entirely based on the country's needs.

Building on his electoral experience, Zoran decided to make the biggest move of his life by joining the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in February 2007. He first supported the development of a capacity building strategy and technical plan for the IHEC before he served as an External Relations Electoral Affairs Officer. In all capacities, what makes Zoran's work in Baghdad unique is the fact that he works, along with his colleagues from the UNAMI electoral support team, directly with Iraqis at the IHEC in Baghdad.

“I never thought that from my native city Skopje I would make it one day to Baghdad where the Iraqi people live, facing death and mayhem everyday. It's certainly the special feeling that I am taking part of not only the UNAMI electoral support team but in the history-making that

gives me the strength to get up everyday eager to do more to help Iraqis rebuild their country on a sound democratic practice”.

Talking about Zoran emphasises the great team spirit that binds Iraqi and international staff working together, every day, side by side, at the IHEC.

“Each member of our UNAMI electoral support team has a role to play in a specific area. The technical assistance and advice we provide covers legal and election dispute resolution, operations, security, training and procedures, procurement, logistics, field coordination, external relations, public outreach, graphic design, database, voter list and capacity building. At first glance, it all resembles a puzzle but, at the end of the day, all the pieces come together since we are all working in the same direction”.

One of the key aspects of Zoran's work is keeping the international community abreast on all electoral developments by organising and delivering briefings and facilitating round table discussions for all *Friends of Iraq Elections*.

But knowledge is not a one-way flow. In fact, Zoran has learned tremendously from his Iraqi colleagues' life lessons through their resilience and determination to stand against all odds.

“Iraqis are indeed the most courageous people I have come across. Whenever an explosion hits right at the check point in the vicinity of their home, they would still show up at the office as if nothing had happened. They are stronger and more wilful than all disasters that have affected them for over three decades. Working with them is a lesson in itself, and we will continue to work with them for as long as they need us”.

Zoran's desire to continue working with the IHEC is even more appealing now since the Commission has grown to become an institution capable of delivering highly professional services and has set a precedent in the country, if not in the region. ■

# On the importance of election procedures in Iraq

By Katie Green, UNAMI Election Procedures Advisor



Voter registration using photo identification - Data Entry Centre. Photo: UNAMI/OCV

“Throughout all processes, procedures complied with international standards for accountability in facilitating full access for observation”

**I**n addition to shaping a country's future, organising a parliamentary election is a wide-scale logistical and technical event. Precision and consistency in an election are critical to the democratic process, as results must be reliable and outcomes credible. Therefore, conducting an election requires clear, simple and comprehensive procedures which can be easily communicated to the election staff and stakeholders in order to minimise errors.

In general, election procedures provide measures for control over processes, and detailed instructions to be followed by election staff, voters and other stakeholders in conducting processes.

Election procedures include the following:

- ◆ accreditation for observation of electoral processes;
- ◆ political entity and coalition registration;
- ◆ candidate nomination;
- ◆ special voting processes;
- ◆ absentee voting;
- ◆ polling and counting;
- ◆ data entry centre;
- ◆ audit complaints processing and recount procedures.

As far as the Iraq 2010 parliamentary election is concerned, procedures were developed in Arabic by the Independent High

Electoral Commission (IHEC) with technical advice from the United Nations. Such an action represents a major change vis-à-vis the internationally-led development of procedures for 2005 elections.

In general, establishing election procedures requires electoral commissions to combine both internationally accepted standards and requirements specific to the context of a given country. While democratic elections worldwide aim to promote principles such as equitable access and secrecy of the vote, procedures vary in terms of eligibility requirements and how these can be met, and specific steps for voting. In this regard, Iraq is no different.

For example, with regards to polling, procedures for the 7 March election included the established norms that voting must take place in person and not by proxy, on presentation of acceptable photo identification, and in secret. They also included the additional anti-fraud measure, applied in several countries such as Nepal and the Philippines, that a voter's finger must be inked with indelible ink prior to casting a ballot to show that s/he has voted, and thereby prevent multiple voting. Polling procedures also included the provision for assistance in marking a ballot where necessary, as is often specified in countries with certain levels of illiteracy.

In addition, one key component which defines polling processes is a voter list. This represents a primary anti-fraud measure as each voter is allocated to a specific and single polling station and can only cast a ballot in the polling station where s/he is registered on the voter list. This can, however, represent a challenge in post-conflict environments with developing electoral processes, in that the success of a voter list depends on the accuracy and reliability of voter data, which can take several years to achieve. For the 2009 Afghanistan Presidential election, for example, it was determined that the voter register was not sufficiently accurate to create functional voter lists for Election Day, and voter lists were not used.

Since 2005, the voter register in Iraq has been based on the Public Distribution System (PDS), as the most comprehensive data source at the time. The PDS is structured by family unit rather than by the individual.

Following significant efforts to improve the voter register over the last three years, in the 2010 election, the IHEC was able to establish procedures for regular polling stations requiring that the voter list contains voters' names in alphabetical order, rather than by family. In addition, a voter had to be on the voter list of a polling station in order to cast a ballot, while each voter was required to sign the voter list before receiving a ballot.

As in other post-conflict environments where there has been a significant level of internal displacement, the IHEC also developed absentee voting procedures for specific polling stations established to service people internally displaced from a different governorate, so that they could cast a ballot for the governorate from which they were displaced.

Absentee voter lists were also created, which listed voters by governorate, and polling stations could utilise ballots from more than one governorate. Where numbers of absentee voters were less than 50, both regular and absentee voting was facilitated in the same polling station, on the basis of the two different procedures.

To facilitate voting for all voters, the IHEC also developed procedures for additional polling centres opened specifically to cater for those who had changed their PDS registration without updating their voter data with the IHEC and for polling centres for Internally Displaced Persons who had not registered to vote as absentees. Additionally, special voting procedures were established for those who may have not been able to cast a ballot in a regular polling station on Election Day, such as for military and police officers on duty, detainees and hospital patients.

With the exception of some voting for

military and police officers, in the absence of a pre-defined voter list, voting took place by what is known as a 'conditional ballot'. This is a mechanism which has been used previously in countries such as Bosnia and Kosovo, whereby a ballot is cast at the time of polling inside an envelope containing the voter's details, according to the identification documentation presented. These details are checked afterwards to determine a voter's eligibility. If the voter is proven to be eligible according to the database, the ballot would be counted, the secrecy envelope is removed from the conditional ballot envelope prior to the start of counting processes, so the ballot itself remains confidential. This also entails a requirement for eligibility verification procedures prior to counting.

While these special voting categories totalled almost 4,500 of the total 51,944 categories, they did necessitate a range of different polling procedures. Each of these categories had different variances in procedures, such as access requirements to polling centres and documentation standards for voting. It created challenges in training different polling stations teams, in providing voter information and in ballot distribution. This resulted in a complex operation and represented one of the distinguishing features of the recent Iraq election.

Throughout all processes, procedures complied with international standards for ac-

countability in facilitating full access for observation. All polling and counting processes were in fact open to observation. Observers and political entity agents were permitted to record all information on polling and counting forms and invited to sign forms as witnesses if they wished to do so.

Additionally, emphasis was placed on developing procedures that ensure security of materials and chain of custody throughout all processes, to prevent and/or identify any tampering with materials. While there are a number of ways in which this can be done, Iraq's recent election applied common procedures such as serial numbered seals for ballot boxes, material handover forms throughout the chain of custody, and transportation of result forms in sealed tamper evident bags.

In light of all challenges, reports issued by observer groups of the Council of Representatives' election, as well as statements released by representatives of the international community, noted that procedures had generally been followed correctly in polling stations. The minimal problems identified during the subsequent recount of ballots for Baghdad governorate also indicated that polling staff were generally well trained by the IHEC and procedures correctly followed during polling. ■



Out-of-Country Voting Centre, Sweden. Photo: UNAMI/OCV

# Iraqi voices from the IHEC

By Randa Jamal, UNAMI PIO



Iraqi staff at the IHEC Tally Centre in Baghdad. Photo: UNAMI PIO

**“Although the work is simple, it gives me a great feeling that there are elections, people can vote and express their opinion”**

**A three-storey concrete building in Baghdad houses the offices of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) for Iraq, where most of the preparations for the 7 March election took place. Iraqi women and men working for the IHEC take a special pride in their contribution to advancing democracy in their country.**

The IHEC is made up of several interdependent units that deal with every aspect of the election. The Operations’ unit covers all logistical and operational aspects, the Public Outreach unit produces election material, while the Political unit ensures that all candidates are properly registered and certified – a considerable task given that more than 6,000 candidates and more than 500 political groups were registered. As for the Translation unit, it ensures that voting and educational materials are translated into several languages.

Iraqis who work in the IHEC take pride in their work and in what they hope to achieve for their country. Since 2007, 38-year-old Mohammad Jassim, who joined the IHEC as a programmer in 2005, has been heading the Database unit in the Operations Department. Mohammad describes how dangerous it was for him and his colleagues to work in the Green Zone.

“In the past, if we had to work late, we had no choice but to stay and sleep in the office since the security situation was difficult”, he said. “However, the situation is now much better”.

Not only has security improved, but so has the atmosphere within the IHEC itself. “We discuss issues and problems that emerge. We have our opinions as Iraqis working for IHEC as we have gained more skills. In 2005, when we first started, we agreed to whatever we were told by international experts. This is no longer the case”.

Other IHEC employees, such as 31-year-old Mais Ali, see their work as a national duty. A graduate of the University of Technology in Baghdad, Mais gave up teaching programming to join the IHEC. She now heads the programming division which is part of the database section. Mais feels she is part of a system that treats citizens equally and encourages them to express their choices about their future, and emphasises that her work with the IHEC reaches out to many people while her work as a teacher benefited only a few of a certain class.

Mais’ work during the parliamentary election involved running programming and software tests with the assistance of one programming expert. However, there were

times when she faced some technical difficulties. Given the large scale and the complexity of the election in Iraq, Mais hopes her unit would recruit more experts to test the programming and software for technical problems. She also aspires to broaden her training and further build her programming capacities. Describing her feelings on Election Day, Mais said, “I was happy as if I were on a holiday; I went to the voting centre wearing my best clothes”.

All the way from Diyala Province, 23-year-old Jamal Kathim describes his work as a data entry clerk at IHEC as a rewarding experience. He says, “Although the work is simple, it gives me a great feeling that there are elections, people can vote and express their opinion”. However, he did experience data entry fatigue, which was not easy: “My eyesight started hurting after looking at the screen for six consecutive hours, entering data and ensuring that every number is correct”. Nonetheless, he stresses the importance of his work, since it is the Iraqi people’s choices and votes he is entering.

Like his colleagues, Jamal has hopes for a booming economy and security for all. A biologist by training, Jamal sees himself in 20 years from now serving Iraq by heading a laboratory.

Other data entry clerks, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, expressed pride that they had been entrusted to enter people’s votes regardless of who they voted for. They emphasised the importance of transparency, the absence of corruption, military interventions or violence in the voting process, which they believed is the best approach to express opinion and create change. These IHEC staff agreed the situation in Iraq had improved, and like Mohammad, Mais and Jamal, they are proud to serve their country and to vote in a process that allows them to choose and to express their opinion through a ballot.

When asked if they felt their work is worth risking their lives, they all answered: “without any doubt, it is worth it! This is our country and we cannot just sit and wait for miracles while criminals take over our freedoms. This is a fight that we have no choice but to win for all Iraqis. We must stand up to defend our right for a better future”. ■

*Note: Some names have been changed.*

2010 Iraq Election Results	
Total Seats for Council of Representatives	
Political Entity/Coalition	Seats
Al-Iraqiya	91
State of Law	89
Iraqi National Alliance	70
Kurdistani Alliance	43
Goran	8
Iraqi Al-Tawafuk	6
Kurdistani Islamic Union	4
Iraqi Unity Alliance	4
Al-Rafidain	3
Kurdistani Islamic Group/Iraq	2
The Assyrian, Chaldean and Syriac Popular Council	2
The Yazidi Movement for Reform and Progress	1
Khalid Ameen Roumi (Sabeen Component Seat)	1
Eng. Mohammad Jamshed Abdallah Al Shabaki (Shabak Component Seat)	1

*Source: IHEC*



*IHEC staff provide training on conduct of the election. Photo: UNAMI PIO*

# Free and fair online campaign trails

By Jacky Sutton and Salam Abdulmunem, UNDP Iraq - Media and Elections

Get short, timely messages from State of Law. Twitter is a rich source of instantly updated information. It's easy to stay updated on an incredibly wide variety of topics. **Join today** and follow @StateofLaw.

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1 following 54 followers 4 listed

Tweets 50

Favorites

Following

RSS feed of StateofLaw's tweets

المالكي الدستور يضمن للتحالف الجديد الحق بتسمية رئيس الوزراء  
<http://qanoon337.org/337/news.php?action=view&id=321>  
7:55 AM May 10th via web

المالكي للشهراء الجدد: مهمتكم ستكون مسجلة لانكم ستظنون صورة العراق الجديد  
<http://qanoon337.org/337/news.php?action=view&id=320>  
7:54 AM May 10th via web

الحنفي: على النحس الحلويس إلى طولة الدوار نذل أطلق التهم  
<http://qanoon337.org/337/news.php?action=view&id=319>

Online campaign site - [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

“For the first time in Iraq’s political history, online campaigns were a significant factor in the pre-election hustling”

**F**or the first time in Iraq’s political history, online campaigns were a significant factor in the pre-election hustling. Online campaigns attracted thousands of followers as Iraqi politicians moved *en masse* into cyberspace. They opened up the space for dialogue and accountability.

Iraqi voters defied bomb threats and went to the polls in the country’s second parliamentary election since the collapse of the Saddam regime in 2003. Turnout was estimated at 62 per cent, with voting also taking place in 16 Out-of-Country locations in Australia, North America, Europe and the Middle East. For the first time in Iraq’s political history online campaigns were a significant factor in the pre-election hustling, augmenting the traditional media of television, billboards, poems, songs and flag-waving rallies.

Voting - especially overseas - was a festive affair, sometimes with entire families dressed in their best attire creating a festive atmosphere complete with music and food. Inside Iraq, commentators noted that the violence that marred the morning of 7 March had seemed to spur people to assert their right to the franchise. Media reports from the polling centres spoke of the reso-

lution of the electorate to move away from the sectarian bloodshed of the past five years and select candidates based on performance and service delivery – the hallmarks of government accountability.

In the weeks prior to the polls, Iraqi political parties and candidates had been streaming live press conference and taking direct questions from Facebook followers, uploading photos to Flickr.com and videos to YouTube, and Tweeting their campaign trails. Even though at an estimated 22 per cent internet penetration is quite low in Iraq (and most of the country does not have broadband access), Iraqi politicians have moved *en masse* into cyberspace.

Almost all the major political parties, slates and coalitions marked up their turf on the web; some, like Al-Maliki’s State of Law coalition and Al-Hashimi’s Tajdeed Slate, provided sophisticated and entertaining online fare engaging different audience segments. But even those who did not have the financial or technical means for such complicated tools were still able to interact with their constituents through online fora that could be set up for free.

The State of Law coalition, for example, created two main websites – one to stream

video; the other for everything else – and used their Facebook page and Twitter feed to announce events and campaign pledges. These were updated at least once a day, often more, in English and Arabic. The Facebook page was used not only to broadcast information but also to answer questions, which were posted on the ‘Wall’, in real time and the main page was linked to additional pages for individual candidates campaigning under the State of Law.

Online campaigns attracted thousands of followers – a number that gains significance considering that during the 2009 Governorate Council election the threshold was low enough to allow a candidate with as little as 3,000 to 4,000 votes to win a seat. Technology also brought change to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), which developed a new website for the 2009 Governorate Council election and has since expanded the online application available and improved its delivery of English and Kurdish content. In the week before the election, Google Analytics figures showed that visitor numbers had increased and that they stayed online for about six minutes – considered far longer than a casual browse.

The Out-of-Country-Vote (OCV) Administration in Erbil also set up a site which in-



cluded a voter-friendly Flash map to help guide voters to the polling centre nearest to them; polling centres' physical location addresses were also entered into the Google Maps database. While the OCV and the main IHEC sites were one-way streams of information, complementary initiatives showed moving the election commission into interactivity.

In February 2010, the Board of Commissioners confirmed that OCV Country Of-

fice Managers were able to engage with the media in their countries on technical issues and individual OCV country offices were encouraged to set up Facebook sites. Ten out of the 16 OCV offices went on Facebook, and several also set up Twitter feeds and posted videos onto YouTube.

These developments illustrate how convergence in Iraq, as in the rest of the Arabic-speaking world, is opening up the space for dialogue and accountability. But these

newly opened spaces and possibilities for public dialogue and discussion are by no means secure.

Iraq still lacks a clear vision for its information and communication technology policies and draft laws, which have been presented to the outgoing parliament, suggest that the government aims to retain control on those newly opened modes of communication and dialogue. ■



Iraqis at a blog corner set up in Baghdad. Photo: UNESCO

# Iraqi women rise to political influence

By Aicha Elbasri and Randa Jamal, UNAMI PIO



Amal Anwar Aref, IHEC Vice-Chairman and Commissioner. Photo: UNAMI PIO

**“My message to Iraqi women has always been that they must participate as they represent half of the population. When a woman votes, she gives us enough support to make our voice heard”**

**A former chemical engineer is now overseeing Iraqi’s elections as a Vice-Chairman and Commissioner at the Independent High Electoral Committee (IHEC), thus rising to political influence in her country.**

Hailing from a Turkmen family of four sisters and two brothers, 53-year-old Amal Anwar Aref, mother of a 13-year-old daughter, has come a long way. Originally from Kirkuk in northern Iraq, Amal’s family was greatly affected by the 1980 Iraq-Iran war that led to the tragic death of one of her brothers. Despite this great loss, the family held strong together.

“As long as I can remember, I have always wanted to be involved in the public life in order to better serve my country. I think my love of my country is the force that drove me into politics.”

Leaving Kirkuk at an early age to pursue her education in Baghdad, Amal’s life was set to take a different course. Graduating with a degree in chemical engineering from the

University of Baghdad in 1980, Amal was appointed by the Ministry of Oil to head the State Company for Oil Project. A few years later Amal resigned from this position as she and her husband considered the possibility of emigrating abroad. She asked for her father’s blessings, who in turn asked that she stay and work with him in Iraq.

Heeding her father’s advice, Amal and her family remained in Iraq. She worked as a Deputy Director for a Turkish oil company until the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003. She decided to return and work with the Ministry of Science and Technology where she was appointed as the Head of Engineers. In 2005, the engineer Amal embarked on her political career. She was nominated as a Member of Parliament (MP) before she would join the IHEC.

“I won in the first election that was held in Iraq and served as an MP for one year. Joining the IHEC in April 2007, came by word of mouth. A friend of mine called me and asked me to check the newspaper ads, encouraging me to apply, which I immediately did.

That’s how I was nominated to be one of the nine commissioners in the newly formed independent electoral body.

Overseeing a credible transparent and a fair election at these crucial times is much more than a job. It’s a mission I am proud to fulfil for my country”, said Commissioner Amal.

Commissioner Amal takes a special pride in the conduct of the most recent parliamentary election of 7 March 2010. “In comparison to 2005, transparency and credibility are major achievements for the IHEC”, she emphasised. As part of her many achievements, Commissioner Amal has formed an anti-fraud committee to document lessons learned, to adopt best practices from previous elections, to apply anti-fraud measures, and to ensure that high electoral standards are maintained when planning and conducting elections.

With the idea in mind to adopt advanced technology to count votes and to impart education on elections and voter participation, Commissioner Amal is confident that future

elections in Iraq will continue to be upheld to the highest standards possible.

Commissioner Amal agrees that Iraqi women have come a long way since the first woman gained entry into parliament. Now, Iraqi women hold around 25 per cent of the seats in the National Assembly according to a quota system aimed at boosting women political participation, by granting them the legislative right to have a share of the seats on sustainable basis. Critics of the quota system argue women must earn the seats instead of occupying them without such an effort.

Amal holds a different opinion: "The quota should be maintained until women are empowered enough to attain votes on their own. Female MPs are often subject to criticism for not having achieved much. I often respond to such criticism by asking what have male MPs achieved that their female counterparts did not? I regret that often times when things go right for women MPs, the credit goes elsewhere", said Commissioner Amal.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Amal is determined to empower other women to take on a more active role in their country's affairs: "I encourage women to participate in the election. Whenever possible, I take the time to educate women about the importance of casting a ballot. My message to Iraqi women has always been that they must participate as they represent half of the population. When a women votes, she gives us enough support to make our voice heard".

But Commissioner Amal points out that being a spouse and a mother are no less important in her life. With a life revolving around the Commission, Amal dedicates most of her time to electoral affairs ensuring that hurdles are removed and problems resolved; which entrenches upon the time she would have planned to spend with her daughter.

"My daughter is my greatest inspiration. Were it not for the support of my entire family, I doubt my job would have been as fulfilling and as successful." ■

### Fast Facts:

## Iraqi Women in the Council of Representatives

- ◆ The 2005 electoral law introduced for the first time the 25% quota for women in the Council of Representatives.
- ◆ The 2010 electoral law reaffirmed the 25% quota.
- ◆ In March 7 elections, a total of 1,815 women ran for elections, winning 82 seats in the Council of Representatives in Iraq's constituencies compared to 70 seats in the past.
- ◆ 21 female candidates garnered the needed votes to reach the electoral threshold without relying on the so-called female quota, while other 61 women won seats thanks to the female quota which grants women 25% of seats in the Council of Representatives.
- ◆ Al Iraqiya list won the highest number of female seats (25) followed by the State of Law coalition (23), the Iraqi National Alliance (19), the Kurdistan Alliance (12), the Change list (2) and finally the Rafidin (Mesopotamia) List with only one winning female candidate.



Iraq election campaign billboards in Baghdad. Photo: UNAMI PIO

# We the People

Compiled by UNAMI PIO



A young lady casts her ballot in northern Iraq. Photo: UNDP/JPenjweny



An elderly couple after voting in northern Iraq. Photo: UN



Voting in Najaf. Photo: UNAMI PIO



Iraqis resident in Germany queue to cast their ballots at an



DP/JPenjweny



An active election campaign rally in northern Iraq. Photo: UNDP/JPenjweny



Out-of-Country Voting Centre. Photo: UNDP/OCV



Special voting centre for police officers in northern Iraq. Photo: UNAMI PIO

# We the People

Compiled by UNAMI PIO



Use of indelible ink during voting. Photo: UNAMI PIO



Voter registration in Kirkuk, northern Iraq. Photo: UNAMI PIO



IHEC staff tally results at the IHEC data centre in Baghdad. Photo: UNAMI PIO



Women voters register at a voting centre in Baghdad. Photo: UNAMI PIO



PIO



Iraq election campaign convoy in Lebanon. Photo: UNDP/OCV



to: UNAMI PIO



Voting for a brighter future in Iraq. Photo: UNDP/JPenjweny

