

After democratic elections, Iraqi leaders must form 'truly national' government, urges UN envoy

The low voter turnout for Iraq's recent national elections was a "strong signal" to the country's ruling political elites that they must work harder to ease sectarian divides and promote democratic accountability over nepotism and patronage, the United Nations envoy to the country said on Wednesday.

Briefing the Security Council, Ján Kubiš, the top UN official in Iraq, urged the country's political leaders "[to draw the necessary conclusions](#)" from the fact that less than half the country's people exercised their right to vote "on the need for improved representation, justice for all and good governance."

In forming the new government, the leaders must ensure full participation of women, both in political negotiations, as well as at the highest level of decision making in the country, added Mr. Kubiš.

Political leaders, he said, should also build upon the achievements of the current Government, prioritise inclusive, non-sectarian dialogue, and ensure the swift formation of a new "truly national" government that reflects the will of the people of Iraq.

It is essential that the new government works as one across the sectarian and ethnic divides in pursuing much needed political, economic and social reforms – *UN envoy Ján Kubiš*

"It is essential that the new government works as one across the sectarian and ethnic divides in pursuing much needed political, economic and social reforms, based on the principles of patriotism and citizenship with equal rights, justice and opportunity for all and good governance while working to improve the economy, public services delivery and social justice."

The envoy, who heads up the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), also noted reports of irregularities at various locations and called on independent electoral management bodies to adjudicate all appeals properly, fully and in time, to enable corrections of the problems, justice and the timely certification of the final election results.

Looking beyond the political situation, Mr. Kubiš told the 15-member Council that the humanitarian crisis persists across Iraq, with over 2.1 million people displaced but severely limited resources to provide aid or implement demining programmes.

"Out of the required \$569 million in the Humanitarian Response Plan, only

\$101 million in donor contributions, or 18 per cent was received as of 15 May,” he said, urging the international community to step up their efforts to support vulnerable populations.



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, addresses the Security Council meeting on the situation in Iraq..

Iraqi-owned and driven reconciliation and reconstruction essential to prevent resurgence of violent extremism

Also briefing the Security Council today, Vladimir Voronkov, the head of the UN Counter-Terrorism Office, urged continued determination of the Iraqi Government to consolidate the military victory against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) through an approach that is focused on both prevention and strengthening resilience.

Recalling a mission to Iraq by his Office together with the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), Mr. Voronkov said that all interlocutors stressed the country's continued commitment to fighting terrorism as it transitions from a military-focused counter-terrorism approach to a more comprehensive one, which includes prevention, law enforcement and criminal justice components.

“It was the conclusion of our Iraqi interlocutors that national reconciliation and reconstruction, owned and driven by the Iraqi people, are essential to prevent the resurgence of violent extremism and terrorism in Iraq,” he said.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Michèle Coninx, Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), briefs the Security Council meeting on the situation concerning Iraq.

Michèle Coninx, Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, outlined efforts taken to combat Iraq's terrorist threat through non-military means since 2015.

The Directorate identified 33 key recommendations on ways to strengthen its overall response, she said, spotlighting the need for technical assistance in such priority areas as legal and judicial matters, countering financing of terrorism, law enforcement and border control and countering radicalization and incitement to commit terrorist acts.

"Subsequently years, the Directorate and its partners held follow-up meetings and visits to Iraq to ensure that discussions at Headquarters continued to reflect the situation on the ground." She explained.

[World No Tobacco Day targets habit that 'breaks hearts': WHO](#)

Spreading the message that tobacco causes deadly illnesses such as heart disease and stroke helps prevent "needless" loss of life, United Nations health experts said on Thursday.

Coinciding with [World No Tobacco Day 2018](#), observed each 31 May, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) is warning that tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke are “major causes” of cardiovascular disease, contributing to three million deaths a year.

The lack of awareness about the risks of tobacco use, is most common in low- and middle-income countries, according to WHO’s [Global Report on Trends in Prevalence of Tobacco Smoking 2000-2025](#).

The good news is that these deaths are preventable and we know what needs to be done – *Dr. Douglas Bettcher (WHO)*

In China, for example, more than six out of 10 people are unaware that smoking can cause a heart attack.

In India and Indonesia, meanwhile, more than half of all adults do not know that the habit can lead to a stroke.

Dr. Douglas Bettcher, Director, Department for the Prevention of Noncommunicable Diseases at WHO, told journalists in Geneva that tobacco use is falling globally but it still kills more than seven million people a year.

Progress is uneven in protecting consumers from the tobacco industry, Dr. Bettcher added, explaining that higher income countries are making “faster progress” than their poorer counterparts at protecting consumers, partly owing to stronger regulations.

Latest data from the WHO report indicates that there are around 1.1 billion smokers in the world today – the same number as at the turn of the century.

Despite the apparent lack of progress in tackling the total number of smokers, the report highlights that only one in five people smoke today, compared to more than one in four, 18 years ago. This decline is masked by the world’s growing population, Dr. Bettcher said.

Commenting on efforts to encourage people to quit, the UN health expert warned that only around 12 per cent countries are on track to meet global targets to reduce by one-third the number of people dying from non-communicable diseases by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

In a bid to promote heart health, the WHO wants every one of its 194 Member States to implement a series of increasingly strict tobacco control measures.

These include making indoor public and workplaces smoke-free and insisting that tobacco packaging carries warnings that demonstrate the health risks for users.

“The good news is that these deaths are preventable and we know what needs to be done,” Dr. Bettcher said.

He named Ireland and Uruguay as countries which had achieved the highest level of tobacco control before adding that since 2007, the number of people around the world to have benefited from these measures has more than quadrupled, from one billion to five billion.

World needs generation of self-empowered 'superheroes', UN youth forum told

The world needs young people who dream big and can endure both failure and pain, a Tongan Olympic idol told a gathering of youth at the United Nations on Wednesday.

"The world does not need violence, does not need bombs, the world needs today's youth to become superheroes," said Pita Taufatofua, the Tongan athlete who became a "superhero" himself two years ago when he marched shirtless, carrying his country's flag during the opening ceremony of the Rio Olympic Games.

At the UN, wearing a shirt, he said his brother advised him to "keep your shirt on and leave oil at home".

The second piece of advice from his brother was, "tell your truth, leave the youth with something they can take into the future," Mr. Taufatofua said.

One day in his childhood, he was coming home with his father, expecting that a superhero outfit was waiting for him at home. But there was nothing waiting for him. "That was my first experience of disappointment," he said.

So what do people do when they get disappointed, he asked.

"They minimize their expectations of themselves because that's how we reduce pain," he said. "Unfortunately, with minimizing expectations, we also minimize our potential to achieve our dreams and goals."

The formula for becoming a superhero is to have the ability to deal with failures and pains and to dream big, he said.

He dreamt of becoming an Olympian when he was 12. That dream never left him. After 20 years of pain, his dream finally came true in Rio.

Now 36, he was one of the many speakers invited to today's event, titled [Youth Dialogue](#), which was held to bring the United Nations closer to young people.

(Check out our exclusive interview with [Pita Taufatofua](#) here)

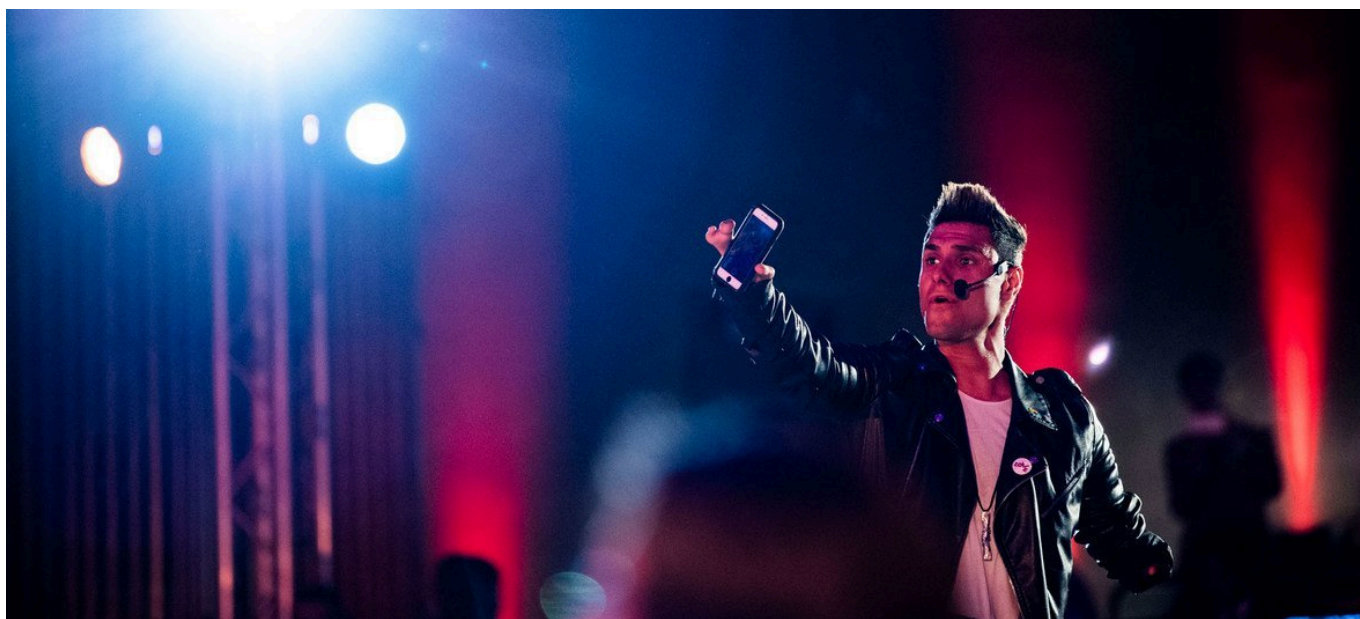
The one-day event sought to highlight the ideas, needs and concerns of young people on education and employment, as well as how to prevent radicalization of youth.

“They still feel they are excluded, from the decisions that are affecting their lives. They are not invited to the table where they are supposed to be. Quite often, they have a feeling that when they speak no one is listening,” said [Miroslav Lajčák](#), the President of the UN General Assembly, explaining that this is why he hosted the event.

Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General’s [Envoy on Youth](#), said most mainstream media appears to be “on a mission” to create an image of young people as a generation of careless or lazy individuals, who, if not managed well, could turn into a threat or burden to a country.

However, that is not the case, she argued: “If we are to realistically achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is our generation who is going to do this. We are the SDG generation. The rest of the world can try, but they can’t, or won’t, make it without [us].”

Otherwise known as the Global Goals, the SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Singer Emmanuel Kelly performs during the General Assembly Youth Dialogue at UN Headquarters in New York.

Other speakers included Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al-Thani, Vice-Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development; Mari Malek, model, disc jockey and founder of “Stand For Education” and singer Emmanuel Kelly.

Tonga's flamboyant Olympic flag-bearer brings his inspiring message to the UN

He is best known for his bare-chested appearances at the Rio and Pyeongchang Olympic Games, but Pita Taufatofua now wants to use his social media muscle to empower youth, and get them to share their stories.

"The young people are the people who are going to dictate our future," Mr. Taufatofua said in an interview with UN News during his first visit to the United Nations in New York.

The two-time Olympian was one of the main speakers at Tuesday's [United Nations Youth Dialogue](#) event, where the President of the General Assembly and other senior officials joined young people to discuss increasing education and skills training, as well as how to prevent radicalization.

"If we can give them ideas and present knowledge in a way that helps them, as they grow up and work through their careers, then that's going to affect all of us," he said.

The 34-year-old has worked with homeless teenagers on the Pacific island for the past 15 years.

He said that seeing their struggles has taught him the importance of listening and encouraging young people, even helping them achieve small victories, so they feel more confident.

"You can have a young child go through the most horrendous conditions and come out on top," said Mr. Taufatofua.

Empowering youth also comes through education, he said, but stressed that children need to be taught how to think – not what to think: "When they're taught to have a dialogue with each other, different points of view, but still be friends after, that's education."

Interacting with others and remaining focused, is a skill that athletes have to learn, Mr. Taufatofua said, praising the value that sport brings to diplomacy and promoting sustainable development. He pointed to the improved relations between the two Koreas following the Winter Olympics in South Korea earlier this year.

"It allows people to interact in a way that can be sports-like conflict according to a set of rules, so you're in competition, and then you go out and have a coconut together. What other avenues can you compete and then share stories together?"

Born in Australia, but raised in Tonga, Mr. Taufatofua built up his strength

lifting heavy cassava and potatoes off the ground, under his father's watchful eye, who wanted him to learn the value of hard work. He went on to get an engineering degree and is now working towards his Master's degree.

Mr. Taufatofua says his heart is always in Tonga, regardless of where he is. This respect for his country and its people is what pushed him to wear a traditional outfit for the opening ceremonies at the Olympics – despite being repeatedly told he should wear a suit and jacket.

“The message is that you can be you, you can be unique, you can be a representation of your country but still intermingle and be peaceful with other countries,” he said.

“I'm representing thousands of years of voyaging, of being a Polynesian, of going across the sea and not knowing where you'll stop. I feel that everyone who marches out should represent their nation, the future of their nation, the struggles of their nature.”

[UN rights chief urges action in Mexico to end 'outrageous' wave of disappearances](#)

Authorities in Mexico are being urged to act to end what the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has described as [“a wave of enforced disappearances”](#) in the city of Nuevo Laredo, amid “strong indications” that federal security forces may be involved.

A local human rights organization in the city, which is located near the border with Texas, in the United States, estimates there have been at least 40 disappearances from February of this year through to mid-May.

Meanwhile, the UN Human Rights Office in Mexico has documented the disappearance of 21 men and two women during the same period.

“Many of these people are reported to have been arbitrarily detained and disappeared while going about their daily lives. It is particularly horrific that at least five of the victims are minors, with three of them as young as 14,” said UN rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a press statement issued on Wednesday.

“These crimes, perpetrated over four months in a single municipality, are outrageous.”

His Office in Mexico has received testimony stating that the incidents were

perpetrated by federal security officials, often late at night or around dawn.

Uniformed personnel reportedly detained people as they walked or drove along public roads, according to the statement, while several burnt out and bullet-ridden vehicles have been found by the roadside.

Zeid noted that “despite ample information and evidence”, the Mexican authorities have made little progress in locating the disappeared people and investigating what happened to them.

Some families have undertaken their own searches, discovering the bodies of at least six victims.

Several witnesses have been subjected to threats, and one was “disappeared” for two days before being released, the statement continued.

Zeid further stated that it was “extremely worrying” that the incidents are taking place just months after Mexico adopted a new General Law on Disappearances.

“What has been happening in Nuevo Laredo is a litmus test of whether this new law actually represents the change its adoption promises, or whether enforced disappearances, followed by impunity and a lack of reparation to the victims, will continue,” the UN rights chief said.