

**Q & A: International Mine Awareness Day: 4 April 2011**

**Q. What is the significance of 4<sup>th</sup> of April?**

- In December 2005, the General Assembly declared April 4 the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. The Day is about raising awareness on the destruction wrought by land mines/ERWs as well as the necessity for the international community and governments to take action to eliminate the threat they pose

**Q. What is the current situation of mines/ERW in Iraq?**

- Iraq is one of the most contaminated countries with land mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the world.
- There are around 4,000 hazardous areas in 13 of the 18 governorates or around 1,730 million square meters of contaminated land.<sup>1</sup>
- Around 20 million mines and more than 50 million cluster bomblets exist
- The lives of more than 1.6 million Iraqis are affected
- Up to 8,000 people, including 2,000 children, have been either injured or killed from failed cluster bomblets with likely thousands more of unaccounted victims
- Victims incur serious psychosocial damage as well as physical
- Most mines/ERW were laid during the Iraq-Iran (1980-1988) and Persian Gulf wars (1991 and 2003).

**Q. Who is responsible for mine action in Iraq?**

- Primary responsibility for mine action lies with the government
- UNICEF works in partnership with national and regional mine action authorities, Government Ministries, several national and international NGOs, and other UN agencies (especially UNDP and WHO) to provide technical expertise and programs to reduce the impact on at-risk populations

**Q. What is the impact of land mines, UXO/ERWs on children in Iraq?**

- Land mines/ERW have a devastating impact on Iraq's children
- Over 25% of all victims are children. Around 24% percent are children under the age of 14 years (LIS 2006); 45.7 percent are between 15 and 29 years of age = 70% of all victims are under the age of 30
- Children are often victimized when carrying out their domestic duties (collecting water, firewood, etc.) or playing outside; children are attracted to the bright colours of mines/UXOs thinking they are toys
- Children often lose their limbs, sight, or hearing resulting in lifelong disability and stigmatization
- Child victims are often perceived as a burden to their families and are discriminated against by society
- As a result of injury, children face limited or are denied future prospects for education and gainful employment
- Children's lives are also devastated when a parent or caregiver is injured or killed as they lose the care and attention they require as well as often being forced out of school and into work
- Landmines/ERW violate nearly all children's rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly a child's right to life, liberty and security, right to a safe environment in which to play and develop, and their rights to education, health care, and to grow up to realize their full potential

**Q. How is UNICEF supporting mine action in Iraq?**

- UNICEF has been supporting Mine Risk Education for the last 11 years
- Since 2006, around 2 million people have received Mine Risk Education in over 1,000 communities in contaminated areas in 15 of Iraq's 18 governorates. Specifically:
  - More than 60,000 MRE Kits were distributed to Schools, NGOs and Governmental Institutions.
  - Up to 100,000 thousand leaflets and posters with MRE messages were distributed in schools.
  - In partnership with ACTED and Save the Children, MRE sessions are being conducted in more than 29 Child Friendly Spaces across Iraq.
  - In partnership with Handicap International, UNICEF is providing Community Based Mine Risk Education to affected communities in the KRG, with More than 10,000 people receiving Community-Based MRE training on a monthly basis.

<sup>1</sup> According to the Landmine Impact Survey (LIS 2006)

- UNICEF has contributed to key policy documents such as:
  - In 2010, UNICEF supported the drafting of a National MRE strategy and standards which have been reviewed and approved by the Directorates of Mine Action and the Ministry of Environment.
  - Provisional Standards and Curriculum for Mine Risk Education
  - Teachers Training Manual on Mine Risk Education
  - Action Plan for Communicating Mine Risk Education
  - A standardized victim data collection form
  - UNICEF is supporting the inclusion of MRE in the school curriculum
- Based on a UNICEF 2009 Survey conclusions and recommendations, a Community Based Mine Risk Education project to ensure the active involvement of the impacted communities themselves, along with the specific target/at-risk groups, in designing and implementing strategies to managing risk was initiated with INGO Handicap International.
- UNICEF is supporting a network of partners including government officials, local NGOs, and thousands of teachers, community volunteers, and health and social workers to respond to mine/ERW threats by designing appropriate Risk Management responses.
- With WHO and UNDP, UNICEF is now supporting a pilot project to set up a National Injury Surveillance mechanism, to improve support to victims of landmines and explosive remnants of war.
- In close collaboration with UNDP, WHO and in partnership with National and International NGOs UNICEF will continue to support the GoI to meet its obligations under the Ottawa treaty to eradicate all mines in Iraq by 2018.
- UNICEF has supported many surveys and assessments that have helped develop our programs and support to the government in developing policies

**UNICEF calls for protecting children and other affected populations from land mines and ERWs:**

- With the government we must urgently focus and invest all of our resources, human and financial, to address this scourge
- UNICEF will do everything possible to work with the government in all efforts to ensure mine-action responses - mine/ERW clearance, mine risk education, reintegration of victims in society
- Mine action to rid Iraq of all mines/UXOs is integral to building an “Iraq Fit For Children”<sup>2</sup>; to the survival and healthy development of today’s and future generations of Iraqi children
- UNICEF calls on all actors to Unite for an Iraq Fit For Children

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<sup>2</sup> Which is consistent with the call in the UN General Assembly’s 2002 statement “A World Fit for Children”