



**Speech**  
**of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq**  
**Ad Melkert**  
**At the Opening of the Consultation Conference**  
**on Iraq National Action Plan for Human Rights**  
*Baghdad, 5 June 2011*

Your Excellency, Prime Minister Al-Maliki, Minister for Human Rights Al Sudani, distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Conference called to discuss the National Action Plan for Human Rights is a landmark event for the promotion and protection of human rights in Iraq. This is the first time where representatives of all sectors of Iraqi society – the Government, judiciary, members of civil society, academics and ordinary Iraqi men and women - have gathered to consult together on the key human rights issues facing the country and to agree on a course of action for addressing these issues over the next three years.

The development and implementation of a National Action Plan on Human Rights was one of the 135 recommendations accepted by Iraq from the Universal Periodic Review of Iraq's compliance with its human rights obligations conducted by the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva in February 2010.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – in partnership with the United Nations Office for Project Services, and with the funding provided by the European Union and the Government of Finland through the United Nations Development Group Fund - has been involved throughout the entire UPR process by providing technical support to, and cooperation with, the Government of Iraq and members of civil society.

It is often said that human rights are inalienable, universal, interdependent and indivisible. This should be repeated every time and everywhere by everyone. Human Rights are not given or granted by governments or kings, nor are they dependent on the will of Parliaments. Human Rights are inherent to all of us as human beings, women and men alike , whatever our nationality, place of residence, gender, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination.

Likewise, Human Rights cannot be divided or graded. The loss of one right affects the enjoyment of other rights in return. The improvement of one right facilitates advancement of others, whether these are civil and political rights, such as the right to life, equality before the law and freedom of expression; economic, social and cultural rights, such as the rights to work, social security, healthcare and education; or collective rights, such as the rights to development and self-determination.

But human Rights also entail obligations. It is the obligation of Governments to ensure that the rights of all citizens, without discrimination, are respected and protected. As recent events across north Africa and the Middle East have shown; if Governments repress the rights of the people they do so at their own peril. These events have brought to the fore one of the oldest lessons history taught us: the more governments disregard elementary rights, the more determined the response of the people becomes to repression of their freedoms.

Over the past decades Iraq has suffered tremendously from previous regimes, war, invasion, occupation and conflict. Millions of Iraqis have experienced, in one form or another, the loss of their basic human rights. Loss of life, torture and abuse, loss of access to healthcare, housing and education, destruction of economic opportunity and the means to earn a livelihood are a few of the harsh realities that the Iraqi people have faced. In many ways improvements can be recognized; but many daunting challenges are yet to be addressed.

All Iraqis seek peace, stability and prosperity – to have their basic human rights respected and protected – and this has been at the root of the demonstrations that have taken place in many areas of the country in recent months. Iraq was the first country in the region to embark upon democracy as the path for securing a prosperous future for its people. Achieving further progress on this path is of crucial importance to all. It is therefore necessary to respond to legitimate demands of people, to ensure that their human rights are protected and respected without discrimination. It is also vital to enable conditions for genuine freedom of expression within a framework of accountability and due process. This is an important next step after so many Iraqis have exercised their political rights, freely and fairly, to elect their Council of Representatives and to mandate their Government.

We welcome therefore the Government's commitment to launch preparations for a Human Rights national action plan. This signals the aspiration and commitment to legal, institutional and policy reform in the key area of human rights, in consultation and partnership with Iraqi civil society. In this first stage, it is envisaged to encapsulate the key human rights recommendations agreed by consensus of all stakeholders and to provide a road map to the future enhancement and protection of the human rights of all Iraq's people.

The holding of this consultation conference on the draft national action plan is a signal of the Government's seriousness of intent to address the issues facing the protection of human rights in Iraq – and it is the opportunity for many Iraqi citizens to ensure that their voices are heard. This would also be of great help to the Independent

Commission on Human Rights that we hope will soon be formed and start its important work.

I wish you every success in your endeavors during the three days of this consultation conference and assure you of the full support of the United Nations.

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