



PRESS RELEASE

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Iraq bomb contamination is catastrophic: six times as costly to remove, and a serious barrier to recovery

Ottawa, October 13th 2021 - Four years after hostilities ended in Iraq, communities are still as fractured as the buildings, roads, and bridges around them. Published today, Humanity & Inclusion's report "*No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq*" paints a harrowing picture of the daily lives of Iraqis, some of whom are too nervous to let their children walk to school, or so desperate for income that they'll risk working in places known to be polluted with explosives.

- Released by Humanity & Inclusion (HI), the report "**No safe recovery: The impact of Explosive Ordnance contamination on affected populations in Iraq**" lends critical evidence to generations of examples proving that war cannot end for civilians until the last bomb is cleared. It underscores the need for States to reach a consensus on a way to safeguard civilians when conflicts strike populated areas. Researchers focused on Iraq's heavily populated governorate of Ninewa, home to the cities of Mosul, Sinjar, and Tel Afar.
- Iraq is one of the most heavily contaminated countries by explosive ordnances on our planet. Explosive remnants of war inhabit **more than 3,200 km² of land - twice the area of London**. The pollution infuses the population with terror, as mines or explosive remnants claimed **about 700 victims between 2018-2020**. A staggering 8.5 million Iraqis live amid these deadly, waste-products of war.
- Demining bombed-out cities costs **six times as much as it does to clear a rural setting**. The job is often done with a mix of heavy machinery, and there is a constant risk to deminers and neighbors that controlled explosions could trigger collapse. In cities, this critical work takes **eight times longer** to complete compared to rural settings. Funding is a serious barrier. **Iraq requires \$170-180 million USD per year, including \$50 million for Mosul, to remove its explosive ordnances.**
- "Gone are the neat rows of minefields," says HI Advocacy Protection of Civilians Manager Alma Taslidžan Al-Osta. "We're often talking about bombs triggered by trip wires in

hallways, aerial bombs that never exploded resting meters below ground and surrounded by rubble, and children's toys packed with explosives.”

- Clearing what deminers call “**three-dimensional**” pollution requires the top-level of explosive ordnance training - a classification that too few deminers hold in Iraq. Even the classic deminer's blue protective suit is almost useless amid this contamination. One mine actor interviewed for the report in Mosul noted, “We would find more items as we dug. This makes clearance difficult, as it is not just the surface layer, it is deep underneath.”

BOMBING CITIES: INHUMANE, IMPRECISE, EXPENSIVE

- Bombing populated areas was a hallmark of the conflict that Iraqis endured from 2014-2017. This practice not only robbed tens of thousands of Iraqis of their lives, it also left their schools, fields, pathways, homes, water treatment plants, and shops littered with explosive ordnances.
- “Bombs and cities should never meet,” says HI Advocacy Protection of Civilians Manager Alma Taslidžan Al-Osta. “Not only does the moment of impact cause maximum destruction to the buildings, infrastructures, and people within the blast radius, the explosive pollution left behind robs a population of its right to any chance at restoring its economic and social heartbeat.”
- Indeed, the report is stacked with data from the conflict, culled from regional reports among others: \$7 billion in damages to the electricity sector; \$2.8 billion of damage to roads, airports, bridges, and railways. In Mosul alone, **9 out of 13 hospitals were damaged**, along with 169 schools damaged or destroyed.
- “Current rules of war fail civilians in populated areas during conflict, and as we can see from Iraq, years after the fighting ends, too,” says HI Protection of Civilians Manager Alma Taslidžan Al-Osta. “What evidence do States need to back a **strong political declaration against the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effect in populated areas?**” After two years of diplomatic discussions, we expect such a declaration to be signed by States soon. It will mark a historic breakthrough for the protection of civilians in conflict.

SOCIAL COHESION

- Ninewa's diverse population is struggling to heal for a variety of reasons. Indirect impacts of contamination on social cohesion, such as limited access to livelihoods and services, can cause tensions within families.
- Explosive ordnance accidents have also shifted roles within families and communities. “When we see a head of household injured in an accident, they may feel that they are no

longer able to support their family, which has a negative impact on their psychological well-being,” says HI Country Director of Iraq Marc Van der Mullen. “If a family member experiences disability after an accident, they can be seen as a burden, especially as access to health services remains limited and expensive.”

- **One in 12 internally** displaced persons—**Iraq counted 678,512 internally displaced neighbors in 2020** - reports that the presence of explosive ordnances is as a barrier to their return, the report notes. Barred from returning safely, households continue to be displaced and communities are unable to reconnect and build their resilience collectively.
- With schools and playgrounds contaminated, groups that might otherwise associate are unable to do so. As one woman explained in Sinjar, “In my village, there is no high school. It is difficult for students to travel to other villages, especially when we do not know whether that village is contaminated or not.”

METHODOLOGY

The report focuses on Ninewa, Iraq’s second most populated governorate. Researchers undertook a thorough desk review of secondary literature and conducted key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders and individuals from the affected population.

About Humanity & Inclusion (HI)

HI is an independent international aid organization, working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster for close to 40 years. Working alongside people with disabilities and people living in situations of extreme vulnerability, our action and testimony focus on responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions, and promoting respect for their dignity and basic rights. Humanity & Inclusion has set up development programs in more than 60 countries and intervenes in numerous emergency situations. The network of eight national associations (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States) mobilizes resources, jointly manages projects, and increases the impact of the organization’s principles and actions. Humanity & Inclusion is one of six founding organizations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997. The organization has numerous prizes to its name, including the 2011 Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize, the 1996 Nansen Prize, and two 2020 European Union Horizon Prizes for innovation. Humanity & Inclusion acts and campaigns in places where “living in dignity” is no easy task.

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