

Iraq: unexploded munitions put civilians at risk

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) HAS BEEN WORKING IN IRAQ CONTINUOUSLY SINCE 1980 RESPONDING TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF ARMED CONFLICTS

Overview

Iraq is littered with explosive remnants of war. The Landmine Impact Survey (an international survey carried out between 2004 and 2006), estimated that 1,730 square kilometres of Iraqi territory spread across 13 governorates – equivalent to around one and a half times the area of the city of Baghdad – is heavily contaminated. As a result, the safety and livelihood of more than 1.6 million Iraqis are at risk. Most of the contamination, a legacy of internal unrest and international conflict, is located along Iraq's borders with Iran and Turkey.

Contaminated areas include not only fertile farmland but also rural mountainous or desert areas where destitute and displaced families have gone to live for lack of a better option.

"These weapons can cause so much suffering," said Hajj Jassim, who lives with his wife, three children and eight grandchildren in Missan governorate. "Families just want to know that their children and livestock will come back from the fields in one piece."

According to the Ministry of the Environment and the Directorate of Mine Action, there are around 25 million landmines and explosive remnants of war in Iraq. Although no statistics are available on the number and types of casualties, it is estimated that hundreds of civilians are maimed by the debris of warfare every year.

"Landmines are just one aspect of the problem. Unexploded artillery shells, mortar shells and other leftovers from past wars also constitute a major hazard," said Srdjan Jovanovic, an ICRC expert on weapon contamination. "We work closely with local and national authorities to make sure that the needs and concerns of victims and other people living in contaminated areas are taken into account."

"Clearing the fields will make a big difference for the civilian population," said Mr. Jovanovic. "It will take considerable funding, political commitment and international support for Iraq to clear its lands. The Iraqi government has taken some steps, but the task is huge."

The ICRC started clearing contaminated lands in June 2010 in Missan governorate, in the southern part of the country, one of the worst affected areas. It is still the only international humanitarian organization involved in community-level clearance activities in the governorate. Over the last six months, the ICRC has removed over 1,600 unexploded shells and bombs from dangerous areas in the districts of Qalat Saleh and Al Mejar Al Kabi inhabited by more than 10,000 people.

Limb-fitting and physical rehabilitation services are provided by the ICRC to help disabled people reintegrate into the community. In 2010, 1,505 new patients were fitted with prostheses and 7,677 new patients with orthoses at 10 ICRC-supported centres throughout Iraq, in Basra, Najaf, Hilla, Tikrit, Falluja, Erbil and Baghdad.



Missan - ICRC Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) staff working in Missan governorate.

The entry into force of the Ottawa mine-ban treaty resulted not only in the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines but also in an undertaking to destroy mines, whether in existing stockpiles or in mined areas. Although Iraq acceded to the treaty on 15 August 2007, the turmoil, unrest and sporadic violence in the country have so far prevented it from devising a comprehensive national strategy to rid itself of mines.

During November and December 2010, in response to the unstable and often challenging security environment, the ICRC further adjusted its activities so as to be able to carry on providing assistance to those most in need.

Bringing aid to people facing hardship

The ICRC maintained its support for people struggling to earn a living and support their families, such as women heading households, people with disabilities and displaced people. During the months of November and December, the ICRC:

- provided emergency aid for more than 6,000 displaced people in the governorates of Sulaimaniya, Erbil, Ninawa, Dohuk and Kirkuk;
- awarded 121 grants to disabled people in Erbil, Sulaimaniya, Kirkuk and Ninawa governorates to enable them to start small businesses and regain economic self-sufficiency. Around 5,000 disabled people have received such aid since 2008;
- completed a land-reclamation project in Dohuk governorate from which over 2,000 people are expected to benefit;
- distributed 1,200 tonnes of fertilizer to 3,100 farmers in Babil, Baghdad, Anbar, Salahaddin and Diyala governorates to help them restart farming activities.

Assisting hospitals and physical rehabilitation centres

Because health-care services in some rural and conflict-prone areas are still struggling to meet the needs of the civilian population, the ICRC continues to help renovate the premises of health-care facilities and train staff. In addition,



to help disabled people reintegrate into the community, it continues to provide limb-fitting and physical rehabilitation services. In November and December:

- 20 doctors and 50 nurses took part in a course given in Najaf and Sulaimaniya for medical personnel from Baghdad, Nasiriyah, Amara, Diwaniya, Kirkuk, Diyala, Anbar, Salahaddin and Najaf intended to strengthen emergency services;
- 11 doctors from all over Iraq attended an emergency services and trauma management course that took place in Sulaimaniya;
- 32 doctors from different parts of Iraq attended a seminar featuring ICRC experts held in Sulaimaniya for surgeons specializing in the treatment of war-wounded people;
- 197 new patients were fitted with prostheses and 1,148 with orthoses at 10 ICRC-supported centres throughout Iraq.

Since mid-2010, the ICRC has provided on-site support for 10 primary health-care centres in Diyala, Ninawa, Kirkuk, Babil and Diwaniya. By agreement with the local authorities, it visits the centres on a regular basis to maintain and where necessary upgrade water supply networks, to advise on and monitor emergency stabilization and referral services, vaccinations and preventive consultations for pregnant women, and to ensure adequate regular stock availability of medicines and vaccines.

Providing clean water and sanitation

Access to clean water remains difficult in much of Iraq. ICRC engineers continue to repair and upgrade water, electrical and sanitary facilities, especially in places where violence remains a concern and in rural areas, to improve the quality of services provided in communities and health-care facilities. In November and December, these activities included:

Emergency assistance:

The ICRC delivered water by truck:

- in Al-Sadr City (Sector 52, 53, Al Husseina and Ma'amil areas) in Baghdad governorate to over 4,800 internally displaced people.

Support for health-care facilities:

The ICRC completed the following works:

- improvement of the quality of drinking water in the 50-bed al Tarmiya General Hospital in Baghdad governorate;
- construction of a new emergency unit in the 100-bed Um Qasr Hospital in Basra governorate;
- renovation and extension of Qazania primary health-care centre, treating 140 patients a day in Diyala governorate;
- renovation and extension of Mandaly primary health-care centre, treating 180 patients a day in Diyala governorate;
- construction of a new operating theatre in the 150-bed Talafar Hospital in Ninawa governorate.

Water supply in hospitals:

The ICRC completed the installation of drinking-water purification units in four hospitals in Diyala governorate (Baquba general Hospital, al Muqdadiya General Hospital, al Zahraa Maternity Hospital and Baladrooz General Hospital) with an overall capacity of 600 beds.

Drinking-water supply:

The ICRC completed seven main projects benefiting over 240,000 people throughout the country:

- renovation of the Old Baquba water treatment plant in Diyala governorate, serving about 128,000 people;
- installation of chemical treatment units in five compact units in Diyala governorate, supplying



water to around 20,000 people. The units ensure that the water supplied to the people and health-care facilities in the area is safe, so that the risk of disease is minimized;

- repair of the Abu Rummana compact unit, in Missan governorate, serving around 13,000 people;
- renovation of the Badra and Jassan water treatment plants in Wassit governorate, providing water for around 22,000 people;
- repair of the water system in Sinjar, in Ninawa governorate, serving 50,000 people;
- installation of a new water treatment plant in Ekbeba, Ninawa governorate, for 12,000 people;
- upgrade of the water system in Rabeea, in Ninawa governorate, serving some 3,000 people.

Visiting detainees

In November and December, ICRC delegates visited detainees held by the Iraqi Correctional Service under the authority of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, various branches of the Kurdish Regional Government and the United States government in 19 places of detention in nine governorates. The delegates monitored the conditions in which detainees were being held and the treatment they received.

The ICRC shared its observations and recommendations with the detaining authorities with a view to bringing about improvements where needed.

In some of places of detention, the ICRC gave detainees mattresses, blankets and recreational items such as books and games.

The ICRC makes a special effort to restore and maintain ties between people held in detention facilities and their loved ones. In November and December, over 260 Red Cross messages were exchanged between detainees and their families in Iraq and abroad. The ICRC also responded to around 715 enquiries from families seeking information on detained relatives. In addition, it issued 281 certificates of detention to former detainees. The voluntary repatriation of a released detainee took place under the auspices of the ICRC. The organization also issued travel documents to three refugees to enable them to resettle abroad.

Clarifying what happened to missing people

In a new effort to account for people missing in connection with the 1990-1991 Gulf War, the Tripartite Commission, composed of representatives of Iraq, Kuwait and the 1990-1991 Coalition (the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Saudi Arabia), held meetings in Kuwait on 5 and 7 December under the auspices of the ICRC. During the same month, a joint search and recovery mission took place in the area of Nassiriya, in southern Iraq, with the aim of locating the mortal remains of Kuwaiti nationals suspected to be buried there.

ICRC Mission The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

The ICRC continues to provide the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights and Baghdad's Medical-Legal Institute with the technical support they require to exchange information and build up their capacity in the area of forensics.

Promoting compliance with international humanitarian law

Reminding parties to a conflict of their obligation to protect civilians is a fundamental part of the ICRC's work. The organization also endeavours to spread knowledge of international humanitarian law by organizing presentations for various audiences, including military personnel, prison staff, students and professors.



In November and December, information sessions on international humanitarian law were organized for members of the Iraqi Army, the Peshmerga forces and Assayesh security forces. In November, an Iraqi officer attended an ICRC-organized workshop on international rules governing military operations, which was held in Lucerne, Switzerland.