



**Speech of UNAMI Deputy Special Representative of the  
Secretary-General for Political Affairs,  
Mr. Jerzy Skuratowicz  
on International Human Rights Day**

**Council of Representatives, Baghdad 13 December 2011**

Your Excellency, Speaker of the Council of Representatives, Mr. Nujaifi,  
Chairman of the Human Rights Committee, Dr. Al-Jbouri,  
Members of the Council of Representatives,  
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be with you here to celebrate international human rights day. Today marks the 63<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That ‘inspiring document’ was born from the realisation that all people are equal and only through the promotion and protection of the basic rights and freedoms of every individual, will prosperity, justice and world peace be assured.

Human rights are not granted by Governments, but they are inherent to each and every one of us as human beings: women, men girls and boys, irrespective of our nationality, gender, ethnic origin, colour, religion, disability or other distinction. Human rights are indivisible and interdependent: the full respect and protection of a right facilitates and enhances the enjoyment of all others. Political rights, such as equality before the law, due process, or freedom of expression and assembly, cannot be separated from economic, cultural, and social rights, such as the right to education, healthcare, shelter or economic opportunity. Respect for human rights in their totality serves as the foundation on which democracy, rule of law, peace and prosperity are built.

But rights also entail obligations. The State has the obligation to respect and protect the human rights of all people without discrimination. On the other hand, we, as rights holders, have the obligation to ensure that we exercise our rights peacefully and according to law, and in a manner that does not limit the rights of others.

The Iraqi people have suffered much from the denial of their human rights at the hands of previous regimes, and from war and conflict. They have endured loss of economic opportunity, lack of access to basic services, death and injury.

Iraq has embarked upon the road to democracy, peace and prosperity built on respect for human rights and the rule of law. This path is long and difficult – but the benefits to be gained are worthwhile. We have seen some significant improvements in recent years, but many serious challenges remain. Among these, widespread poverty, economic stagnation, environmental degradation and lack of basic social services constitute human rights violations that affect large sectors of the population and which fuel popular discontent. Armed violence continues to take

its toll on civilians and civilian infrastructure, subjecting the people of Iraq to arbitrary loss of life and injury, but also limiting their access to, and enjoyment of, other basic rights. The judicial and law enforcement system requires improvement and there are challenges to the full enjoyment of the rights of freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and freedom of opinion. Challenges also remain for the full and equal enjoyment of social, economic and political rights by women, members of diverse ethnic groups and minorities, and persons with disabilities.

The United Nations is actively working with the people and Government of Iraq to find solutions to many of these problems. For example, the United Nations is working in partnership with the Ministry of Human Rights to enhance the awareness, respect and protection of human rights among Government officials and members of civil society. We assisted the Government during the Universal Periodic Review process before the United Nations Human Rights Council in February 2010 – a process which continues today with the much-anticipated National Action Plan on Human Rights that the Government is in the process of finalising.

The United Nations is working with Iraqi civil society to foster their awareness of human rights, and their capacity to engage with the Government in meaningful and constructive ways to address challenges to the full enjoyment of human rights that the country faces.

The United Nations in partnership with the Government of Iraq is also implementing a range of programmes and activities aimed at improving the equal access of all Iraqis to basic services, including education, water, shelter, food, and economic opportunity.

Most importantly, the United Nations is providing technical and logistic advice to the Council of Representatives, and to the Human Rights Committee in particular, on ways to strengthen the respect and protection of human rights. The Parliament is a unique institution – it is the body which is elected by the people of Iraq to represent them, and it is the body through which government is held accountable to the people. As such the Council of Representatives serves as the protector of the rule of law and the ultimate guardian of the human rights of all Iraq's people. For this reason, a true partnership between the Parliament and the people is essential to strengthen democracy and the rule of law, and to ensure that the human rights of all Iraq's people are respected and protected without discrimination.

The United Nations has been working actively with the Parliament, and in particular the Human Rights Committee, to help build such a partnership. In particular, we are actively assisting the Expert Selection Committee in its task of nominating persons to serve as Commissioners on the Independent High Commission for Human Rights – which, once established, will serve as the cornerstone of an Iraqi-led mechanism for the promotion and protection of human rights and will act as a bridge between the people, Parliament and Government of Iraq. The United Nations looks forward to the successful completion of the nomination process and the formal establishment of the Independent Human Rights Commission according to international standards.

In concluding, I would like to commend the Council of Representatives, and in particular the Human Rights Committee, for its work in promoting and protecting the human rights of the Iraqi people. The role the Council of Representatives plays in the future development of Iraq towards democracy, peace and prosperity built on respect for human rights and the rule of law, cannot be underestimated. In this regard, I wish to assure you of the ongoing support of the United Nations in accordance with our mandates in your important endeavours.

I also wish to pay tribute to Iraqi citizens, who through their work with Government and civil society, are the greatest champions of human rights. These are the men and women who work to improve the lives of their fellow citizens by facilitating their access to services, education, healthcare and employment; who work to protect and support the victims of violence;

who work in law enforcement and justice to ensure that those who perpetrate acts of violence are held accountable according to law; or those who work to ensure the full and equal participation of all people, irrespective of their gender, ethnic or religious background, disability, or other differences in the economic, social, and political life of Iraq. It is their work, which often goes unrecognised, that contributes so much to making the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a reality.

On this human rights day, I wish you - the people of Iraq - a peaceful and prosperous future, built on democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights – a future which you so truly deserve.