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Mine Awareness in Iraq

Following the U.S.-led war in Iraq, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are saving lives by doing what they can to raise awareness about the country's serious landmine/UXO problem.

by Kristina Davis, MAIC

Introduction

Due to the massive amounts of mines and UXO littering post-war Iraq, the country has arguably become one of the most dangerous places in the world. The main problem areas are around Iraq's borders and military bases, where unfortunately, many local villages are located as well. Many organizations are well aware of the landmine problems facing the Iraqi citizens and are currently implementing thorough mine education programs throughout the region.

Mine Awareness Programs

Handicap International (HI)

While it is difficult to ascertain exact numbers of landmine victims, the HI team reports landmine and UXO accidents occur at the rate of "several times a day in Baghdad and more than a dozen a day in the rest of the country." Hoping to spread awareness, HI has collaborated with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2003 to print out at least 200,000 leaflets as their first step in educating the Iraqi community about the dangers of landmines. In order to present the messages in a way that would be understood by all, the images were tested on a sample of the Iraqi refugees currently in Jordan—coming from different regions of Iraq and Kurdistan and composed of men, women and children, both Muslim and Christian. Two main areas have been targeted for distribution thus far: northern Iraq, in collaboration with the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), and southern Iraq, in collaboration with UNICEF in Basra. Baghdad will also be targeted with 100,000 leaflets for distribution as certain areas of the city are also polluted with mines and UXO. HI will use the community network, including mosques, the Red Crescent Society and women's organizations to facilitate the distribution of the leaflets.

The Data Coordination Unit (DCU) of the MAG has a database that holds records of more than 3,782 minefields in the most heavily contaminated areas of Iraq. MAG's mine awareness program seeks to minimize the risk of mine encounters among local populations by implementing various programs suited to different types of people. From 1997 to June 2003, MAG trained over 3,000 teachers and school supervisors and was the first NGO to implement "child-to-child" techniques to mine action, including MRE. In addition to dealing with major shortages in food, medical care and medical care, NGOs are working hard to continue the provision of aid amidst political instability and civil turmoil. Looting and criminal gangs frequently disturb the delivery of essential supplies to hospitals and civilians in various parts of the country. The following is a short description of what some established NGOs and the United Nations are doing to help victims in Iraq.

The United Nations

The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has managed the northern Iraq Mine Action Program and continues to work there.

Victim Assistance in Iraq

Large numbers of UXO and mines left behind from the continuing conflict in Iraq have resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of victims. This article was written while the Coalition forces were still engaged in conventional combat prior to the fall of Saddam Hussein.

by Kimberly Kim, MAIC

Toward the end of 2002, civilian landmine casualties rates in Iraq were believed to be about 32 per month. Since conflict began in March of 2003, however, no one knows for certain exactly how many Iraqui civilians have been injured or killed. The number of civilian victims is very high but cannot be counted accurately due to the Civil War in Iraq and newly liberated areas in southern and central Iraq. The purpose of this assessment is to estimate the number of victims from conflict and to find a means of victim referral to special EMERGENCY surgical centers in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah.

Since the conflict started in March, UNOPS estimates that the average number of victims per month in 2003 increased to an estimated 58 per month. From March 18-May 31, 2003, more than 2,000 victims were referred to two EMERGENCY satellite posts in Kirkuk and Umm Qasr.

The UNOPS victim assistance program in Northern Iraq is currently fully functional and operational. It was unaffected by recent looting because of its northern location. Its goal for the next few months is to continue the implementation of the first aid efforts and raise funds for the program once the evacuation of the city is completed. A "user-friendly" victim assistance program is available in northern Iraq, and to expand the program to central and southern Iraq.

In April 2000, UNOPS began a program to provide victim assistance services to northern Iraq and parts of southern and central Iraq. Their vision is to provide general care, to re-integrate victims into society and to establish a sustainable victim assistance capacity. Through this program and with the cooperation of an International NGO named EMERGENCY, UNOPS works from a network of medical facilities that are staffed from three main limbo centers in Dobuk, Dukha and Halbijha. The three main centers fit, produce, and maintain prostheses and orthoses for victims in the three northern governorates. They also provide outreach services via seven outreach centers in inner areas of re habilitation and vocational training centers in Dukha and prospectively in Dobuk. As a part of this network, EMERGENCY runs 21 first aid posts, two surgical centers, and two Centers for Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration.

Over 60 percent of the employees working in these rehabilitation centers are handicap. In 2002, the network provided services to over 800 new patients, produced over 1,200 prostheses and orthoses, provided over 5,000 psychotherapy services to patients, and had over 20,000 outpatient visits. All services also regularly provided transportation as required. One important part of the network, the Emergency Surgical Hospital for Civilian Victims (ESCHV), is currently implementing rehabilitation and vocational training services in some of the most heavily bombarded and Dukha prosthetic limb centers. It also provides medical care services at disabled centers and psychological treatments at sites in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah. The UNOPS is also working to include standardized administrative processes, develop standard databases, consolidate training and technology at all funded centers, increase production levels to meet demand, assess requirements for new services and establish a means of coordination with local authorities. They have been working in cooperation with other UN agencies, NGOs, local authorities and community groups to identify needs and services gaps, find solutions, and coordinate needs.

Handicap International

The HI staff in Iraq has encountered several problems providing aid to victims during this conflict. Working in and around Baghdad, HI teams have had difficulties providing medical supplies, water,
Putting Sea Mammals to Work: Dolphins Help Coalition Forces in Iraq

In the first month after arriving in Iraq, the dolphin teams achieved a number of successes, including unofficial clearance of 913 nautical miles of water, investigation of 237 objects, and recovery and/or destruction of over 100 mines.

by Nicole Kreger, MAIC

Dolphins Helping Out in Iraq

Iraqi forces laid sea mines in Umm Qasr, Iraq's only deep-water port, as they withdrew from the area in late March. Thus, before humanitarian aid ships could enter, the area had to be cleared of sea mines. This mission marked the first time the NMMP dolphins were used in a combat environment. Military personnel from the United States, Australia and Britain—including 50 divers with sophisticated underwater equipment—spent four days clearing the port with the help of the dolphin teams.

Several dolphins in all helped out in the region: Tacoma and Makai arrived first, and they were later joined by Jef and Kahili, two males, and Kona and Punani, both females. In more hours, the team had cleared a path for the Sir Galahad, a humanitarian aid ship. After clearing a 50-mile shipping lane in the port, the teams began clearing hazardous explosives from a wider area. The dolphin teams were also being employed to help clear the Khawar Abdullah waterway, which connects Umm Qasr to the Gulf.

The dolphins were well taken care of during their deployment; veterinarians and handlers monitored their health carefully. The group in Iraq adapted fairly well, probably because the Gulf is similar to their normal environment. One dolphin, Tacoma, left the area for about 48 hours, and some were worried he was gone for good. He did return, however; as their trainer, Aviation Ordnanceman First Class Dee Jennings, says, "They take day trips. They're not missing. We do have tracking devices on them, but we don't worry about it. They always come home."

References
2. For more information, see the ICRC website at http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/ infoaffair/iraq/iraq/final/iraq/SpecialDocuments.

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operations in both the north and south of the country, while coordination with military and civil bodies has been strong and beneficial. MAG is still the only mineaction agency fully operational in former G01-held areas of Iraq and will continue to increase in area of work into central Iraq as security allows.

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(MAP) since 1997, UNOPS was able to expedite and fine-tune mine awareness programs by developing a mine action database by the year 2000. Between December 2000 and June 2002, the MAP provided mine awareness education to over 143,000 beneficiaries.

Meanwhile, UNICEF has launched an impressive MRE campaign in Iraq as well. In an effort to further target children, UNICEF has aired television campaigns to be sure children are educated and aware of the dangers they face. UNICEF is trying to get the Iraqi children back in school as quickly as possible in order to both increase MRE and to keep them off