

United Nations, July 16 (AP) - U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is urging all countries to enforce sanctions against the Islamic State extremist group that has captured a vast stretch of territory in Iraq, warning that "terrorism" must not be allowed to steer the country away from its path toward democracy.

In a report to the Security Council obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press, the U.N. chief strongly condemned the upsurge of violence at the hands of the militant group and its supporters and called on the 193 U.N. member states, especially Iraq's neighbors, "to come together and support Iraq in its fight against terrorism."

The extremist group, as an offshoot of al-Qaida, is subject to an arms embargo and targeted financial sanctions and travel bans.

Ban also urged Iraq's leaders to unite behind a political process acceptable to all parties and form a new government "in the spirit of national unity and inclusiveness."

The report was written before Iraqi lawmakers broke a two-week deadlock Tuesday and elected a moderate Sunni as speaker of parliament. It was the first step toward forming a new government that is widely seen as crucial to confronting the militants, but lawmakers now face the most contentious decision: choosing a prime minister. The incumbent, Nouri al-Maliki, who has ruled the country since 2006, is under intense pressure to step aside but is insisting on staying for a third term.

Ban stressed that "the spirit of national unity and reconciliation, non-sectarianism and non-violence recently expressed by Iraq's political and religious leaders must prevail at this critical time."

Ban said the next steps toward an immediate and long-term solution for Iraq should include a national security plan with explicit guidelines for cooperation between the government and the Kurdistan regional government, an action plan to address the threat posed by all armed groups, speedy formation of a sustainable and inclusive government and "an equitable social policy to address the concerns of all communities."

The U.N. chief said reports of mass summary executions by the Islamic State group are "extremely disturbing" and the use of water as a weapon is a new and "dangerous trend."

According to his report, militants from the group took control of a dam on the Euphrates River in early April, redirecting the water flow and causing extensive flooding while cutting water supplies to Iraq's central and southern governorates. The group gained control of a second dam on the river in late April that led to extensive flooding in Baghdad Belt districts including Abu Ghraib, forcing local residents to flee and destroying agricultural land, livestock and irrigation networks, it said.

Ban demanded that the Iraqi government do "everything possible to protect civilians while confronting the terrorist threat."