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**UN Security Council Briefing on
The Situation in Iraq (UNAMI briefing)**

(February 16, 2021)

**Statement by Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti
Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations**

Thank you Madam President. I thank Special Representative Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert for her comprehensive briefing. We appreciate UNAMI's close cooperation with the Government of Iraq in providing the necessary assistance to tackle the multiple challenges being faced by them.

2. Let me begin by expressing my deep condolences to the Government and the people of Iraq and the families of those who were killed in the terrorist attacks in Baghdad on January 21. We strongly condemn these attacks on innocent civilians and express our solidarity with the Government and the people of Iraq. I also wish a speedy recovery to those who were grievously injured in these despicable attacks.

3. The attacks are a stark reminder that ISIL continues to pose a significant challenge to peace and stability in Iraq and the region. Terrorism remains the gravest threat to mankind and endangers the very foundation of humanity. It is important for the international community to continue its support for Iraqi Security Forces and the Government so that they can credibly address the menace of terrorism and provide an environment free of terror and fear.

4. The report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the 1267 Committee had mentioned in its report that the threat posed by ISIL to international peace and security is on the rise again and that majority of the active 10,000 ISIL fighters in the region are in Iraq. This is deeply concerning. The focus of this Council should be to eliminate every threat posed by ISIL and other terror groups in Iraq and elsewhere in the world. In order to ensure effective action, a holistic approach needs to be adopted in the global fight against terrorism. In this context, my External Affairs Minister had proposed an eight-point action plan for effectively countering terrorism at the Council's Ministerial meeting last month.

5. The upcoming parliamentary elections in Iraq, scheduled in October 2021, will be a valuable opportunity to strengthen the roots of democracy in the country. A transparent, free, fair and inclusive election, conducted in a violence-free environment, with high voter turnout will empower the new Government to implement reforms, improve accountability, meet the genuine aspirations of Iraqi people, especially the women and youth, and promote inclusiveness and reconciliation. International assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq and UN observation of the electoral process would also enhance the credibility of these elections and build confidence about the integrity of the results amongst the Iraqi people.

6. In this regard, India fully supports the Government of Iraq's request for UN observation of the upcoming elections in the country. We will support any process which respects Iraq's sovereignty, strengthens the democratic exercise, and makes it credible, and consequently acceptable to the people of Iraq. In line with our strong democratic traditions, India has contributed to the democratic and electoral processes in Iraq by training Independent High Electoral Commission officials and sending election observers.

7. We are pleased to note the positive progress in preparation for the upcoming elections. The passage of the electoral law and allocation of funds to the Independent High Electoral Commission are significant steps in this regard. It is important that the remaining conditions for smooth elections like completion of bio-metric voter registration and agreement on the Federal Supreme Court's membership are also fulfilled in a timely manner. We acknowledge the valuable support provided by UNAMI in the electoral process.

8. We commend the concerted efforts of the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to resolve all outstanding issues. We encourage both sides to continue the constructive dialogue for a mutually satisfactory long-term sustainable agreement on these issues, including on revenue sharing and budget allocations. We are also pleased to see the commencement of the implementation of Sinjar agreement.

9. The continued attacks on diplomatic establishments and convoys, including yesterday's attack in Erbil, by non-State armed groups are a serious challenge in maintaining the fragile peace that prevails in Iraq. We appreciate the efforts by the Government of Iraq to provide protection to all diplomatic missions. We hope that a long-term solution can be found to this issue.

10. We applaud the Government of Iraq's determined efforts to maintain friendly and cordial ties with its neighbours and other regional countries. The stability of Iraq should be of paramount importance to the region and the country should not become a theatre for regional or global conflicts. I reaffirm India's steadfast support for Iraq's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

11. We welcome the cooperation between the Governments of Iraq and Kuwait to achieve an amicable solution on the issue of missing Kuwaiti persons and third-country nationals, as well as the return of Kuwaiti property. The recent identification of Kuwaiti nationals from the remains sent by Iraqi authorities last year, has resulted in solace to the families of the deceased. Besides being important from the humanitarian perspective, this has furthered reconciliation between the two countries. We recognize the significant support provided by ICRC to facilitate progress on this file.

Madam President,

12. India's friendship with Iraq is steeped in history. India has always been supportive of a democratic, pluralistic, federal, unified and prosperous Iraq fulfilling the aspirations of its citizens. Our people-to-people ties and trade relations are very strong. We have always responded to the urgent needs of Iraq for relief and reconstruction and contributed USD 30 million. This includes supporting the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq, contribution through World Food Programme and capacity building under our Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme.

13. India is the preferred destination for medical treatment for many Iraqi friends, who visit every year. This cooperation has continued even during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am also happy to note that under Air Bubble Arrangement between the countries, over 10,000 Iraqi nationals have traveled to India during the last four months alone for medical treatment.

14. The Government of Iraq is taking encouraging steps to achieve stability, reconciliation, peace and development in the country. As a reliable and longstanding friend, India will remain a willing partner of Iraq in its nation-building endeavors to deliver prosperity to its people.

Thank you.

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