SAYYID AMMAR AL-HAKIM: "Collapse of political accords among forces will place the country in a dark tunnel and push it towards the unknown.”

The tense situation the country is living at this juncture and the successive crises, whenever we come out of one we fall into another, have all started bearing an impact on the great achievements won in the past years. The continuation of this situation in this way may lead to the collapse of accords and signed commitments among the political forces which have safeguarded the political plan during the past ten years. This will get us to enter a dark tunnel and push us towards the unknown, God forbid. Also, the national meeting remains in the phase of preparations, discussions, deliberations, timings and continuous postponements, as if we now need a national meeting to get together so we may set an agenda for the expected national meeting. This issue is very regrettable, that is, that the matters should continue this way. I remind the respectful political forces of the seriousness of this situation and of this painful reality, and I call on everyone to be on their guard, and to take precautions, against being dragged behind these tensions and convulsions which may leave a negative impact on the status of the political project in Iraq and on our citizens as a whole. We must not let the homeland and the citizen fall prey to these differences so he may not be like a chicken burnt because the cooks dispute about this place or that.

National meeting is an important beginning to resolve differences.

We are before two options, and we have to choose one of them fully clearly: We may either hold the national meeting, or we may complicate this meeting and not go to resolve the problems among us. We emphasize that the national meeting, should it be held in sound intentions and clear political will by all sides, will represent an important beginning for finding solutions. But we must not raise the ceiling of our expectations of this meeting. Such a meeting will not be able to resolve all the country’s problems in one installment. We have to go to such a meeting in order to achieve the minimum extent required to break this boycott among the political leaderships and to return to communication, to stretch bridges among the kind political forces, diagnose the points of weakness and put solutions and the needed treatments for these standing differences among the political forces. I direct my call to my brothers in the political leaderships in the country to speed up the holding of the national meeting so we may put an end to such retreating reality in our political process and set out forward to build a national unity and a unified vision for resolving the differences and for putting a road map that enables us to get out of the difficult reality which we now live.

Our policy stems out of principles in which we believe and from strategies which we put for ourselves.

We have lately noticed extreme sensitivities about what we say in this forum and in other meetings, and we do not know the reason for such sensitivities. Does this result from

misunderstanding what we say, or does it result from a premeditated intention to distort and misrepresent what we talk about although we adopt a moderate address in these meetings, in this talk, in these situations, avoiding to enter into detailed controversial issues, and we are not biased to anyone as we are biased to the homeland and to the citizen first and last. We do not attack a particular individual, nor do we try to cause the fall of any personality or entity in our political reality in Iraq. Our language towards the government is one of encouragement, support and backing for the achievements and undertaken sound steps, for drawing attention, providing advice about the negativities, should they take place here or there. If some people face difficulty in understanding our words, we plead to Allah, the most Praised, the most Exalted One, to make it easy for them to understand them. If there is deliberate distorting and misrepresenting of this talk which comes out of a truthful heart towards this homeland and this good people, if such interpretations, distortions and misrepresentations result from certain objectives and narrow calculations…, we hope these dear ones will not test our patience much and not bet on targeting the eensibility of the address and the path which we undertake. Our policy stems out of principles in which we believe and from strategies which we put forth for ourselves in this movement, and they are deeply rooted in our minds and consciences. We cannot be dragged, God forbid, to a conduct different from the one which we continue, and we cannot fall into the pitfalls of campaigns of defamation and of abusing others from here or from there. We do not lack the ability to launch fiery statements, mix the cards and release emotional escalations, but we discipline ourselves by our own selves against entering such places, and we will continue treading the path of moderation and straightforwardness and be a voice, by the will of Allah Almighty, that airs the concerns of our countrymen and to bring viewpoints among the political contenders closer. We have a project, and our project is to build the successful modern state that serves the homeland and the citizen, a state that respects its citizens, serves them and provides care for them, a state that earns others' respect and interest. Anything other than that are political maneuvers that are completely distant from our strategies.

We paved the path for creating the suitable grounds for solving problems with neighboring countries.

We monitor with interest the official effort to send delegations to neighboring countries, to calm the situations down and bring waters back to their paths. The news media has recently talked about an official delegation that visited sister Turkey, sending it letters to calm its leaderships and respectful government. Also, the Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations witness developments, and the joint committees will start their works in the few coming days. There are delegations that are roaming other countries in the region trying to calm the situations down, appease people and remove the complications between Iraq and these countries. They are sound steps that are in harmony with the paths of the Iraqi constitution, with the country's supreme interests and with the official program on the basis of which the Iraqi government was formed. We have

had the great honor to put foundation blocks in this path through many visits, trips and communications which we undertook to these countries in order to provide the grounds for the success of such missions carried out by the respectful government delegations, although these important efforts were not understood then properly, falling prey to some analyses and erroneous accusations which interpreted them distantly from their true objectives. We emphasize that we have no choice except to calm down, to hold a truthful and constructive dialogue in order to resolve our domestic problems and to deal with the countries of the region and of the world and to administer the dossier of Iraq's foreign relationships. Dialogue, communication, calming down and looking for common interests provide the path which can get all Iraqis in the interior together and to restore for Iraq its strength, dignity, status and good relations with regional and global countries.

Postponing elections is a red line.

Elections provide the basic pillar in the democratic system and in building the New Iraq, and they are the clearest feature for any democratic country that elections in it are held on their set and clear deadlines, be they elections of the governorate councils or those of the council of representatives (parliament). Any abuse of this pillar abuses one of the most important foundations on which the New Iraq has been built. Any postponement or change to the elections' schedules is regarded as a red line regardless of the justifications and pretest used for such postponement. We have noticed that the Iraqi citizens were in conditions tougher than those which we nowadays live, yet they were able to hold the elections even in those tough circumstances. Why should we not be able to win success for the elections and to hold them at the present time since the conditions have greatly improved? We now hear about shy whispering about the possibility of postponing the elections. We categorically reject it, and we cannot tolerate it in this case. We hope that all respectful political leaderships, without any exception, to stress the sanctity of the electoral process, to respect the timings of the elections and not permit any change in these timings which risks the democratic status of our newborn experiment. In this regard, we hope that our dear ladies and gentlemen members of the council of representatives will undertake a clear decision to fully extend the power of the electoral commission till the new commission completes its work so Iraq may not remain living in a vacuum of electoral institutions for one day, neither in the manpower nor in the powers. As long as we are not ready for a new commission, this commission must remain in effect and must be granted full legitimacy. It must have full powers. At the moment when the circumstances are ready for the full substitute, the one that is effective and national acceptable, there will be talk about each event. But it should be for short and defined term extensions. We do not know whether the parliamentary effort will be completed during this period or not. It is a risk that Iraq may enter into a big vacuum for some period. We have no institution that is concerned about the elections and about holding them, and this is a serious issue which I hope the dear ones in the parliament will pay attention to it.

Ten million dinars minimum youth loan limit

The ministry of labor and social affairs ahs adopted a plan to grant easy loans to the youths. It is a sound and important step. We always are biased to the youths, and we cannot talk about developing Iraq’s future without making a long stop at the youths, their concerns, issues and problems. But it grieves us that this plan was launched weak, procrastinating, and the reports point out that last year, it did not give grants except only to 2,000 youths despite the large number of youths who are willing to take advantage of this opportunity. Also, these granted sums have been modest and simple in their amounts and have tough conditions which reach the extent of incapacitating some youths in certain cases. We hope the ministry of labor and social affairs will develop and grow this project this year and to expand the area of those youths whom it covers, to raise the level of this loan so the minimum may be ten million dinars in order to help the youths start private projects that provide them a livelihood and a real work opportunity. It will also encourage a group of youths to participate in one project by putting together the loans given to them in such a project so they may start a collective project that involves a number of young people. It is an opportunity to develop the economy and to get it out of the unilateral status which we now live. This project and its activation will effectively contribute to minimizing unemployment among the youths and in developing private projects for the youths which will revitalize the economy and decrease the need for government jobs which have become the only trend for the youths in our present time as Iraqi ministry of planning reports point out. His Excellency the minister of planning has revealed the existence of six and a half million government employees in Iraq, and there are three and a half million permanent employees plus a million and a half of those working via temporary contracts in addition to employees of the ministries of defense and interior, making the total six and a half million government employees connected to State institutions which is a very big figure by global criteria compared with the 33% unemployment rate in Iraq which ranges between full unemployment and masked unemployment. If we add six and a half million government employees and 33% unemployment, we will find out that the other area of the private sector is almost non-existent in such figures. The accumulation of labor one year after another, as a result of new graduates and the new labor joining the work market, which most often do not carry the desired practical experience to deal with the sensitive tasks, and who do not absorb masked labor, turns into a real production force in this homeland. All of this will cause the state’s structure to age. It consumes the resources of the Iraqi state and causes it to be a consumer institute, not a production one. This requires the spending of huge sums of money on these jobs and salaries without we get an opportunity to build, invest and change this country’s conditions the right way. This may lead to violent economic reactions in our economic reality in Iraq. There is no room to get out of this crisis except by activating the private sector and invest in strategic projects. There is an acute shortage in both of these matters which requires a great deal of interest in them both.

Weapons fair and a flower fair

Nowadays, a fair is held at the Baghdad International Fair for the defense and security. We do not object to defense or to security for they are the bases which, when provided, permit all other things and fields in the country to set out on their courses. But we wonder about arranging the priorities, about the types of signals which we release for our countrymen and for the observers abroad. At the time when we cancel a book fair in Baghdad in April, we hold one for weapons. We have to bring to memory a fair for flowers which is being held these days in Baghdad in a beautiful and great step. We wished the timing of the flower fair would coincide with that of the book fair so science and knowledge may strengthen this good homeland. Our opinion in this and other subjects is that we depend on defining the vision and the priorities in the steps which we undertake. Nowadays we badly need quality fairs that compensate us for years of isolation which separated us from the rest of the world. Such fairs facilitate for us to become familiar with the technology, scientific, informational and technological development which the world has witnessed during the past decades so Iraq may return as a basic player and an important pivot in these fields.

One million signatures for the Tigris of Goodness, not just thirty thousand

The ministry of water resources has launched an initiative to include the Tigris in the roster of the UNESCO’s protected world heritage list. The endorsement of this initiative requires gathering thirty thousand signatures of Iraqi citizens. At the time when we welcome this initiative, we plead to the official and civilian institutions and to civil society organizations to participate in this campaign and collect one million signatures, not just thirty thousand, because the Tigris deserves this step from us so it may be the basis for inclusion in these globally protected places. The Tigris River has been with us, and we have been with it for thousands of years. The Iraqi civilizations and cities were built on its banks through the blessing of its presence. We have enjoyed life from the blessings of the Tigris water. The Tigris River requires us to undertake such a stand, and I call on the media establishments to bear their responsibilities to promote this campaign.

Five plus one in Baghdad

We have monitored with a great deal of interest the meeting of five plus one which is relevant to the Iranian nuclear dossier in the city of Istanbul during the few past years. We encourage such initiatives which contribute to ending this crisis and to deal rationally with the natural right of any nation to acquire a true opportunity to own peaceful nuclear energy. We also appreciate the steps which the Islamic Republic undertook and the good intentions it presented in this meeting. We are of the view that these initiatives must be met with initiatives from the Untied States and from the Western countries in general, for it is not logical or fair that the Islamic Republic and the Iranian Muslim nation should suffer from international and economic sanctions. We also demand more initiatives and steps that enhance trust. The global

sides must also present what proves their good intentions towards Iran and the Iranian people as well as the nations' legitimate rights to reach the peaceful nuclear energy. Only one side must not be the only one that is concerned about presenting such initiatives and steps of good intentions. We advise the United States and the Western countries to look at the Islamic Republic differently, distantly from the typical and conventional attitude with which we have become familiar for lengthy decades of time. We also encourage the officials in Iran to present the initiatives that ensure their position before the world community and that embarrass their enemies. The developments in this dossier win a great deal of interest for Iraq because Iran is a Muslim neighbor. Anything connected to it and has something to do with it will leave its marks on the neighboring countries, particularly on Iraq. This makes us concerned about this dossier, and we are hopeful that the next meeting of these countries, which will be held in Baghdad, will give this dossier a basic push forward.

Palestinian Prisoner Day

On the seventeenth of April, the brotherly people of Palestine will commemorate the Palestinian Prisoner Day. The issue of prisoners is regarded as one of the most important sensitive issues in the Palestinian reality along the path of its arduous and lengthy struggle against the Israeli occupation to strengthen freedom and to reach independence. Almost one-fifth of the Palestinian people, the equivalent of 800,000 citizens, have been subjected to captivity and jail since the beginning of the Israeli occupation of 1967 and till our present time. More than eight thousand prisoners and detainees remain in Israeli prisons, detentions, holding and interrogation centers. We are in solidarity with all prisoners in the world in general and with those of the Palestinian people in particular, and we raise our voice before the international, Arab and Islamic boards to bear their responsibility towards this regretful and painful phenomenon to monitor this dossier and to seriously exert effort for the release of these prisoners, for the restoration of their confiscated rights, and for their material and moral compensation for the damages inflicted on them and on their families. Justice and equity, and standing beside the oppressed, represent a basic entrance. The citizens of our Iraqi people are used to always be with the wronged in facing the wrongdoer; so, we cannot help being in solidarity with the Palestinian people.