

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

31 October 2004

Excellency,

Iraq is approaching a decisive moment in its history – the elections which, as you know, are due to be held in three months time. The United Nations is committed to doing everything possible, as circumstances permit, to support Iraqi efforts to hold credible elections and, more broadly, to assist with Iraq's political transition, pursuant to the mandate we have been given under Security Council resolution 1546 of 8 June 2004.

I believe that the forthcoming elections are the keystone in a broader process to restore stability and legitimacy in Iraq. If the January 2005 elections are to contribute to this critically important objective, and not to fuel further divisions and instability, it is essential that current efforts to attract a broader spectrum of Iraqis to join the political process should succeed. Persuading elements who are currently alienated from, or skeptical about, the transition process to compete politically is key to creating a political and security context that will inspire confidence among all Iraqis in the process and allow the full participation of all segments of society in the elections. I have consistently encouraged all Iraqis to join an inclusive, participatory and transparent political process, which I believe could positively impact on the overall security environment.

Against this backdrop, I wish to share with you my increasing concern at the prospect of an escalation in violence, which I fear could be very disruptive for Iraq's political transition. I have in mind not only the risk of increased insurgent violence, but also reports of major military offensives being planned by the Multinational Force in key localities such as Fallujah.

His Excellency
Mr. George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
Washington, D.C.

I wish to express to you my particular concern about the safety and protection of civilians. Fighting is likely to take place mostly in densely populated urban areas, with an obvious risk of civilian casualties. But I also worry about the negative impact that major military assaults, in which the main burden seems bound to be borne by American forces, are likely to have on the prospects for encouraging a broader participation by Iraqis in the political process, including in the elections.

Of course, I understand that there is an imperative need to restore security throughout Iraq. But I equally believe that, ultimately, the problem of insecurity can only be addressed through dialogue and an inclusive political process. It is therefore important to guard against policies that are irreconcilable with that objective or create new obstacles, through actions that could either directly or indirectly undermine the political process. The threat or actual use of force not only risks deepening the sense of alienation of certain communities, but would also reinforce perceptions among the Iraqi population of a continued military occupation.

I believe that these concerns are particularly relevant in light of the various initiatives that are being taken to address, through political dialogue, the grievances of certain Iraqi constituencies, particularly among Iraqi nationalists. I welcome the efforts of Prime Minister Allawi in this regard, including by encouraging a delegation of the Interim National Council to mediate with a delegation of civic leaders from Fallujah. Similarly, I welcome reports of an impending initiative by a coalition of Iraqi nationalist groups, who would be willing to join the political process and participate in the elections, subject to certain requirements. This could be an important political opportunity. These efforts should therefore be given the necessary time and space to succeed, as they reflect the welcome beginning of a willingness to engage in sustained dialogue in a spirit of compromise. It seems to me essential that the Interim Iraqi Government and the Coalition should seize such opportunities, at a time when Iraqis need to come together to put their country back on a stable path towards national reconciliation.

The United Nations and my Special Representative in Baghdad, Mr. Ashraf Qazi, stand ready to facilitate dialogue and assist in any manner possible a successful transitional process, in fulfillment of our mandate.

The challenge of forging a conducive political and security environment for successful elections within a very short period of time is formidable. It is extremely important that it should succeed, and that nothing be done that has the effect of increasing alienation and polarization in Iraq. I, and all my colleagues at the United Nations Secretariat, want to help. But we need a conducive environment if elections are to produce a positive effect. This is the moment for redoubling efforts to break the cycle of violence and open a new chapter of inclusiveness and national reconciliation. I am committed to working closely with the United States and other key members of the international community, as well as with the Iraqi leadership, to help the Iraqi people to determine their future peacefully.

I am writing in similar terms to Prime Minister Allawi and Prime Minister Blair.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Kofi A. Annan