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**BAGHDAD, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 2003, THE GOVERNMENT MEETS OUTSIDE THE GREEN ZONE**

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Baghdad (AsiaNews / Agencies) - The Iraqi yesterday cabinet met for the first time outside the Green Zone, the fortified district in the heart of the capital erected 15 years ago in the aftermath of the US invasion of the Arab country. The meeting was attended by the premier Adel Abdel Mahdi and 14 new ministers whose designation was approved the night before by Parliament; however, for the formation of the new executive there are still some key roles around which negotiations within the coalition are open.

The government meeting took place in a place of symbolic value: this is the former seat of Parliament, used at the time of Saddam Hussein. Since the fall of the dictator in 2003, following the US invasion, a wave of violence and terror led to the construction of a fortified district [the Green Zone], in the center of Baghdad and isolated from the rest of the city.

Inside there are the highest offices of the country and foreign diplomatic representations. To protect the symbolic sites - the seat of government and parliament, US and British embassies - the authorities have set up a series of checkpoints and walls protected by barbed wire and electrified.

In recent days, Prime Minister Abdel Mahdi accelerated the formation of the new government, defining as many as 14 ministerial roles. At the moment, however, some key dicasteries are missing, including the Interior and the Defense, which are still the subject of negotiations between the various coalition forces.

So far it is a men-only executive and no woman's name has emerged for government roles. Hence the appeal of the United Nations in an official letter sent in recent days to Baghdad, to promote and foster a greater gender balance.

The Prime Minister is required to present his choices for a vote in Parliament by November 6, six months after the parliamentary elections. In the context of two different telephone conversations, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo congratulated Abdel Mahdi and new Foreign Minister Mohamed Ali al-Hakim, former ambassador to the United Kingdom.

Pompeo is committed to working closely with Abdel Mahdi to "help his government ensure stability, security and prosperity for all Iraqis". Moreover, a balance between opposing forces [United States on one side and Iran on the other] will be essential for a future of peace and stability, putting behind the sectarian violence that has torn apart the country following the US invasion and the war against the jihadist militias of the Islamic State (IS, ex Isis).

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Baghdad,-for-the-first-time-since-2003,-the-government-meets-outside-the-Green-Zone-45309.html>

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