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Baghdad,
December 6, 2005

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad has appealed to Iraqi voters to cast ballots in the December 15 parliamentary elections for a permanent government.

"The election on December 15 is very important for Iraq's future. And I hope all Iraqis will come out to vote," Khalilzad said in a statement issued December 6.

To choose capable leaders, Khalilzad urged voters to question candidates about their policy platforms and leadership capabilities and urged candidates to present their views to the public.

He stressed that the United States is not backing any particular candidate but will work with the government chosen by the Iraqi people.

"The United States is committed to help Iraq stand on its own feet as soon as possible. We will continue to engage with all Iraqis and engage also with Iraq's neighbors so they can assist Iraq in its difficult transition," Khalilzad said.

For additional information, see [Iraq's Political Process](#).

Following is the text of Khalilzad's statement:

Thank you for being here today.

I have been the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq since June and it has been quite an honor for me. I've had the opportunity to travel throughout Iraq and, inshallah, in the coming months I will continue to do so.

The election on December 15 is very important for Iraq's future. And I hope all Iraqis will come out to vote. It's important because the next assembly will select a permanent government to be seated for the following four years.

The next assembly will have the opportunity to pass more than 50 critical implementation laws as called for by the new Constitution. The next assembly will have the opportunity to decide on amendments to the Constitution.

The next assembly will review the implementation of the de-Baathification decisions made. And, among other things, the next assembly will develop a strategy for developing Iraq's oil and gas resources.

With freedom and democracy, and the right to vote, comes responsibility.

As Iraqis go to the polls, they should think about the kind of leadership they want their country to have and to be their representatives who will work the hardest for them over the course of the next four years. Every Iraqi should educate themselves about which candidate or list has correctly identified the challenges that Iraq faces; which candidate or list have the right plans to deal with the country's problems; and which candidate or list is more likely to deliver on the promises that they are making. Also, they should discuss what the individual candidates or lists have done for the people of Iraq already. Have they delivered on past promises?

I have been asked numerous times by my colleagues in Washington what campaigning in Iraq looks like.

In the United States, our candidates from both major political parties spend millions of dollars every election season to get their message out, debate each other and challenge each other with regard to the future.

The Iraqi people have the same right to ask their candidates these questions as well. In addition, the candidates owe to the voters to tell them what they stand for. The security situation in Iraq makes it difficult for candidates to get out to do "door to door" campaigning like we do in America, but I urge the candidates to present their plans to solve the problems of the Iraqi people. Whenever I meet with different leaders who are running for office, I ask them what issues they are running on and what concerns do they hear that are important to the Iraqi voters.

Let me be clear, the United States is not backing any particular candidate in this election. We will work with whatever government the Iraqi people choose. The future of Iraq is in the hands of the people of Iraq. We do hope leaders emerge who can work for national unity -- leaders who can bring Iraqis together -- to help heal the divisions of the past and build bridges among different communities for a positive future. We hope the new government will be formed quickly because there is important work to be done and decisions to be made for Iraq's future.

The Iraqis face many challenges: the government, the next government, needs to treat all Iraqi communities fairly and maintain their confidence. The new government will have to respect the human rights of all Iraqis and strengthen the rule of law. The next government needs to strengthen national security institutions and make sure that they have sufficient resources and these security institutions will have to have the trust of all communities. The new government will have to provide for increased economic opportunities for the people of Iraq.

The United States is committed to help Iraq stand on its own feet as soon as possible. We will continue to engage with all Iraqis and engage also with Iraq's neighbors so they can assist Iraq in its difficult transition.

Iraq's success is our success. I feel fortunate to be here in Iraq, working with Iraqis at this pivotal time in Iraq's history. What happens here now will help shape the future of Iraq. And Iraq's future will shape the direction of the Middle East for years to come. And the future of the Middle East is important for the future of the world. Thank you very much.

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