

Remarks at the Opening Session of the International Conference on Iraq

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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Thank you very much, Foreign Minister Asselborn, for that kind introduction. Prime Minister Ja'afari, Secretary General Annan, Foreign Minister Zebari, Ladies and Gentlemen: On behalf of President Bush, I am pleased to join you as we open this very important conference on Iraq.

Over 80 nations have gathered at the request of the Iraqi Transitional Government. We have agreed to work together to build a renewed international partnership with Iraq. And we look forward to hearing Iraq's new leaders describe their vision for the free future of their country.

In just one year, the citizens of Iraq have begun an unprecedented political journey -- a journey as hopeful as it is difficult. In the face of terror, the overwhelming majority of Iraqis are displaying tremendous courage and making remarkable progress. They regained their sovereignty. Then despite signs saying, "Vote and you die" eight and half million men and women participated in Iraq's free elections. Now, they are writing a constitution. The brave people of Iraq are asking us to stand with them -- and they deserve our full support.

So today in Brussels, we begin a new conversation between the international community and the democratic government of a free Iraq. This partnership will support the Iraqi government along three important fronts: political reform, economic reconstruction, and strengthening security with the rule of law. We all recognize our obligation to help Iraq fulfill the promise of its democratic transformation. Iraq's neighbors -- Syria, in particular -- must secure their borders from those who seek to destroy Iraq's progress. And all countries must deliver the material support they have already pledged to the government of Iraq. Iraq, in turn, has obligations of its own. To maximize the financial benefits of assistance, the new Iraqi government must continue to improve security, liberalize its economy, and open political space for all members of Iraqi society who reject violence. Building the institutions of democracy is essential to Iraq's long-term success.

The Iraqis themselves will set the course of Iraq's future. But they will not bear the weight of their responsibilities alone. Iraq has many allies in the international community, as we are demonstrating that with this remarkable gathering here today. So let us move forward together, toward the goals of freedom and democracy that we all share.

I would now like to welcome my colleague to the stage United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan.

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