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Statement by Ambassador Crocker on First Anniversary of the Democratically-Elected Government of Iraq

Baghdad, Iraq
May 23, 2007

This month marks the first anniversary of the democratically-elected Government of Iraq. It is an important milestone, for the nation of Iraq and for the world. I congratulate Prime Minister al-Maliki and his government on what they have accomplished during their first year in office, and on what they have pledged to do in the immediate future for their country and their citizens.

The transformation of any nation to a democratic system is a complex process. My own nation took more than a decade, after our Declaration of Independence, to establish the system of government that we still cherish today. Other modern democracies went through their own challenging periods in the past. Iraq's achievements during the last twelve months are truly admirable when viewed correctly from this perspective.

It is easy to focus on the problems and challenges – easy, but wrong. As Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte recently wrote, “When I was ambassador to Iraq two years ago, the country had no permanent government, no Council of Representatives, no constitution, no IMF Stand-By Arrangement, no hydrocarbon laws in draft or otherwise, no willingness to cut subsidies, no International Compact with Iraq, and no forum for constructive dialogue with its neighbors and international community leaders. Now all that exists. It is what the Iraqis and we are fighting for, and what the terrorists and extremists are fighting against.”

This is also a time to look to the future. At the recent meetings in Sharm el-Sheikh, Prime Minister al-Maliki said that his Government “did not present the national reconciliation initiative as a passing political slogan, but as a strategic vision and central objective, which the government and all sincere forces are seeking to achieve.” The United States fully supports this vision, and notes the importance of seeing specific actions by Iraqi leaders in the next few months to achieve this objective -- as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said, “It needs to be pursued urgently, and it needs to be pursued to completion.”

In the weeks ahead, the elected leaders of Iraq will be responsible for handling a number of important issues, including progress in hydrocarbon legislation, de-Ba'athification reform, arrangements for provincial elections, and Constitutional review, as well as ensuring that the daily business of the Government is handled efficiently. These

are tasks that must be completed, and completed soon, to achieve the national reconciliation that the vast majority of Iraqis desire. The United States remains firmly committed to supporting the Government, nation, and people of Iraq as they move ahead rapidly with this agenda, which is of vital importance to all Iraqis. Following his May 9 visit to Baghdad, Vice President Dick Cheney stated, "During the course of the meetings I emphasized the importance of making progress on the issues before us, not only on the security issues but also on the political issues that are pending before the Iraqi government. I was impressed with the commitment on the part of the Iraqis to succeed on these tasks, to work together to solve these issues."

These efforts also merit, and need, the full support of the international community, particularly from Iraq's neighbors. The meetings in Sharm el-Sheikh earlier this month brought the three elements together: the Iraqi Government spoke to its own responsibilities to foster national reconciliation and to create an Iraq for all Iraqis. The neighbors spoke to their desire to foster an environment in which that national reconciliation can take place. And the international community took its place alongside Iraq and its neighbors to with support for the democratically elected government of Prime Minister al-Maliki.

The first anniversary of democratic government in Iraq is a victory for the people of Iraq. They have selected their leaders, and they now have the right of every citizen in a democratic society: To expect actions and decisions from their elected representatives that serve the interests of every Iraqi. The United States will continue to assist and support this process of national reconciliation, so that Iraqis leaders and citizens will be able to create the conditions for a democratic, stable, secure, and unified Iraq that is a source of positive development in the region and beyond.

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