



United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)  
بعثة الأمم المتحدة لمساعدة العراق (يونامي)

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**Speech**

**of Deputy Special Representative of the United Secretary-General for  
Iraq**

**Mr. Jerzy Skuratowicz**

**at the Iraqi Expanded Meeting on the 2010 General Population and  
Housing Census**

**General Secretariat of the Council of Ministries, Baghdad  
Wednesday, 22 September 2010**

*Your Excellency the Prime Minister,  
The Honorable Ministers of the Cabinet,  
Government and Regional Government officials,  
COR members, and Political Representatives,*

Your Excellency, I thank you on behalf of the Special Representative to the Secretary General for Iraq for the opportunity to briefly address the distinguished gathering and congratulate you on your efforts in convening this meeting in an attempt to address all parties and components concerns in regards to the upcoming census.

I would also like to commend the efforts of Dr. Ali Baban, Minister of Planning and chairman of the High Commission for the Census, and Ms Nuha Khodr, Executive Director of the Census for their leadership in the difficult and challenging preparation of the census, Mr. Mehdi Al-Alak, Chairman of the Census Operation Room for his overall leadership in the census preparations including the technical and operational preparatory steps completed to date, and all local and regional officials who have been undertaking census preparations throughout the country. I would also like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the United Nations Population Fund for the technical and professional advice which they have been providing to Central Statistical Organization in support of these census preparations, advice accumulated through sharing international experiences from assisting countries throughout the world and on the basis of the United Nations standards in conducting the census.

As his Excellency the PM has indicated, the Census is an important tool for development, government planning and resource allocation, so that the current and projected future needs of the people of Iraq can be addressed. It is a tool intended to provide data to enable more informed government planning at all levels, from the federal government, to the Kurdistan region, at the governorate level and district and sub-district levels, all in order to better serve the people of Iraq. The census will support the development of a properly resourced education sector, help ensure that sufficient resources are dedicated to the provision of clean water and electricity in light of increasing population and industrial demands. It should help government officials and the private sector better focus resources to drive economic development, spur the manufacturing sector and enhance trade, all towards promoting a sustainable economy with sustained job creation to meet the needs of today and the young people of Iraq's aspirations of tomorrow. In short, the census is a fundamental tool for development policies and prosperity of Iraq.

All of us in this room recognize the technical importance of a census for the future of the country.

At the same time, it has become clear that the census can also be a source of tension among communities, can foster misunderstandings, or create fears and expectations, all of which have brought you here today. This is clear. Let me say too that this is not unique to Iraq. Census can be a source of tension throughout the world particularly in countries which have emerged from oppressive regimes or conflicts, are multi-ethnic and emerging

democracies, and are now faced with the challenges of new beginnings, beginnings linked to the equitable allocation of resources, or group identities.

I observed similar concerns during my time in the Sudan in the preparation of its census. Concerns emerged there that the census would be a source of division among the ethnic and religious communities rather than a tool for development, that it would foster conflict rather than facilitate resolution of developmental needs. At the same time, I also observed how the Sudanese government and political leaders committed themselves to tackling these concerns to enable their census to proceed. Consequently, they were able to ensure that the census was conducted in a relatively good atmosphere, helped instill trust in the process and in the use of the results, thereby enabling broad base participation. It is to these points which I would like to share a few key ideas with you – to provide some points for discussion and action as you proceed in your work and proceedings.

One of the fundamental principles to the holding of a census in a multi-ethnic emerging democracy is the need to initiate and engage in a consultative process designed to identify the fears and concerns and begin to address them if citizens are to trust the census process and political leaders to trust each other. This is a critical, necessary step.

It is also important to forge political consensus around the holding of the census, what it is, what it represents, and what it is not, so that the census enjoys broad based participation and support. Without such consensus the census could function as a tool to undermine trust rather than building and supporting development as it is intended.

As part of the consultations and political consensus building, it might be worth to consider reaffirming the purpose and importance of framing the census in the context in which it was intended as a tool to assist in planning and development so that Iraqi citizen's development needs can be better addressed.

It may also be worthwhile for the political parties and blocs to agree to a code of conduct and potential confidence building measures, and to clarify any misperceptions or perceptions about the census and to forge a national consensus on holding the census. A joint declaration by all political bloc leaders to this end could send a timely message to foster a common understanding on all key issues.

It is also just as important to affirm what the census is not:

- First, the census does not nor can it under Iraqi law serve as legal document or legal reference to either validate property claims or grant legitimacy to claims of residency.
- Second, nor can the census data form the basis of any voter registry roll in light of the obligations on the privacy of individual information as per Iraqi law;

- Third, that the census takers themselves are not in a position to verify the accuracy of the data reported to them, nor is it their mandate to do so.

In addition to securing agreement on these principles, operational confidence building measures may also be considered. By this I mean measures that are tangible and present on the ground. For example, the use of multi-ethnic teams of enumerators in those areas where citizens need additional such assurances or the use of joint or ethnically mixed security forces. These measures will help to reduce any concerns that may exist about the census taker or concerns arising from threats of intimidation, and instill confidence in the process. Moreover, multi-ethnic or mixed teams could also observe the tabulating entry of data into the database, again promoting transparency and instilling confidence in the professionalism of the technical staff.

Similarly, the commitment by political parties and government officials to act speedily and efficiently in response to reports by citizens of threats of intimidation or harassment or of irregularities, both in the lead up to the census and on census day itself. Such speedy responses signal the government's and political parties' commitments to respect for the individual's rights and personal security, fundamental guarantees enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution, as well as underscoring the technical nature of the process. This commitment would greatly help create an environment conducive for holding the census.

Lastly, and perhaps most relevant to many of you here today, is that the census cannot serve as a substitute for the resolution of political issues, that the complex political issues require inclusive negotiations among all stakeholders leading to broad-based agreement. An affirmation from the political leaders that the complex political issues will be addressed in a negotiated process separate and distinct from the census consultations will help to alleviate concerns and better ensure broad-based participation.

I would like to conclude by reiterating that the holding of the census is an Iraqi sovereign decision, with the sanction of the COR and the Council of Ministers. What I have presented today, your Excellencies, is The United Nations' contribution to your deliberations and I hope that you find it useful.

Thank you for your attention.