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## UNICEF and UNDP concerned Iraq unable to meet its Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty obligations

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BAGHDAD, 1 July, 2009 – A joint UNICEF-UNDP report, released today with the Iraqi Ministry of Environment, raises concerns that Iraq is unable to meet its obligations under the Ottawa Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty.

“After decades of war and conflict, Iraq has become one of the world’s most contaminated countries in terms of landmines and unexploded remnants of war, impacting the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis,” said Paolo Lembo, UNDP’s Country Director for Iraq. “Unfortunately, with the Government’s current capacities and resources, it is unlikely Iraq will be able to meet its obligations under the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Treaty, as it will take decades to clear all mines and unexploded ordnance.”

By acceding to the treaty, Iraq has committed to never again use, produce, acquire, or export antipersonnel mines. It has also committed to destroy stockpiled mines in four years and to clear minefields in ten years.

The report, titled *Overview of Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War in Iraq*, notes that around 20 million landmines and 2.66 million cluster bomblets are contaminating more than 1,700 square kilometres of Iraq’s land, including oil fields and farmlands. These unexploded remnants of war are affecting more than 1.6 million Iraqis in some 4,000 communities by significantly impeding both their own and their country’s economic recovery.

Iraq’s signature of the Mine Ban Treaty came into force in February 2008. Since then, approximately 20 square kilometres have been cleared by national and international demining organizations and 276,658 people have received mine awareness training through UNICEF-supported activities. Under the terms of the Convention, Iraq must clear all areas containing or suspected to contain anti-personnel mines before February 2018.

“At the onset of Iraq’s ratification of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, we have been engaged in the very difficult task of seeing Iraq’s obligations to the convention fulfilled” said Her Excellency Narmin Othman, Iraq’s Minister of Environment. “This report makes abundantly clear the enormity of the task ahead and that more must be done”.

The report also notes that around one million Iraqi children are at risk of being injured or killed by mines and unexploded ordnance and that 2,000 children (one quarter of all victims) have been maimed or killed by cluster bomblets since 2003.

"Iraqi children have the right to grow up in a safe environment without risk to their well being and lives as much as any other child in the world" said Sikander Khan, UNICEF Iraq Representative. "More action to clear mines and other unexploded ordnance is urgently needed so all Iraqi children can grow up without fear of this hidden enemy and be assured of a safer and better future".

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.