

IRAQ PROGRAMME REPORT 2023





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GLOSSARY

DMA Directorate for Mine Action

EHFR Explosive Hazard First Responder

EHM Explosive Hazard Management

EO Explosive Ordnance

EOD Explosive Ordnance Disposal

EORE Explosive Ordnance Risk Education

GIS Geographic Information System

GoI Government of Iraq

GPS Global Positioning System

IDP Internally Displaced Person

IED Improvised Explosive Device

IEDD Improvised Explosive Device Disposal

IKMAA Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency

INGO International Non-Governmental Organizations

IOM International Organization for Migration

ISIL Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

MAG Mines Advisory Group

MoD Ministry of Defence

MoE Ministry of Education

MoI Ministry of Interior

NMAA National Mine Action Authorities

NMAS National Mine Action Standards

NNGO National Non-Governmental Organizations

NTS Non-Technical Survey

OSESGY Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen

RAC Residential Area Clearance

SBCC Social, Behavioural Change Communication

SHO Shareteah Humanitarian Organization

T3 Train-the-Trainer

TS Technical Support

UAV Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

UN United Nations

UNAMI United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

UNMAS United Nations Mine Action Service



A Message From the UNMAS Iraq Chief Mine Action Programme Pehr Lodhammar

“ In 2023, UNMAS Iraq continued to support the Iraqi Government and national operator’s efforts in reducing the number of indiscriminate casualties and minimize the impact from explosive ordnance amongst the most vulnerable of populations.

For me, 2023 was my seventh year leading UNMAS in Iraq. Over the last seven years, the programme has shifted from supporting and enabling stabilization in the liberated areas, which was our main activity and a priority for the first three years, to supporting durable solutions and focusing on nationalization and localization. In 2023, UNMAS Iraq continued with the three pillars of activities, including survey and clearance, EORE, and technical support for the Government of Iraq (GoI) national mine action authorities (NMAAs). These pillars assist us in our mission to ensure that Iraqi communities are safe and to facilitate the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their places of origin.

What has been very encouraging this year has been to see the achievements accomplished regarding nationalization and localization. The number one achievement in 2023 was that our Partnership Model reached successful conclusion in December. After three years of collaboration between International and National Non-Governmental Organizations

(INGOs and NNGOs), working together with funding and support from UNMAS Iraq, we have ensured that there are now two fully national, localized, very capable, and motivated mine action NNGOs available in the sector. To make this an even bigger success, the operational teams consist of women and men working alongside each other in technical operational roles. I am very proud of the fact that we now have almost 28 percent of women in operational and technical mine action positions, which has been one of my main objectives since my arrival in Iraq.

This year, we also continued to provide technical support to the GoI in developing the National Mine Action Standards ensuring they continue to be aligned with the International Mine Action Standards. This is important to ensure that the mine action sector has standards that promote safe, cost-effective mine action activities in the communities where they are most needed. I also want to say thank you to the GoI for prioritizing the development of their standards. This is important!

Finally, I would like to highlight one of the experiences we shared with the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (OESGY). Since 2017 UNMAS Iraq has trained 1822 Iraqi women and men police officers to become Explosive Hazard Management First Responders. This one-week training course enables them to identify explosive hazards, warn their communities, and report explosive hazards. In 2023, following discussions with the OESGY, our Iraqi instructors, normally working at the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI) police training school at Salman Pak outside Baghdad, travelled to Amman Jordan, where they trained 18 women and men Yemenis from, amongst others, civil society, to become first responders. The training also included an instructor’s specific training so that the participants, once back in Yemen, can train additional first responders.

We have come a long way over the last seven years, and I would like to thank all UNMAS Iraq staff for their incredible work every day, and how they make what often looks impossible look easy. I am pleased to share the UNMAS Iraq Annual Report for 2023, highlighting our key activities and achievements throughout the year. A big well done to all of us for these achievements! I also wish to thank all our donors who contributed financially this year and continue to support us. Without this support, the work of UNMAS Iraq would not have been possible.

Support for UNMAS Iraq in 2023 comes from voluntary contributions from the following countries:



Pehr Lodhammar
Chief Mine Action Programme, UNMAS Iraq

UNMAS





VISION

The GoI manages an efficient mine action sector that protects civilians from the threat of explosive ordnance (EO) and enables stabilization and development efforts to proceed unimpeded by EO.

MISSION

UNMAS Iraq supports the development of a sustainable, well-coordinated national mine action sector and reduces the threat of EO to civilians.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The UNMAS Iraq programme was re-established in 2015 at the request of the Iraqi government and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) with the task of starting the comprehensive and complex process of clearing EO, mainly improvised explosive devices (IEDs), left after the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

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Initially, UNMAS Iraq was supporting stabilization and the restoration of basic infrastructure to enable safe and dignified returns of IDPs to the areas liberated from ISIL. In doing this **UNMAS Iraq surveyed 30,567,078 sqm and rendered safe more than 673,041 items of EO through nearly 2,000 stabilization tasks.**

In the last few years, UNMAS Iraq has focused on the capacity enhancement of Iraqi NMAAs and national operators. Through the UN Durable Solutions Initiative, UNMAS Iraq contributed to the safe and voluntary returns of IDPs and supported local livelihood activities by clearing residential and agricultural areas.

To ensure a sustainable mine action, the response was delivered mainly through a focused EHM strategy, allowing for effective survey and clearance efforts reinforced with extensive EORE efforts to raise the community awareness of explosive threats through life-saving messages. The strategy was implemented in parallel with technical and advisory support provided to relevant GoI mine NMAAs and stakeholders to enhance and increase the overall EHM response capacity.

After the defeat of ISIL in 2017, Iraq has shifted from emergency phase to development. With its rich natural resources, Iraq is considered as a middle-income country, meaning the country is now better prepared to address mine action needs gradually and autonomously. With this in mind, the UNMAS Iraq strategy for 2023 was focused on supporting the GoI to effectively prioritize tasks increasingly implemented by national actors. In parallel, UNMAS Iraq enhanced the capacity development of national mine action operators to implement sustainable and localized humanitarian mine action response. In addition, UNMAS

Iraq continued to deliver and disseminate lifesaving messages to affected communities in the areas liberated from ISIL, to enable at-risk communities to mitigate the threat of EO through adopting safe behaviours.

In December 2023, UNMAS Iraq successfully concluded the 'Partnership Model' where INGOs worked together with NGOs to develop the capacity of the NNGOs and generate independent and sustainable national operational organizations accredited to respond to the threats from EO. In 2023, two NNGOs were accredited for clearance of EO and to operate autonomously.











In 2023, UNMAS Iraq continued to update and review the National Mine Action Standards (NMAAS), which are the national regulations that govern mine action activities in Iraq, for the Directorate for Mine Action (DMA) to better control and manage mine action activities in line with the most recent international standards and norms. UNMAS Iraq also advocated within DMA for the allocation of state budget funding for national partners.

Through 2024 and onward, UNMAS Iraq prioritizes the following activities:

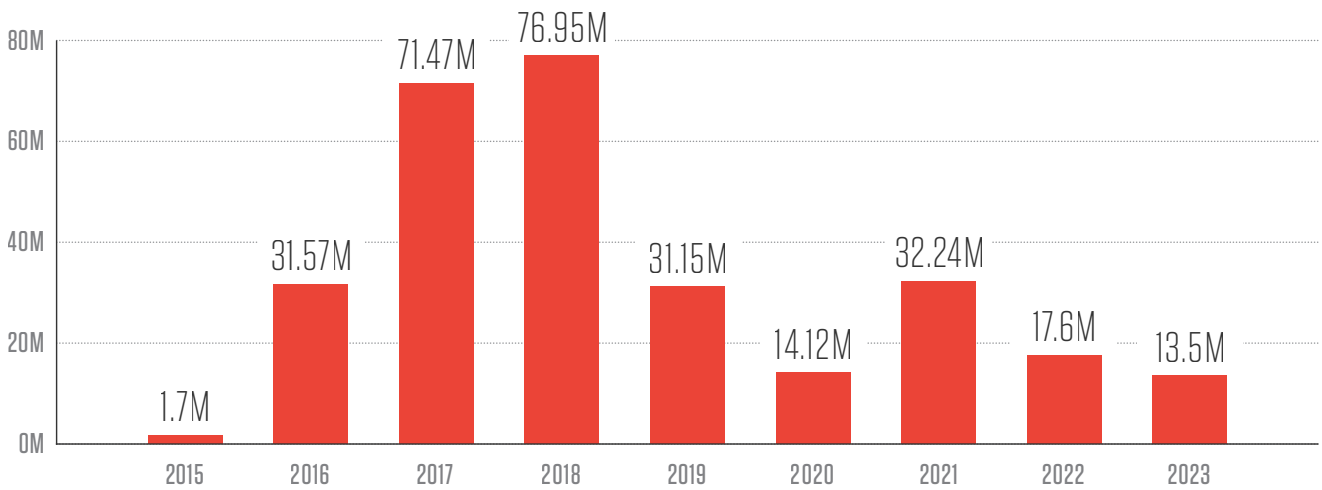
- » Technical and advisory support to the **NMAAS**; and,
- » Capacity development of national operators through the 'Direct Grant Model.'

Strategic Pillar / Donors 2023

PILLAR SUPPORT BY DONOR

	EXPLOSIVE HAZARD MANAGEMENT	EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISK EDUCATION	TECHNICAL SUPPORT
		Belgium	
	Canada		
		Denmark	
		Estonia	
	France		
	Germany		
		Italy	
		New Zealand	
		Slovakia	
		Sweden	

FUNDS SECURED PER YEAR SINCE INCEPTION



TECHNICAL SUPPORT (TS)

In 2023, UNMAS continued to support the national-led mine action response and assisted GoI NMAAs in increasing the national mine action capacity.

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Furthermore, UNMAS Iraq continued to provide strategic and technical advice on numerous mine action-related matters, including improved coordination of the mine action sector, strengthened prioritization systems, review and update of the Iraqi NMAS, and advocating for increased and sustained state budget funding for Humanitarian Mine Action organizations and operations. In 2023 four NMAS review roundtable workshops were convened.

UNMAS Iraq also provided a broad range of operationally focused mine action courses for the MoI, and Ministry of Defence (MOD) including Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Improvised Explosive Device Disposal (IEDD), Explosive Hazard First Responder (EHFR), Post Blast Scene Investigation courses, Geographic Information System (GIS), Global Positioning System (GPS), and Non-Technical Survey (NTS) training supported with Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV). All training courses were closely monitored by the UNMAS Iraq Train-the-Trainers (T3) teams. T3 courses were run to enhance the MoI instructor pool and ensure the MoI worked towards self-sufficiency of course delivery.

Since the start of 2023, the UNMAS Iraq T3 programme has trained 342 MoI officers, of which 27 were women.

The EHFR training course focuses on training officers to take charge of an incident involving EO or IEDs, protecting the public, and securing the area until the specialist response units arrive. The course teaches awareness of the potential risks that can be encountered, the importance of establishing a safety cordon, and how to identify important objects that may prove to be crucial evidence and that should not be disturbed.

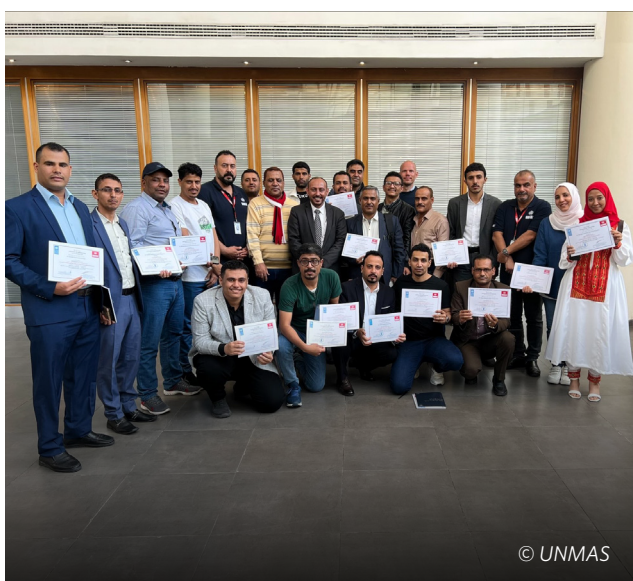


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The photo above shows UNMAS Iraq TS personnel preparing for a newly introduced UAV training course. This training has helped the NMAAs to further grasp how modern technology can assist during EHM operations.

The MoI instructors now deliver most of the training courses; however, mentoring is still conducted by the UNMAS Iraq T3 teams, when required, to enable the MoI staff to fully explain and demonstrate the skills and principles required.

The GIS training was developed to provide the students with essential skills in data analysis, mapping, and spatial analysis. GIS knowledge is required for accurate data management and informed decision-making during EHM operations. The



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training highlighted the importance of GIS proficiency for Mol officers. **As a result of this training, 11 Mol officers successfully completed the GIS course in 2023** and are now able to use their skills in their daily work.

The UNMAS Iraq TS Coordinator assisted the Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency (IKMAA) and Mine Advisory Group

(MAG) during the practical assessment of thermite lances for burning EO. These thermite lances have been specifically designed to destroy thin-cased steel and plastic-cased ordnance and to potentially be used as an effective alternative, when explosive use is not permitted.



In support of the Mol EOD/IEDD teams, UNMAS Iraq provided the following:

- 2 EOD/IEDD courses** to 154 officers (♂)

- 1 EOD/IEDD T3 course** to 17 officers (♂)

- 4 EHFR courses** to 29 officers (11 ♂ 18 ♀)

- 3 UAV courses** to 49 officers (♂)

- 3 GPS courses** to 53 officers (♂)

- 1 T3/GPS course** to 15 officers (♂)

- 1 PBI course** to 24 officers (♂)

- 1 GIS course** to 11 officers (1 ♂ 10 ♀) from the Mol

EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISK EDUCATION (EORE)

In 2023, UNMAS Iraq continued to deliver life-saving messages to EO-affected communities.



UNMAS Iraq delivered EORE sessions for **25,601 people (3,376 women, 9,728 girls, 11,080 boys, 1,417 men)** in the Ninewa and Basra governorates.

In Ninewa, UNMAS Iraq continued to deliver direct and indirect EORE activities in the prioritized areas in Mosul, Sinjar, and Tel Afar districts, as well as the Ninewa plains. Indirect activities included distributing EORE materials with tailored messages for children and adults by installing billboards at strategic points with messages adapted to the age and local context, culture, and in relevant languages.

During the year, UNMAS Iraq also undertook a Social, Behavioural Change Communication study (SBCC) to better understand how to adapt EORE messaging to achieve change in behaviours, from unsafe to safe actions. EORE messaging must be adapted so that they are communicated in such a way that they contribute to behaviour change amongst at-risk populations.

In June, the first phase of the SBCC study was undertaken. It was clear from the outset that there was a lack of coordination across the EORE sector, with several organisations already having identified SBCC methodology

and having implemented activities specifically designed to engage their target audience and effect change. With this in mind, the outputs required from the second phase of the study, were amended and an EORE working group was established to discuss, amend, and distribute current SBCC-enabled EORE materials throughout the sector. The second phase consisted of detailed interviews with EORE practitioners and managers and delivered recommendations through workshops in Erbil. The final report for phase 2 will be completed and shared in early 2024.



Furthermore, **UNMAS Iraq also provided EORE sessions for 130 cash-for-work workers (48 of whom were women) employed** by various UN agencies in Iraq, as well as employees of NGOs, engaging in high-risk activities. By targeting these individuals, UNMAS Iraq enabled a multiplier effect, reducing risk to the workers themselves and enabling them to safely contribute to the recovery of the communities in the most need of assistance.

In November 2023, one of the long-term goals of the **UNMAS Iraq EORE initiative** was achieved when the **Ministry of Education (MoE)** endorsed the inclusion of **EORE messaging in the Iraq school curriculum** ranging from primary to secondary level for the academic year 2023-2024 and beyond. The achievement comes after

dedicated efforts of the UNMAS Iraq EORE section over the previous years and was achieved in collaboration with the DMA and MoE. This initiative ensures that students ranging from primary to secondary level will receive valuable lessons on how to recognize and avoid the risks of explosive ordnance.



EXPLOSIVE HAZARD MANAGEMENT (EHM)

The final 12 months of these grants were funded to furnish the NNGO with additional management and clearance skills and make them more robust in their ability to compete for funding.

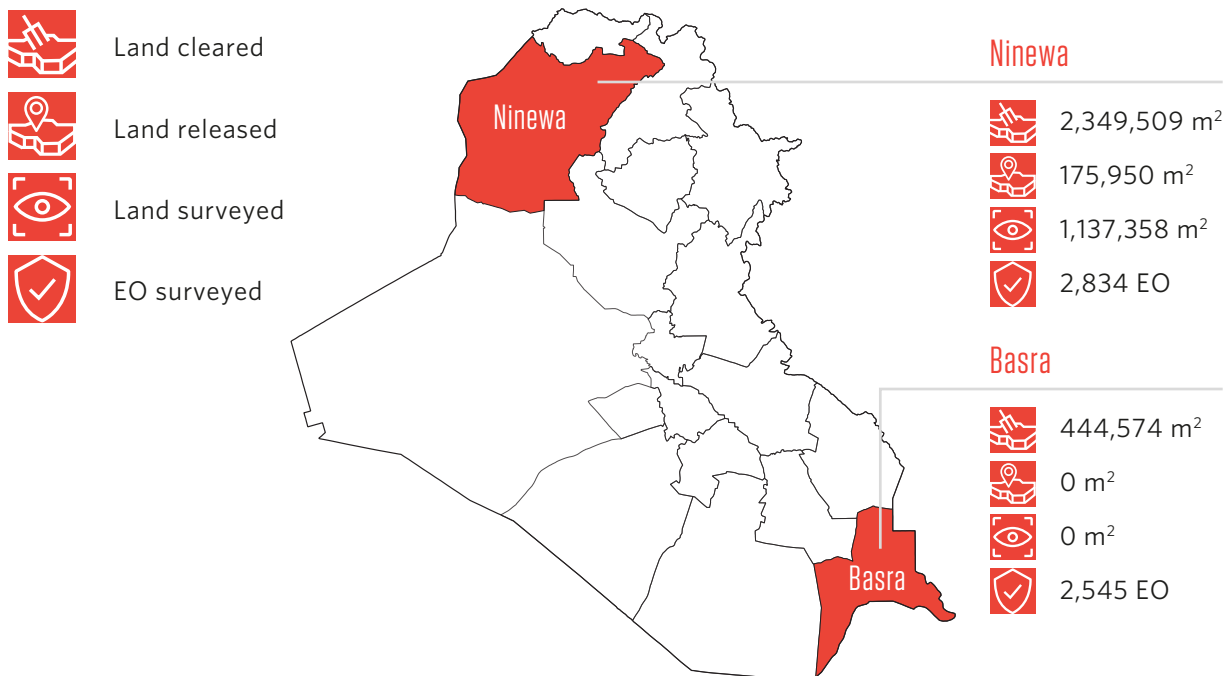
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This was achieved through 2023, and during the end of the year, savings allowed for both grants to be awarded a one-month extension within the budgets originally allocated.

In 2023, EHM also oversaw post-ISIL Residential Area Clearance (RAC) in Sinjar and post-ISIL clearance in Mosul. These operations predominantly dealt with contamination

remaining after the ISIL occupation and the subsequent operations to defeat ISIL. In furtherance, UNMAS Iraq also, delivered clearance of legacy contamination in Basra remaining predominantly from the Iran/Iraq war in the 1980s with some additional contamination from the coalition invasion in 2003.

During 2023, UNMAS Iraq teams continued clearance activities in the governorates of Basra and Ninewa and in doing so, **cleared over 2,794,083 m² of land** and **rendered safe over 5,379 items** of EO in agricultural and residential areas.



Partnership Model Grant Completion

The Partnership Model that has been running since 2020 **achieved its objectives in December 2023 and two NNGOs** were enabled for autonomous operations in Ninewa. Previously, there were no NNGOs accredited or able to undertake IED clearance, despite there being a wealth of suitably trained Iraqi personnel in country. The Partnership Model enabled two NNGOs to grow, supported and mentored by INGOs. The two NNGOs have now achieved accreditation, and the experience necessary, and also have reached a level where they are independently managed and can carry out resource mobilization and receive direct grants. **In 2023, the two NNGOs cleared close to 1.2 million sqm, removed 1068 items of EO and employed 30 women,** representing approximately 30 per cent of the staffing of the NNGOs.



Post ISIL Clearance Activities

In Ninewa, the operations focused on extensive belts of IEDs planted by ISIL in the area east of Mosul towards the main Dohuk-Mosul road and in Tel Kaif districts. Clearance was completed using manual search techniques supported by mechanical clearance assets. Clearance of these IED belts allowed local farmers to once again use the previously contaminated areas for farming. Wheat and potatoes have now been planted in areas previously contaminated. It was possible to see the farmers reintegrating the cleared area into their crop rotation as clearance progressed along the belts of IEDs. **In total over 600,000 sqm were cleared with 1,507 items of EO removed by a team consisting of 26% women, or nine women technical staff.**

In Sinjar, RAC operations continued through to the completion of clearance in the village of Ain Talawi. This large hazard area encompassing the entire village and surrounding farmland was started in 2022. The mixture of rural and urban areas allowed for the continuation of clearance during periods of poor weather as some areas always had safe access. The clearance of the village has now been completed and it is ready for its community to return. As the clearance included the farmland immediately around the village it will also allow the returning villagers a means of income through agriculture. **In total over 570,000 sqm were cleared with 259 items of EO removed by a team consisting of 26% women, or 11 women technical staff.**



Legacy Contamination Clearance

In southern Iraq, the UNMAS Iraq teams in Basra cleared close to two million square meters of land, located between the Shalamcha highway and Al Salehiya main road, close to the Jasem River in the Shatt al-Arab area. The area is heavily contaminated with unexploded ordnance, anti-personnel mines, and anti-tank mines dating back to the Iran/Iraq war of the 1980s. The density of this legacy contamination exceeds that seen following subsequent conflicts within Iraq and despite the age of the mines in the area, they remain functional, which the numerous accidents involving people and animals attest to every year.

Clearance was technically difficult with several layers of mines caused by aerial bombardments during the war. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding operations in the area came to an end in mid-2023 **after having cleared over 444,000 sqm and having removed 2,545 items of EO in operations, which included a workforce comprising 15%, or a total of 8 women in technical roles.**



VISIBILITY

Throughout 2023, UNMAS Iraq continued to profile and advocate for the generous contributions of its multiple donors and partners. The importance of mine action in Iraq was mainstreamed through briefing notes, reports and presentations to the GoI, other UN entities, and the international community, as well as through social media.

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Highlights of 2023

- » [International Mine Action Day](#)
- » [Pehr Interview with Al Jazeera](#)

UNMAS Insight

- » [April-June 2023](#)
- » [July-September 2023](#)
- » [October-December 2023](#)

Press Release

- » [The Government of Denmark continues its support to explosive hazards management activities in Iraq](#)
- » [Estonia and Slovakia Bring Further Support To Humanitarian Mine Action in Iraq](#)
- » [The Government of Sweden extends its support to explosive hazards management activities in Iraq](#)
- » [Belgian Contribution Enables UNMAS Iraq to Continue Supporting the Government and the National Mine Action Operators](#)
- » [The Government of Denmark Provides Additional Contribution to UNMAS in Support of the Mine Action Sector in Iraq](#)



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A Story from UNMAS Iraq

From Fleeing Flames to Building Hope: Rasha's Journey in Post-Conflict Makhmur

“ I can still remember as it was yesterday when my three children and I had to flee from our house at midnight to save our lives from the fire started in our home by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Rasha Al Taweel is 35 years old and from Makhmur, a small town located in the southern part of Erbil governorate, Iraq. The town lies on the Ninewa Plain and is known for its fertile soil. Those who live there work in farming and are raising livestock for a living. The residents of Makhmur lived in peace and harmony. For generations they raised children proud of living there and enjoying the right to live a decent life, until one night in 2014, when ISIL seized control of large swathes of Iraq, including Makhmur, where the peaceful town soon was destroyed, and its population displaced.

In the wake of the conflict and the military operations large areas have been war damaged and contaminated with explosive hazards. The threat from explosive ordnance has hindered people from returning safely and has restricted safe access to land for farming and animal husbandry.

Since 2021, Rasha has been working as a member of one of the Shareteah Humanitarian Organization (SHO) as a member of the Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) team. SHO is one of the UNMAS Iraq Implementing Partner organisations. *“EORE is a fundamental in enabling stable and peaceful communities and giving them the right of living equally and free of explosive ordnance threats.”*, she says.

The job allows her to support her community in learning more about the risks posed from explosive ordnance and, through this

knowledge, prevent them from unsafe behaviours. Behaviours they might consider normal in their daily life, such as scrap collection, picking up strange objects, or treating dangerous objects as if they are fireworks.

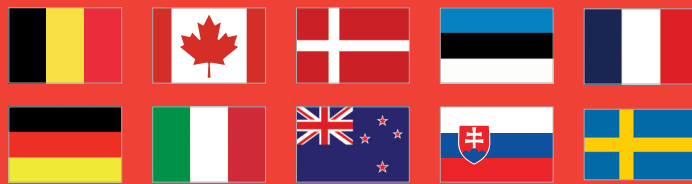
The EORE teams work closely with the clearance teams and are providing them with vital information about possible explosive hazard contamination gathered during the EORE teams close contact with the affected communities.

The EORE teams also provide life-saving messages to at-risk groups living in and/or nearby contaminated communities, particularly children, students, families, and daily workers.

Nowadays, Rasha is a very proud and capable woman, improving herself, supporting her family, and contributing to the rehabilitation of her own city by educating people to protect themselves.



UNMAS in Iraq would like to thank all of its donors who contributed to explosive hazard management, explosive ordnance risk education, and technical support activities in 2023.



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