

US says observers say Iraq election credible following election fraud complaints

by Wladimir van Wilgenburg - 16/05/2018 07:10



The US State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert on Tuesday told reporters that international observers find the Iraqi elections held on 12 May were credible, following charges by mostly Kurdish parties that the Iraqi elections were rigged by the ruling Kurdish parties, blaming mostly the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, but with some also blaming the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

“I can just say the Independent High Electoral Commission – that’s basically the Iraqi equivalent of the Federal Election Commission – they are investigating; they are taking a close look at allegations of fraud and intimidation,” she said.

“There were civil society observers who were participants or who were involved in watching the process. And there were also international observers who were on the

ground as well, and they have reported to us that they found the elections to be credible,” she added.

Six Kurdistan opposition parties suggested there was fraud by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Sulaymaniyah. On May 12, the Gorran movement, the Coalition of Democracy and Justice (CDJ), the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG), the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) and the Kurdistan Communist Party called for a re-run. Other parties, such as the KDP called for a manual recount in Suleymaniya.

“We, the Coalition of Democracy and Justice (CDJ), contest the results of 2018 Iraqi federal elections in the Sulaimaniyah governorate. We believe that the electoral process was compromised, potentially through tampering with the electronic system. Furthermore, we believe that paper ballots were tampered with at ballot collection centers,” a statement received by The Region said.

The CDJ is a party that was newly created by Barham Salih, a former high-level member of the PUK, who split from the party.

“We have multiple reports of irregularities—fraud and intimidation—at polling stations around the Kurdistan Region. In addition, the results are hugely inconsistent with political trends in the run up to elections. While certainly there is always a margin of error, the discrepancies are difficult to logically explain,” the CDJ said.

Aram Kokoy, a CDJ member, told The Region they are sure the PUK cheated. “We know PUK intended to change the result and we know that PUK does not have the know-how to hack those machines,” he said about allegations that Iran helped PUK. “Today, I had to calm down one of our supporters and observers in the Chamchamal polling center. He was overwhelmed and burst into tears when he saw the results from his polling station, shouting where is my vote? This will not go without an answer.”

According to preliminary official results, the PUK won in Sulaimani by a large margin, reclaiming the province from the Change Movement (Gorran) who has had the majority since 2009 when the party first emerged, reported Rudaw.

Gorran was second, followed by the New Generation, the Islamic League (Komal), the KDP, the Coalition for Democracy and Justice (CDJ), and the Islamic Union (KIU).

On Tuesday, the PUK rejected the allegations of opposition parties.

“The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan remains committed to the outcomes of the current elections, regardless of the baseless allegations of voter fraud and vote manipulations. We look forward to a post-election period when we can have peaceful negotiations to unite our votes before heading to Baghdad to represent our people in the Iraqi National Assembly,” the PUK’s foreign office said..

“We strongly reject the ill-intended content of a recent communication by Goran Movement sent to diplomatic missions in Kurdistan Region,” the PUK statement concluded.

Ceng Sagnic, a researcher at Tel Aviv University’s Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern Studies told The Region that the PUK was able to mobilize its supporters.

"The possibility of an elections fraud and a decisive victory for PUK due to the low turnout bear the same credibility. It is correct that PUK controls the government apparatuses in Sulaymaniyah and Halabja, and therefore if elections were rigged it can only be done by this party," he said.

"However, the significantly low turnout was a serious problem for opposition parties, as the PUK was able to mobilize its supporters to vote thanks to all of its strength in this region but the opposition parties continued to call on their supporters to show up to polling stations through the final hours of the electoral process," he concluded.