



LANDMINE CLEARANCE CRITICAL TO BOOST IRAQI ECONOMY

Government Vows to Accelerate Implementation of Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty

BAGHDAD, 6 April 2009 – An estimated 20 million landmines and 2.6-6 million cluster bomb-lets are contaminating Iraq's oil fields and farmlands, impeding economic recovery according to government figures.

To mark International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, the Government of Iraq and the UN pledged to accelerate civilian demining efforts, to liberate more land and protect Iraqi civilians from the dangers of mines.

"Landmine clearance is a key element within broader efforts to stimulate Iraq's economy," said David Shearer, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and UNDP-Iraq's Resident Representative. "Mines are limiting access of farmers to their lands, preventing increased oil production and putting the lives of Iraqi civilians at risk. We strongly welcome the Government of Iraq's renewed commitment to implement the Ottawa Treaty, and will support their efforts as a priority."

It is estimated that more than 1,730 square kilometers of land in Iraq are contaminated, affecting more than 1.6 million Iraqis in some 4,000 communities across the country. Iraq's signature of the Mine Ban Treaty came into force in February 2008. Since then, approximately 20 square kilometers have been cleared by national and international demining organizations and 276,658 people offered mine awareness training through UNICEF supported activities.

"Iraq has one of the world's largest contamination problems of landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXO) and other explosive remnants of war (ERW)," said Her Excellency Narmin Othman, Iraq's Minister of Environment. "Clearing these mines is essential and urgent. We intend to increase coordination within the government on this important issue, and are reassured by the ongoing international support."

It is also estimated that around one million Iraqi children are affected by mines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs). Around 2,000 children (one quarter of all victims) have been maimed or killed due to cluster bomblets since 1991. "Iraq's children are paying an enormous price for the country's landmine and unexploded ordnance contamination," said Sikander Khan, UNICEF Iraq Representative. "The damage extends beyond physical harm; it restricts children's ability to go to school, play safely and enjoy a happy childhood."

For the past 10 years, UNICEF has supported the "Mine Risk Education Programme" in Iraq where two million people received information and prevention tools on the dangers of mines and explosive remnants of war. UNDP coordinates UN Mine Action in Iraq, supporting the Iraqi government and civilian Mine Action authorities through building an operational demining and clearing capacity and developing a coordination and regulatory framework on mine action.



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