



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

## Intervention Remarks at Expanded Iraq Neighbors Meeting

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Kuwait City, Kuwait  
April 22, 2008

Thank you very much, Dr. Muhamed. I want to thank you and I want to thank the Kuwaiti Government and the Kuwaiti people for the excellent arrangements that we've experienced here and for hosting this third neighbors conference. I would like to thank the Prime Minister for his comments this morning as well as Prime Minister Maliki for the comments that he made.

The United States remains committed to fostering a sovereign and democratic and prosperous and unified Iraq, a federal Iraq that is at peace with itself and with its neighbors. And I believe that this expanded neighbors process has emerged as a forum for the international community to address the political, economic and security challenges that face Iraq and the region, as the United States is very grateful for everyone's participation and, indeed, to be a participant.

We're very pleased to see that there has been progress in Iraq since the last ministerial in Istanbul. I would just note that violence in Iraq has decreased. Iraq's leaders have certainly made progress in passing legislation on the budget, provincial powers, de-Baathification reform, pensions and amnesty. They have significantly improved Iraq's budget execution and they are now allocating more of Iraq's own budget to build the infrastructure and provide the services that the Iraqi people expect from their elected government.

They're working to foster a political process that transcends sectarian identities. And I can say I was just in Baghdad, and I think that the spirit of reconciliation and working across those identities is strong. And they have many challenges still, but Iraq has taken some real strides toward reconciliation and has demonstrated significant accomplishments. And I would like to say to our colleague, Foreign Minister Zebari, we support you in this difficult work, but we must acknowledge the work that has been done.

Momentum needs to be maintained, and we are looking to the Iraqi Government to continue to make progress on elections law constitutional amendment, a hydrocarbons package, and we encourage the Iraqi Government to welcome all Iraqis into the political process who are not guilty of war crimes and who disavow violence and terror. We're pleased by Iraq's willingness and ability to take a larger role in its own security, as shown by the events in Mosul and Basra, where the Government of Iraq took decisive action against a formidable challenge by criminal and extremist elements.

And here, I want just to underscore that we need to really understand what happened in Basra. The Iraqi Government was seeking to establish law and order in one of its most important cities against criminal elements and against terrorist elements and extremist elements. And I must underscore, those elements were funded, financed, and trained by outside forces. This is something that the Iraqi Government needed to do, and we all need to support what has been done there. I also note that the Iraqi Government is working now to establish the trust of all of its citizens, including in Basra, with economic and reconstruction dollars going to people who, too long, have lived under the will and the terror of militias.

The people of Iraq have made immeasurable sacrifices to rebuild their country in the face of terrible and incredible challenges. They need and they deserve our full support and full denunciation of those who seek to undermine Iraq's nascent democracy, whether they seek to do so from within or from without.

All gathered here -- the neighbors and the international community -- recognize that a stable and secure Iraq is critical not only for the Iraqi people but also for the people of the region and the world, and it's crucial that we build on the momentum that we have in this expanded neighbors process.

Today, Iraq's neighboring countries have provided assistance through the hosting of Iraqi refugees. We now look to the Iraqi Government to substantially increase its contributions to international appeals to assist displaced Iraqis and to prepare a plan for their safe and voluntary return. The larger international community also needs to step up its assistance for refugees. The United States has already made available \$208 million and plans to contribute an additional \$70 million this year toward the more than \$900 million in assistance appeals for displaced Iraqis.

I want to commend the Special Representative of the United Nations, Secretary General Stefan de Mistura -- the Representative of the United Nations Secretary General Stefan de Mistura, and his staff for their work. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq has already undertaken key work on elections and on disputed territories; that is, assisting and supporting Iraq on many issues, including promoting national reconciliation and regional dialogue, facilitating elections, protecting refugees and internally displaced persons, and resolving disputed international -- or disputed internal boundaries.

We know that Iraq requires regional and international support to succeed. Increased diplomatic, economic, social and cultural engagement with the people of Iraq is essential. We urge Iraq's neighbors and friends to strengthen these ties through the reopening of embassies and consulates, the appointment of ambassadors, and participation at the ministerial level in the first anniversary meeting of the International Compact with Iraq in Stockholm, Sweden on May 29th. We also look forward to seeing a communique which will help Iraq move toward these goals.

Ladies and gentlemen, we here in the Expanded Neighbors Ministerial are now in our third gathering, and I wanted just to take a moment to reflect on the fact that Iraq is a different place than it was when we first met in Sharm el-Sheikh. It is a place where the government is retaking and reestablishing its authority in the country. It is a country that is rebuilding after many, many years of tyranny, which destroyed not only the social fabric of the country but its governing structures. It is a country that, with the will of the Iraqi people, with the toughness of the Iraqi people, with their willingness to endure a great deal of hardship, has come through very difficult times. The United States is proud to have been a part with the coalition forces, who I might add are there by UN mandate and at the invitation of the Iraqi Government, the United States is proud to have been a part of both the liberation of Iraq from the tyrant Saddam Hussein and now the rebuilding of that country.

There is much work yet to be done, but I do hope that we will take a moment to reflect on how much has already been done and, in doing so, to find the will, the strength and the optimism to continue to support the Iraqi people on the journey towards democracy, stability, prosperity. When they have achieved that journey, they will also be a force for good in this troubled region. In that regard, I very much look forward to our next meeting, and as the communique is intended to say, we hope to look forward to holding that meeting in Baghdad. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

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