



The Government of Sweden increases its support to explosive hazards management activities in Iraq

Baghdad, 10 February 2019 – The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) welcomes the contribution of SEK 75 million (approximately USD 8.3 million) from the Government of Sweden on mitigating the threat from explosive hazards in support of enhanced provision, facilitation and enablement of humanitarian and stabilization support.

Approximately 1.8 million people are estimated to be internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq, equating to 18 percent of the Iraqis who live in conflict-affected areas, and more than 5 percent of the overall population. According to an assessment carried out in 2018, on average and across affected areas, 22% of IDPs in camps cite explosive hazards as a main reason for not intending to return to their areas of origin, rising up to 52% in some governorates. In addition, 12% of out-of-camp IDPs cite the same. As for those who do choose to return, do so in potentially unsafe environments contaminated by explosive hazards (*Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment VI led by the Assessment Working Group and facilitated by REACH, September 2018*).

UNMAS Iraq, working in tandem with its implementing partners, continues to maintain a weighted presence in Iraq, especially in the areas liberated from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Through strategic partnerships and engagement of both internal and external stakeholders, and in support of the Government of Iraq and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNMAS has so far cleared over 1,100 sites of critical infrastructure. These include bridges, water plants, power plants, hospitals, schools, etc. that were once the strongholds of ISIL and which were littered with explosive hazards after their defeat.

With this contribution from Sweden, UNMAS will be able to better support communities with explosive hazard management, risk education, and capacity enhancement initiatives in support of the Iraqi government.

The contribution comes in concert with a recent field visit organized for representatives of the Government of Sweden, including the Swedish Ambassador to Iraq Mr. Pontus Melander, to Sinjar and Kocho in the Sinjar District of the Ninewa governorate. During the visit, the delegation gained a first-hand insight on UNMAS planned clearance activities inside the district's most damaged area, with its scale of destruction and contamination continuing to be prime inhibitors for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of IDPs to their homes.

His Excellency Mr. Pontus Melander said: *“As we have seen firsthand, it is painfully clear how explosive hazards prevent humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and the safe return of internally displaced persons. Sweden proudly supports UNMAS’ critical work, as well as the efforts of the Government of Iraq, with explosive hazards management and demining. These efforts are crucial for both the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection of civilians, as well as being a precondition for safe reconstruction and returns.”*

“The severity of explosive hazard contamination in ISIL-affected areas in Iraq cannot be understated. The methods and explosive devices used by ISIL are unlike any we have seen previously. They planted, sometimes very complex improvised explosive devices, across all areas previously under their control. These devices are constituting a threat to returning populations and humanitarian actors, still, and long after ISIL were defeated,” said Pehr Lodhammar, Senior Programme Manager of UNMAS in Iraq. *“This new funding from Sweden will go a long way in ensuring that UNMAS can provide the support needed to ensure the safe return of IDPs to their communities.”*

Contact

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