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Statement by Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, United States Permanent Representative, on the situation in Iraq, in the Security Council Chamber, November 14, 2008

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, I am pleased to report to the Security Council on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I).

I would like to begin by thanking Special Representative de Mistura for his briefing on the important work undertaken by UNAMI. Mr. de Mistura -- your work and the work of your colleagues is critical to cementing the gains we have seen in Iraq and I wish to extend our appreciation to you and your staff for your hard work and sacrifices. We remain committed to ensuring that the United Nations and UNAMI receive the support necessary for it to carry out its mission.

This has been a year of significant achievement for which the Iraqi government, the Iraqi people, and the international community can take pride. Yet, a lot of work remains to be done. Progress in Iraq is fragile and reversible. It is critical that Iraq receive the continued support and encouragement of the international community as it faces the next set of challenges in rebuilding the country:

- legitimate and peaceful provincial, district, and national elections in 2009;
- restoring essential services for its people;
- humanitarian efforts to support the return of approximately four million refugees and internally displaced persons;
- peaceful resolution on the status of disputed internal boundaries, most notably Kirkuk; and, of course,
- the constitutional review.

Today, I would like to update the Council on the progress that has been achieved.

Mr. President, as mentioned by Mr. de Mistura, the security situation has significantly improved since June 2007.

- The number of overall attacks has decreased by 86%
- Civilian deaths due to violence have decreased by 80%
- Iraqi Security Force (ISF) deaths have decreased 84%
- U.S. military deaths in Iraq have decreased by 87%
- Coalition military deaths in Iraq have decreased by 88%, and
- Ethno-sectarian deaths have decreased by 95%.

Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces have degraded al Qaeda in Iraq and militia groups' capabilities as evidenced by the 81% decrease in Improvised Explosive Device explosions and the 72% decrease in suicide explosions.

A reduction in violence across northern Iraq can be attributed in part to the removal and displacement of key al Qaeda leaders as a result of Iraqi-led security operations. But some political and factional tensions still remain that have affected the delivery of services. The Government of Iraq, with Coalition assistance, has begun addressing the complex underlying ethnic and religious tensions that contribute to violence by ensuring adherence to the rule of law and by establishing reconstruction operation centers to bring much-needed essential services and economic investment.

Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces have maintained these security gains even with the reduction of coalition forces to pre-surge levels. Joint operations, in concert with the Awakening movement, have improved the security situation such as that, even as a number of Coalition countries depart theater, the United States has announced the early withdrawal of the Second Brigade of the 101 Airborne Division from Baghdad – bringing the number of Brigade Combat Teams to below pre-surge levels.

Ongoing security operations have produced encouraging results, with arrests of significant al Qaeda targets in Diyala, Mosul, and Baghdad, as well as leaders of other armed groups in Baghdad, Basrah, Maysan, and Wasit provinces. The Iraqi people's increasing trust of the Iraqi Security Forces has also led to a number of record-breaking seizures of weapons caches, including several hundred IEDs in the Mada'in area and two tons of explosives in Ninewa.

Primarily as a result of successful operations against AQI facilitation and support networks inside of Iraq, we are also beginning to see a decrease in the number of foreign fighters crossing into Iraq.

Nevertheless, we remain concerned by the flow of foreign fighters and lethal aid into Iraq. Syria remains the primary gateway for foreign terrorists moving into Iraq. Damascus has taken insufficient action to combat the terrorist facilitation networks based in Syria. We urge Syria to take additional steps against these networks.

For all this progress, al Qaeda in Iraq remains a significant threat, as do Iranian surrogate militants and JAM militia forces. All retain the intent and capability of carrying out lethal attacks against the Iraqi people, such as the multiple bombings that occurred this week. Al Qaeda in Iraq's use of person-borne improvised explosive devices and increasing shift toward female suicide bombers remain a particular challenge.

In countering the continued extremist threat, the increased capability of the Iraqi Security Forces has substantially improved the overall security environment. More than 601,000 personnel now serve in the ISF -- an increase of over 21,000 personnel since our last report to you in August.

There are now 165 Iraqi Army combat battalions conducting operations, an increase of 4 Iraqi Army combat battalions since our last report. Nearly 70%-- or 115 of these Iraqi Army combat battalions—are assessed to be "in the lead" for operations.

The expansion of the Air Force and the Navy lags behind that of the Army. There's nothing surprising about this given the technical platforms that the Air Force must acquire and learn to sustain. While the Air Force and the Navy possess limited capabilities, comprehensive force development strategies are being implemented.

The Air Force now is flying over 300 sorties a week and playing an increasingly active counterinsurgency role, flying surveillance and reconnaissance missions in support of the Iraqi Security Forces, and providing important logistics support with their mobility aircraft. The Iraqi Air Force recently graduated its first initial entry pilots who are now flying, and there are many more to follow.

The Navy is conducting three times as many patrols as it did last year, with increasing amounts of boarding and searching of vessels coming into Iraqi territorial waters in the Northern Arabian Gulf. The Navy has just taken delivery of the first six of 26 modern patrol craft and is expecting the delivery of four large patrol ships in 2009.

The National Police also continue to increase their effectiveness and is now staffed at over 41,000 personnel. The police continue to stress better ethno-sectarian balance within the force both through recruiting and assignments.

Mr. President, with regard to the Coalition role, in September, on the margins of the UN General Assembly, President Talabani noted with thanks the role of those countries that have contributed to the Coalition and NATO Training Mission – Iraq. Currently, coalition members other than the United States contribute over 6,000 forces to the Multi-National Force and some 300 personnel to UNAMI. Since our last briefing, approximately 3,000 coalition personnel departed theater and others will return home soon.

At the same time, continued political and economic support by the Coalition and the international community will remain critical to the success of Iraqi efforts to build a stable and secure country.

MNF-I is continuing to progressively transfer responsibility for security to the Iraqi Government. This process of transitioning security responsibilities to the Iraqi Security Forces is increasingly being led by Iraqi officials. Thirteen out of 18 provinces are now under provincial Iraqi control. Anbar Province – once a stronghold of AQI – transitioned on September 1, Babil Province transitioned on October 23, and Wasit Province transitioned on October 29. A joint coalition–Iraqi effort is anticipated to assess conditions in and facilitate transition of the remaining provinces:

Salah ad Din, Ta'mim, Diyala, and Ninewa within the next several months, culminating with the planned transfer of security authority for Baghdad in June 2009.

The improvement in security has helped to foster political reconciliation. Since our last report, the Iraqi Council of Representatives unanimously passed a Provincial Elections Law that will provide for local elections in 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces early next year. The provincial elections are a major step toward political stabilization. Sunni Arabs who boycotted the 2005 provincial elections will compete for political power in the provinces that once were the heartland of the insurgency. UNAMI also remains deeply engaged in elections preparation. Indeed, UNAMI's work with the Iraqi government proved critical in achieving this Elections Law, and we congratulate Mr. de Mistura for that.

We commend UNAMI's plans to expand its footprint in Iraq and will dedicate ourselves to providing assistance as necessary so that UNAMI can continue to assist the Iraqi government with other critical issues, such as the relocation and reintegration of Iraqi refugees and the internally displaced. We strongly support the construction of the proposed UN compound in Baghdad and commend the Government of Iraq on its initial pledge of 25 million dollars so that planning for this facility may proceed.

UNAMI is heavily involved in assisting with resolution of the disputed internal boundaries between the KRG and the Government of Iraq. The resolution of this dispute is a key step in creating stability for all

of Iraq. We appreciate UNAMI's efforts and assistance on this very important issue.

Iraq has made significant diplomatic gains, with most of the countries in the region normalizing their diplomatic presence in Baghdad. Since our last report, Syria and the Arab League have joined Iraq's other neighbors in naming ambassadors to Iraq – and many of these ambassadors are now on the ground in Baghdad. Other neighbors, including the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, have sent high-level delegations to Baghdad. We encourage others in the region to follow their example.

Finally, I want to highlight that negotiations continue between the United States and the Iraqi government on our transitioning relationship, with a goal of a strong and strategic relationship with Iraq, which respects both countries' sovereignty and serves both countries' interests

Mr. President, the report of the Secretary-General, which is before the Security Council today, highlights the sustainable progress that has been achieved by the Iraqi Government, with the assistance of the United Nations and the support of the MNF-I and Iraqi Security Forces. The United States supports a free, democratic, pluralistic, federal, and unified Iraq, and I call upon all parties to renew their commitment to assist the Iraqi Government in continuing the hard work to overcome the many challenges that remain.

Thank you Mr. President.