

Building Iraq's Future



A message from the
Rt Hon David Miliband MP

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The second parliamentary elections in Iraq on 7th March are a vital stage in Iraq's political process. I share the hope of most Iraqis, as eloquently expressed by Iraqi President Talabani recently, that these elections "will provide an opportunity to consolidate our growing democracy and further isolate those who use the bomb and the gun against the will of our own people."

These elections will also contribute to the process of returning Iraq to the international community after many long years of

isolation and dictatorship.

It was President Talabani, again, who rightly said of Iraq, "We are a potentially rich country but our legacy is a poor one. We value the ability of British business to unlock our resources through increased investment and by trading with us. Iraq is becoming increasingly open to commerce, which is a means of giving our people the better way of life that they seek and deserve."

I strongly agree that it is in Britain's interest to continue and develop our relationship with Iraqis and am moved when he adds that, "We are proud to be your friends and hope that you will always be our friends, working together for the common good of humanity."

I have seen for myself how keen Iraqi political leaders and ordinary people are to catch up with the rest of the world. There is a thirst for connecting with academics, sports organisations, politicians and business people throughout the world, and the UK and the Iraqi

governments are committed to building a new strategic relationship in the diplomatic, economic, cultural and political fields.

Iraqis – politicians and everyday citizens - have told me that they want the UK to play our part in helping Iraq form new relationships, and I am proud that the UK Government is actively helping and encouraging UK companies to play a substantial role in the reconstruction of Iraq's essential infrastructure. British firms are active in Iraq in a range of sectors, including power, water, health, telecommunications, oil & gas, construction and education & training.

The Invest Iraq Conference in 2009 demonstrated our commitment to generating the international investment that will generate jobs and economic growth and which will be key to setting Iraq on the path towards long term prosperity. The conference marked the culmination of the UK Government's efforts to promote investment, which resulted in proposals worth up to USD \$10 billion.

The UK will continue to work with and advise British business on how they can best contribute to the development of Iraq for the benefit of the Iraqi people. Successful elections will do much to provide the security and stability that will see more British and other companies flocking to Iraq to help renew your country.

It remains a vital goal of British foreign policy that Iraqis are able to build a democratic, federal and peaceful country which will also be able to show the

value of democratic institutions in the wider Middle East. I know that Iraqis themselves are keen to make their own contribution to rebuilding Iraq, and I am glad we can work together to this end.

I am pleased that Labour MPs such as the Prime Minister's Envoy to Iraq on Human Rights Ann Clwyd, Dave Anderson and Meg Munn as well as Labour Friends of Iraq have been working with Iraqis here and will continue to cement deeper and broader relations between our two countries. Like them, we have also given support to independent organisations such as the new trade unions and women's rights advocates which have emerged since Saddam's fall and which do much to make for a vibrant civil society and democracy.

There is another election on the horizon, here in Britain. I know that the Iraqi Association does its very best to encourage participation by members of the Iraqi community in the country in which they live, and it is vital that you use your vote in what will be an important election. The choice is between a deeply internationalist Labour government and a Conservative Party intent on looking in the rear view mirror and fighting the battles of the past.

There are exciting opportunities ahead for Iraq and the UK will continue to help the Iraqi people seize them. The 7th March is an opportunity for democracy and dialogue prosper over violence, setting the path for stable government,

Son of Iraqi Exile won a place to study medicine at Jesus College, Cambridge



The 17-year-old star student of Birchwood High School, Aws Sadik, has just won a place to study medicine at Jesus College, Cambridge. His parents, fled to Britain to escape the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, but since the overthrow of the dictator, Mr Sadik has returned to advise the new government and help rebuild his fractured homeland. Aws's father is the former head of science at Harlow College, while his mum Ferdos, is a qualified architect. Hard-working Aws said: "Cambridge was my top goal – I thought if I could earn a place there it would mean I have done everything correctly." His parents fled to England, setting up home in Hackney, east London, shortly before he was born. The family later moved to Harlow and then to Stortford, where Aws became a pupil at Manor Fields Primary. As Birchwood High School head boy, Aws also has a central role to play at school as the students and staff cope with disaster. Following the death of fellow pupil 13-year-old Jordan Trowsdale in the Stort on Christmas Eve, Aws helped collect more than £700 for charities nominated by the youngster's families.

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Email info@iraqiassociation.org**

Election, Diaspora's Elation and Fear

The second Iraqi parliamentary election since the overthrow of Saddam's regime in 2003 will take place on 7th March. Iraq's parliamentary election will set the future direction of the country, it will either leads towards increasing stability and freedom; or the route back to sectarianism and violence. The election campaign started on 12 February, a total of 6,172 candidates were vying for the 325 seats up for election in parliament. Media outlets affiliated to major parties started advertising their party's electoral programmes and displaying pictures of candidates, with newspapers published detailed articles on the progress of the election campaign. While the country is going to poll, the huge inequalities and needs in some parts of the country remain a source of instability, with economic and social progress hinging on the country's political conditions. Our hope is that, the post election period will deliver the formation of a new government which will enable consensus building around major issues that would define stability for the future and thus strong determination for economic and social programmes. However, the opinion is divided, the upcoming parliamentary elections are widely considered a barometer of the country's progress and march toward stability and political maturity with political and personal freedom, and others will see a post election political destabilisation period, as the U.S. prepares for a major reduction of its troops by August and its complete withdrawal in 2011. In a



divided sectarian society, Iraq is desperately attempting to recover from decades of war and dictatorship. Diaspora community see this election as a hope that the ballot box will become the medium through which political scores are settled. The community is anxious and eager to see the election through free, fair and open processes and without

intimidation and violations. Iraqi community in the United Kingdom is the largest in Europe, majority are naturalised British citizens or born here, and political awareness is a popular forum of discussion among them, as registered voters in their respected councils and boroughs, they cast their voting rights at the time of local and general election.

Iraq, Seven Years Later

Iraq is entering its seventh year since the military conflict started in 2003. Many things have changed in that period, from the chaos that followed the collapse of the previous regime, to the sectarian violence, terror and fleeing refugees. Now though, pessimists versus optimists' arguments, but the trend is more into a situation where politics is the main forum for disputes within Iraq now, and political maturity may overcome the differences. This process will continue in the 2010 vote, and has led Iraq from being a failed state to a fragile one. The country is gaining back its sovereignty, with violence is down to its lowest level since the 2003 conflict. It is noted that the 2009 provincial elections also pushed the struggle for political power through peaceful means. However, the inability of Iraqi government to deliver on many basic needs, its corruption, and divisions continue to kill off its standing with the public. The problem is that Iraqi people's dissatisfaction with its government can undermine the political democratic process, and may lead to a return to autocracy or worse.

In its latest report, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) noted the decrease in violence in Iraq, but it recorded continued institutional abuses in the justice system. Iraq's minorities are also targets. Yazidis, Sabians, Shabaks and Christians claim that their numbers have been drastically reduced because of the violence, with many

becoming refugees. The U.N has found continued, so called honour killings, and suicides due to abuses. Journalists also say they face regular harassment by the security forces and politicians' bodyguards. One NGO reported 64 cases of abuse in 3 days in Baghdad, Basra, Babil, and Anbar. The report also noted that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has also arrested and convicted journalists for criticizing the authorities. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that Iraqi authorities failed to address impunity in journalist murders, one of the many brutal legacies of the conflict. Of the 140 journalists killed in Iraq since 2003, at least 89 were targeted for murder. By year's end, Iraqi authorities had yet to bring a single killer to justice in any of those murders. Iraq ranked first worldwide on CPJ's Impunity Index, which calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of the nation's population. The press faced heightened restrictions even in secure Kurdish Regional Government area. A press law that took effect in October 2008 was lauded at the time for omitting prison penalties for press offenses such as defamation, but the language of the measure was vague enough to be open to different interpretations in court. CPJ expressed concern over poor implementation of the Kurdish press law. The Iraqi constitution guarantees free speech and a free press. However, the new rules from the Iraqi

Communications and Media Commission are being enforced ahead of a March 7 parliamentary election. CPJ's conclusion on this new press rule is "the regulations represent a clear effort to control the media, undermine its independence, and allow the government to assert control over the information agenda".

For women in Iraq, the coming national elections offer both a promise and a reminder of the difficulty of change in this male-dominated culture. The Constitution calls for at least 25% of parliament seats to go to women. Now, as the campaign begins for the country's second parliamentary vote, on March 7, some women say a new female political class is starting to emerge. In one sign of this development, 12 women from outside the political system have formed their own party, with a platform built on women's rights and a jobs program for Iraq's more than 700,000 widows. The other painful issue is refugees and internally displaced people. It was noted that two thirds of homes belonging to them, which were occupied by squatters, have been evacuated since mid-2008.

Since July 2008, Iraqi government has made a concerted effort to encourage the return of internally displaced people and refugees to the areas of origin. We hope that the situation of vulnerable destitute will improve, and that the post election period will make a difference to the lives of Iraqi people.

The Iraq Inquiry Debate

Iraqi Association issued a press release on 1 February on the Chilcot inquiry, the extract says that "Chilcot inquiry must also highlight the chaos and havoc in Iraq post 2003 conflict. It was the result of lack of a strategy which led to anarchy and regrouping of extremists. The failure of 'what happens next' was a salient feature of the conflict, and lack of planning added further sectarian tension, murders and looting in Iraq. It was followed by fleeing thousands of skilled Iraqi refugees, and hundreds of Iraqi academics were eliminated. War is about death and destruction, Iraqi people have suffered enough. Let us leave aside for the moment the legality of the war, a group of lawyers should not become arbiters, but the history of the bloody regime and sequence of factual events will judge that. Iraqi women and children are paying for the cost of the war, with thousands of widows and orphaned children without support and attention. The inquiry must highlight the plight of Iraqi people, not just its legal nicety. How many 'international laws' did Saddam's regime have to break before the world community decided to enforce its will?"