

Copyright 2005 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest Global Communications Corp.
All Rights Reserved
Windsor Star (Ontario)

February 19, 2005 Saturday
Final Edition

SECTION: EDITORIAL/OPINION; Pg. A6

LENGTH: 888 words

HEADLINE: UN to bring together global support for Iraq

BYLINE: Kofi Annan, Special to The Windsor Star

BODY:

The success of the Jan. 30 elections in Iraq has created an exciting moment of opportunity.

It matters greatly that Iraq's transition is a success. I am determined to make certain that the United Nations will play its full part in helping the Iraqi people achieve that end.

But it also matters that the international community, which has been angrily divided over Iraq, now recognizes that we all share a common agenda: to move Iraq from the starting point -- its successfully completed elections -- to a peaceful, prosperous and democratic future.

Even the scars left by past differences can be turned into opportunities.

Precisely because the United Nations did not agree on some earlier actions in Iraq, it now has much-needed credibility with and access to Iraqi groups that must agree to join in the new political process if peace is to prevail. Now is the time for us to draw on that capital.

I want to capture this moment, and I encourage the international community to come together around Iraq through the United Nations.

No one can fail to have been moved by the Iraqis' display of courage at the polls.

The United Nations is proud of the assistance it was able to give them, both in developing the political base for elections and in the technical preparations.

BUILDING A CONSTITUTION

We helped to draft the electoral law and to form the Independent Electoral Commission, which ran the elections. A UN electoral team of more than 50 staff members in Baghdad, Amman and New York supported the commission.

The United Nations trained the commission's members and several hundred other electoral workers, who in turn trained thousands more, and we have advised and supported them throughout the process. I believe we can also help in the next stage: building a constitution. There, too, our help must be both political and technical.

Politically, my special representative, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, is engaged in efforts to reach out to those groups -- mainly Sunni Arabs -- that stayed away from the elections but are willing to pursue their goals through peaceful negotiation and dialogue.

Success in this effort is crucial. Some groups are bitterly resentful of the occupation and believe that they have been excluded from the political process.

Every effort must be made to bring them in. The wider the spectrum of Iraqis that can be brought into the tent, the greater the chance of success.

The new constitution will, of course, be an Iraqi constitution, and Iraqis will decide its shape. But if they ask for advice -- and I believe that they will -- we do have considerable knowledge and experience to draw on.

Once the draft constitution is agreed on, a referendum is to be held in October to give all Iraqis the chance to pronounce on it. We would expect to be able to help the electoral commission in organizing the referendum and the subsequent parliamentary elections, just as we worked with them in preparing the Jan. 30 elections and are still working with them to tabulate and verify the results.

We can also give technical assistance to the new ministries.

Many people seem to think that because, for security reasons, we have only 200 international staff members in Iraq (three-quarters of whom are guards), the United Nations is not present and active there.

This is wrong, first because the United Nations has many Iraqi staffers and second because much of our work -- training, advice, co-ordination, acting as a conduit for funds -- can be done from outside the country.

In fact, about 23 UN agencies, funds and programs are working together to co-ordinate international aid and to help rebuild the country. Forty-six projects have been approved and funded to date, for a total of \$494 million.

Rebuilding power plants

In Basra, for instance, the UN Development Program is providing \$15 million worth of spare parts to rehabilitate the Hartha power station.

Similar projects are planned for power stations in other Iraqi cities, while engineers from the ministry of electricity are being trained in Japan in a program jointly funded by Japan and Belgium.

Meanwhile, in Fallujah, a group led by UNICEF has distributed some seven million litres of potable water to more than 70,000 people displaced from their homes in the recent fighting.

These activities are funded by the International Reconstruction Fund Facility, which the United Nations set up with the World Bank. So far, 24 donors have committed about \$1 billion.

We must see that these commitments are honoured and that the money is properly spent. This can help Iraqis improve their daily lives in many tangible ways. Let's not pretend that it will be easy. Iraq is in a complicated region of the world, and has had a tortured recent history.

It also has a diverse society, and some groups are determined to prevent a democratic outcome on any terms. But I believe that with international help, such a society can use democratic institutions to build itself a stable and prosperous future. That hope and that vision offer us in the outside world a real opportunity to start again -- together -- and support the Iraqi people in their great experiment.

We have a mandate from the Security Council to take the lead in bringing that support together, and we intend to do it.

Kofi Annan is secretary general of the United Nations. This column first appeared in the Washington Post.

GRAPHIC:

Photo: Kofi Annan;
Photo:

LOAD-DATE: February 19, 2005