

Iraq: Security Council told 'despair' has 'given way to hope' but road to stability 'long and far from easy'

Despite some positive developments following years of brutal conflict, Iraq is gripped by political stalemate and a continued humanitarian crisis that is hampering the stabilization of the country, the head of the UN Assistance Mission in the country, ([UNAMI](#)), [Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert](#), told the Security Council on Wednesday.

Special Representative Hennis-Plasschaert started her first briefing to the UN body since taking up her post, by explaining that although a new Prime Minister-designate has been nominated, the Iraqi Government remains incomplete due to "fierce disagreements among political parties", with four top positions still vacant, including the key portfolios of the Interior, Defense, and Justice ministries.

Moreover, multiple parliamentary sessions have been "adjourned, interrupted or boycotted" which has delayed substantive work from taking place.

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the challenges

"The people of Iraq are bearing the brunt of the political stalemate... at a time when it is critical to address their needs and demands for better services," she stressed, adding that further delays would have "significant repercussions" for "the stability of the country".

She called on politicians in Baghdad "to overcome political infighting and to demonstrate that political compromise can prevail in the greater interest of the Iraqi people," noting also that there are "excellent and experienced Iraqi women well-qualified to perform the job".

The people of Iraq are bearing the brunt of the political stalemate
– UNAMI chief Jeanine Hennis

Insecurity remains a major concern, as regular attacks by ISIL extremists – known in the Arab world as Da'esh – continue and as other armed groups are "expanding their economic and social control in Iraqi daily life".

Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert called on the Iraqi Government to "take quick measures to reform its security sector and act resolutely against these groups and their activities."

As a result of years of conflict, the international humanitarian effort to support Iraq remains critical. The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan seeks \$700 million to provide basic assistance to 1.75 million vulnerable Iraqis,

including protection services, medical care, food support, explosive clearance, and longer-term recovery activities.

“While significant efforts are underway to reconstruct infrastructure and restore basic services it will take many years and billions of dollars to rebuild the country. And Iraq will undoubtedly need the continued attention of the international community to make this transition successful and sustainable,” the Special Representative said.

Positive developments

In her briefing Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert noted some recent positive developments such as the adoption of the federal budget for 2019 which includes important allocations for the delivery of basic services, and efforts made by the Government to combat corruption.

“The fight against corruption will not be an easy one, but it is a much needed one as corruption is vast and pervasive at all levels in Iraq. It is a much-needed fight in order to revive public-trust and to facilitate the provision of basic services,” she said.

Other highlights included a recent agreement between the Federal Government in Baghdad, and the Kurdistan Regional Government, based in Erbil, to unify custom duties. “This decision is an important step in reinforcing Iraq’s unity,” she explained adding that “a speedy implementation of this agreement should now be a priority for both sides”.

Priorities moving forward

The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) has formally recommended that Provincial Council elections take place on 16 November, she said, noting that UNAMI “will continue to provide the technical assistance and support” IHEC needs. “However, in preparation for these elections a number of steps will need to be taken urgently by the Government of Iraq and the relevant institutions.”

She also highlighted as a priority the need for “a more consistent adherence to international standards of due process and fair trial.”

“An impartial and transparent process of judicial accountability – for the gross violations of human rights by ISIL – will prove crucial in rebuilding peaceful coexistence and social cohesion,” she insisted.

Closing her briefing, Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert said that “the atmosphere of despair during the period of ISIL occupation has given some way to hope and optimism for the future in Iraq. However, one cannot shy away from the fact that the road to well-deserved long-term stability will be long and far from easy”.

Noting that great determination, political will and national ownership will be critical for success, she stated that support from the international community will continue to be “of paramount importance”.

[LGBT community in Chechnya faces 'new wave of persecution': UN human rights experts](#)

People in Chechnya who are suspected of being lesbian, gay or bisexual, are facing a “new wave of persecution” following a spate of killings involving torture, and other rights abuses, said a group of independent UN human rights experts on Wednesday.

In a [statement](#) released by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the experts expressed alarm at information indicating a worsening situation for LGBT people in Chechnya: “Abuse inflicted on victims has allegedly become more cruel and violent compared with reports from 2017. It is no longer only gay men in Chechnya who are being targeted but women also.”

More than 40 people have reportedly been arrested since December 2018 because of their perceived sexual orientation: the two deaths allegedly occurred as a result of torture during detention.

In addition, victims attempting to flee the republic, which is part of the Russian Federation, are reportedly being prevented from doing so by the Chechen authorities. Their methods, say the UN experts, include destroying or confiscating identification documents; threats directed towards them, or those close to them, with criminal proceedings; and forcing them to provide signatures on blank forms.

They went on to say that a December 2018 report from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which describes “clear evidence of...successive purges against LGBTI persons” in Chechnya, suggests a pattern of impunity detrimental to accountability for human rights violations.

The UN experts have written to the Russian authorities, calling on them to act urgently to protect the LGBT community. In a similar letter sent less than two years ago, in April 2017, they raised allegations of the unlawful detention, torture and extrajudicial killing of men perceived to be gay or bisexual in Chechnya.

The response, said the experts, was not substantive, and they went on to note that, last year, Russia [claimed](#) at the UN Human Rights Council that “it was not possible to find representatives of the LGBT community in Chechnya.” Such “negation”, they stressed, contribute to the creation of an “environment conducive to violence and discrimination in which perpetrators feel motivated and enabled to attack diversity.”

'New tech' business model threatens decent work conditions, warns UN

Unemployment is down globally but workers' conditions have not improved, the [UN said on Wednesday](#), warning that some businesses driven by new technology "threaten to undermine" hard-won social gains of recent decades.

According to the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#), most of the 3.3 billion people employed worldwide in 2018 did not enjoy adequate levels of economic security, and lacked sufficient material well-being as well as too few opportunities for advancement.

In total, 172 million people were jobless last year – one in 20 individuals of working age – ILO's Trends in Global Employment 2019 report shows.

This unemployment rate, which has only just returned to levels last seen before the 2008-9 financial crisis, is not expected to change this year or next, assuming stable global economic conditions; although current uncertainty is "already having a negative effect on the labour market" in upper middle-income countries, it says.

Nonetheless, "being in employment does not always guarantee a decent living," said Damian Grimshaw, ILO Director of Research. "A full 700 million people are living in extreme or moderate poverty despite having employment."

Fewer working-poor...in middle-income countries

On a positive note, the ILO report highlights that working poverty has decreased in middle-income countries over the past three decades, although poorer nations are likely to see a rise in the number of working poor.

This is because the pace of poverty reduction is not expected to keep up with employment growth in these emerging economies, despite China's major contribution in reducing the working poor levels as a result of strong economic growth since 1993.

The ILO data also shows that 360 million people in 2018 worked in a family business and 1.1 billion worked for themselves – often in subsistence activities because of an absence of job opportunities in the formal sector and/or the lack of a social protection system.

Workers 'unable to find more work or too discouraged to look'

Linked to the challenge of bringing down unemployment, the UN report identifies a lack of opportunity for those who want to work.

This includes those who would like to make the jump from part-time to full-time work and the long-term jobless, who become so discouraged that they stop looking.

Taken together, poor workplace conditions, unemployment and gender inequality have contributed to slower-than-anticipated progress in achieving the key development goal of sustainable work for all, as set out in the [2030 Agenda](#).

Under 48 per cent of women work, versus 75 per cent of men

Among the most striking labour issues in the report is the continued lack of progress made in closing the gender gap at work, with less than 50 per cent of women in the labour force in 2018, compared with three quarters of men.

This problem is universal, ILO maintains, although the gender gap is widest in the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia.

Another challenge is the size of the informal sector – a “staggering” two billion workers, or 61 per cent of the world’s workforce. “Informal employment is the reality for the majority of workers worldwide,” ILO notes.

Also of concern is the fact that more than one in five people under 25 years old are not in employment, education or training; part of 15 per cent decline between 1993 and 2018 that is set to continue.

Innovative technology threatens to undermine rights at work

Noting how a country’s level of development is linked to the availability of reasonably paid work or adequate welfare protection for those who need it, the report cautions that these and other labour market achievements “are still elusive” for many.

“Securing these gains is therefore a major challenge that policy-makers must face up to,” the ILO WESO report insists, noting also that innovative technologies “threaten to undermine” these labour market achievements and others, such as job security, collective bargaining and compliance with labour standards and rights at work.

[Radio still a powerful worldwide tool for ‘dialogue, tolerance and peace’: Guterres](#)

Radio is a powerful tool that continues to promote “dialogue, tolerance and peace,” United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said in message on Thursday, marking [World Radio Day](#).

“Even in today’s world of digital communications, [radio reaches](#) more people than any other media platform” explained the UN chief, adding that it “conveys vital information and raises awareness on important issues”.

“And it is a personal, interactive platform where people can air their views, concerns, and grievances” he added, noting that radio “can create a community”.

UN Radio was established on 13 February 1946, and since 2013, the day has been commemorated to recognize radio as a powerful communication tool and a low-cost medium.

“For the United Nations, especially our peacekeeping operations, radio is a vital way of informing, reuniting and empowering people affected by war”, said Mr. Guterres.



UNESCO

Radio brings together people and communities from all backgrounds to foster positive dialogue for change.

Despite the rise of the internet, many parts of the world, especially remote and vulnerable communities, have no access, making radio broadcasting via transmitters, a vital lifeline. Joining a community of local listeners, also provides a platform for public discussion, irrespective of education levels.

Moreover, it has a strong and specific role in emergency communication and disaster relief.

“On this World Radio Day, let us recognize the power of radio to promote dialogue, tolerance and peace”, concluded the Secretary-General.

Radio still sparking ‘new conversations’

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) underscored

“the unique, far-reaching power of radio to broaden our horizons and build more harmonious societies”.

“Radio stations from major international networks to community broadcasters today remember the importance of radio in stimulating public debate, increasing civic engagement and [inspiring mutual understanding](#)”, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay said in her message.

Since its invention as the first wireless communication medium well over a hundred years ago, “radio has sparked new conversations and broadcast new ideas into people’s homes, villages, universities, hospitals and workplaces,” she continued. “To this day, dialogue across the airwaves can offer an antidote to the negativity that sometimes seem to predominate online, which is why UNESCO works across the world to improve the plurality and diversity of radio stations”.

The UNESCO chief pointed out that radio has adapted to 21st century changes and offers new ways to participate in conversations that matter, retaining its role as “one of the most reactive, engaging media there is”, especially for the most disadvantaged.

For example, she flagged that rural women constitute one of the most under-represented groups in the media and are twice as likely as men to be illiterate, “so radio can be a critical lifeline to express themselves and access information”.

Ms. Azoulay made clear that “UNESCO provides support to radio stations in sub-Saharan Africa that enable women to participate in public debate, including on often-neglected issues such as forced marriage, girls’ education or childcare”.

Linguistic diversity, and people’s right to express themselves on-air in their own languages, is also crucial – especially true in 2019 which has been designated by the International Year of Indigenous Languages by the UN. “In former conflict zones, radio can dispel fear and present the human face of former foes”, she elaborated, citing North-West Colombia where community radios are healing old wounds “by highlighting the good deeds of demobilized combatants, such as clearing polluted waterways”.

Around the world, the “inclusion of diverse populations makes societies more resilient, more open and more peaceful”, Ms. Azoulay spelled out.

“The challenges we face – whether they be climate change, conflict or the rise in divisive views – increasingly depend on our ability to speak to each other and find common solutions”, she concluded.

Civilians 'continue to pay highest price' in Ukraine conflict, with peace prospects losing 'momentum'

"Civilians continue to pay the highest price" arising from Ukraine's on-going conflict with separatist rebels in the east, the UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator told the Security Council on Tuesday, a conflict which is still claiming lives.

"More than 3,300 civilians have been killed, and up to 9,000 injured since the conflict began in 2014," Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, told Council Members, adding that 1.5 million have been internally displaced.

In 2019, she said, 3.5 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection services, "many of whom are elderly, women and children".

The impact of the conflict has destroyed livelihoods, exhausted limited resources and damaged infrastructure, "compounding people's struggle".

"The parties to the conflict must take all feasible precautions to avoid, and in any event minimize, civilian harm" she stressed. "International humanitarian law must be upheld to protect civilians and critical civilian infrastructure, at all times, everywhere and by all parties".

Ms. Mueller painted a picture along the contact line which divides Government forces from separatist militia, of "shelling, sniper-fire and landmines" constituting "a daily reality for millions."

"We have not forgotten you. We will continue to do everything we can to alleviate your daily suffering, and to call for lasting peace", she said, concluding her briefing on the humanitarian situation.

'Largely unimplemented' Minsk Agreements

Miroslav Jenca, Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas for the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, briefs the Security Council on the situation in Ukraine., by UN Photo/Cia Pak

Briefing on the latest moves towards implementing the only "agreed framework" for halting the guns in eastern Ukraine, known as the Minsk Agreements, Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, told the Council that "negotiations appear to have lost momentum, with the main stakeholders either unable and, or unwilling to reach an agreement on the key steps forward or being distracted from focusing on the

implementation of agreed steps”.

The February 2015 Minsk Agreements, agreed by the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany, set out the necessary steps to restore peace to Eastern Ukraine.

Mr. Jenka recalled the Council’s June 2018 Presidential statement unanimously reaffirming the centrality of the Minsk Agreements, noting that it remains, four years later, “largely unimplemented”.

Emphasizing the stalled progress, he called on all parties to “fully implement the Measures, including a much-needed comprehensive and lasting ceasefire”.

As consistently highlighted over the past years, the conflict in eastern Ukraine is “neither dormant, nor frozen” said Mr. Jenča, but it “continues to claim victims”.

Pointing out that another round of discussions will be taking place in the capital of Belarus this week convened by the Trilateral Contact Group – representatives from Ukraine, the Russian Federation, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – he spelled out “the UN’s sincere hope and expectation” for tangible outcomes.

“There is an urgent need to agree on the additional measures that would make the ceasefire sustainable and irreversible”, Mr. Jenča emphasized.

He said that the parties’ withdrawal of heavy weapons from populated areas, disengagement of forces and protection of critical civilian infrastructure needed to be a “priority”.

“Over half a million people are living within five kilometres of the contact line and they are the most exposed to periodic shelling, gunfire, landmines and unexploded ordnance” he said, adding that the area around the contact line remains “among the most mine-contaminated areas in the world”.

Noting that the conflict will soon be entering its sixth year, he called it “an active threat to international peace and security”.

“The conflict in Ukraine is first and foremost tragically affecting the Ukrainian people” he said, but it also “continues to test the credibility of international and regional organizations”.

He urged Member States to work together in the interest of regional stability. “We urge all parties to demonstrate the necessary political will to ensure the earliest possible end to the conflict and help bring about peace and stability in all of Ukraine”, concluded Mr. Jenča.

Speaking via video conference from Minsk, Belarus, Martin Sajdik Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE cited some positive developments, including water deliveries and infrastructure repairs; and encouraging efforts in maintaining mobile communications, telecommunications, which are “especially vital for the elderly to receive pensions in

government-controlled territory".