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Iraq: US/UK plans for post-war transition could jeopardize democracy  
Minority Rights Group, 12/02/2003

Current US / UK plans for a post-war transition to democracy in Iraq could prove unworkable and fuel ethnic and religious division, said Minority Rights Group International today as it published the first detailed analysis of the options for building democracy in a post-totalitarian Iraq.

Based on in-depth interviews with internationally-renowned experts in conflict prevention, transitional administration, human rights and constitutional law, the report *Building Democracy in Iraq* identifies the obstacles to an effective transition to democracy, including the lack of political or civil organization in Iraq, high dependence on the state bureaucracy, and the likelihood of revenge killings.

The report reveals the potential for conflict inherent in many of the current transition plans being considered in Washington and London, including division of the country into religious, ethnic or tribal cantons, crude forms of power-sharing which base political representation solely on ethnic/religious identity, as well as the establishment of a US 'protectorate' and the installation of an Iraqi general as President.

Mark Lattimer, Director of Minority Rights Group International, said: "Given Iraq's recent history of extreme discrimination, ethnic cleansing and other gross human rights violations, any transitional administration which now exacerbated sectarian division or ignored the legacy of discrimination against the Shi'a and the Kurds would be doomed to fail."

The report presents seven ground rules for preventing conflict and building inclusive democracy in Iraq, including:

- The design of an electoral system which requires candidates for President or other federal office to gain support across the different communities and parts of Iraq
- Special measures to counteract long-standing discrimination against the Shi'a and against the Kurds and other minorities, including promoting their participation in central as well as regional government and in public life
- Consideration of a federal structure for Iraq, taking particular account of the long-standing aspirations of the Kurds for self-government
- The deployment of human rights monitors across Iraq during the transitional phase
- Implementation of a major programme to facilitate the voluntary return or resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons
- The need for any external peace-keeping forces to have a clear UN mandate and be international in composition to ensure credibility and neutrality in the eyes of the Iraqi people.

The report emphasizes that the people of Iraq must decide on the structure and form of their own democracy, rather than having a system and constitution imposed on them. A constitution-making process must be based on consultation and participation, in which all Iraq's ethnic and religious communities are represented. A new

constitution should conform to international human rights standards and establish equality before the law.

"Taking democracy seriously means respecting the right of the Iraqi people to determine their own future," said Mr Lattimer. "The role of the international community should be supportive rather than directive."

Minority Rights Group International takes no position on the legitimacy of the use of force against Iraq. However, as the possibility of political change in Iraq increases, it is essential to consider the requirements for protecting minority rights and promoting human development.

MRG's report, *Building Democracy in Iraq* by Yash Ghai, Mark Lattimer and Yahia Said, ISBN 1 904584 00 4, is published on 12 February 2003.