



## Small-arms and Light-weapons Risk Education in Iraq

by Meredith Wotten and Kirsty Jenatsch [ MAG Iraq ]

*MAG (Mines Advisory Group) has one of Iraq's most established mine-risk education programs. In 2007, MAG identified a regional need to warn people, particularly children, about the risk of handling guns and other weapons. Drawing on more than 16 years of experience and skill in MRE delivery, MAG aimed to adapt existing methodologies and successfully expand the MRE program to include small-arms and light-weapons risks.*

In 2009, MAG sought to expand small-arms/light-weapons risk education to central and southern Iraq, an area of need beyond the reach of MAG's current operating area. In order to undertake this expansion, local partnerships were integral as MAG presently only works in the relatively safe areas in northern Iraq. MAG developed partnerships with funding from Stichting Vluchteling in 2008 in a project that enabled two Iraqi organizations, Al Ghad in Kirkuk and Work for Peace in Diyala, to conduct effective MRE and contamination assessment to assist vulnerable communities, internally displaced persons and returnees. Further support from UNICEF in 2009 meant that MAG could capitalize on these partnership successes to implement the SA/LW risk-education project.



As part of this project, MAG identified several Baghdad organizations to participate in a SA/LW risk-education workshop, which was conducted in Sulimaniyah with participants from Baghdad, Basra, Diyala and Kirkuk governorates. Participants included the Iraqi Mine and UXO Clearance Organization, Kirkuk Youth Centre and Khanaqin Youth Centre, and Hadea for Human Rights and Iraqi Society Development. In addition, the Humanitarian Women and Family Organisation and the Iraqi Civil Society Programme— organizations based in Basra—were invited to participate. Representatives from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and the General Directorate for Mine Action also participated in the workshop.

The workshop sessions focused on the development of risk-education capacity in the partner organizations and youth centers. It gave participants the opportunity to identify and agree on the key stakeholders in the project, develop appropriate messages, and design and create sample materials. Coordination with local authorities was discussed, and participants planned strategies for their respective governorates.

### Target-group Identification

In order to work effectively and efficiently in Kirkuk and Diyala,

further information regarding SA/LW issues and accidents in these areas was needed. Surveys conducted during the initial phase showed that nearly all the children who participated had accessible guns and other weapons in their houses. The Diyala and Kirkuk police confirmed this data, estimating that 95 percent of households in the area had SA/LW. These guns and weapons were rarely secured, even in households with small children. While countrywide accidental gun death and injury statistics were not readily available, the Kirkuk Provincial Department of Health recorded 313 deaths and 975 injuries as a result of accidental gunfire in 2008.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the broad impact SA/LW has on children, parents and communities, children were identified as the key stakeholders in the project. Messages to parents focused primarily on keeping children away from weapons—for example, encouraging safe storage and warning against cleaning weapons around family members. Messages to children warned of the danger of playing with weapons, while communications with community leaders reinforced the importance of the messages for community safety.

During the delivery of SA/LW education program, teams gathered information about previous accidents that had occurred in Kirkuk and Diyala. Many took place in the home, injuring family and friends of those playing with or handling weapons. When teams from Work for Peace deployed to Diyala's Sheerq village, they met with the family of a child who lost his life when one of his friends was playing with a weapon. The boys were both nine years old when the accident happened in 2005. One boy was killed immediately, and his friend was badly injured. In February 2010, Al Ghad teams met with another family—a policeman's wife and their three children in Masker village, Kirkuk. The woman had accidentally shot and killed her husband when she was cleaning his AK-47 rifle. The accident had taken place earlier in the month. In May 2010, Al Ghad teams met with an 18-year-old farmer from Kirkuk's Hayfa village. Similarly, he had killed his 16-year-old friend and injured himself while cleaning an AK-47.

**Risk-education Team Deployment**

Following MAG's training, five Community Liaison teams from Al Ghad and Work for Peace deployed, after initial preparations and work-plan development, to deliver risk education and train primary school teachers and religious leaders. Work plans for risk-education delivery were developed for target areas where teachers and community leaders had already expressed an interest, and were based on the location of SA/LW-related accidents reported to MAG or its partner organizations.

In addition to the risk-education programs, MAG and national partners implemented a poster competition in coordination with youth centers from Kirkuk and Diyala. Eight youth centers participated in the competition that aimed to develop SA/LW risk-education posters and leaflets for partner teams to use and distribute. The top three posters that most effectively communicated SA/LW-risk messages were chosen and used to design leaflets targeted for children and adults.

Throughout April, May and June 2010, Al Ghad and Work for Peace deployed five teams to 23 different villages in Kirkuk and Diyala governorates to deliver sessions and train primary



The winning posters from the risk-education competition held in Kirkuk and Diyala youth centers (Iraq).  
Photos courtesy of Zana Kaka/MAG.



Working in partnership with NGO Al Ghad, MAG trained teams to present mine-risk education and armed-violence reduction messages to vulnerable communities across Iraq. The project was funded by UNICEF.  
 Photo courtesy of Sean Sutton/MAG.

school teachers and religious leaders. In June, Al Ghad provided risk education for 600 summer-camp children between the ages of 13 and 17. The youngsters were from six different intermediate and secondary schools.

In total, the teams delivered 136 sessions to 12,280 individuals and distributed 8,380 materials including leaflets, posters and booklets. In total, 216 school teachers from 60 different primary schools (35 in Kirkuk and 25 in Diyala) were trained. Eighty-six community leaders, including religious leaders and village leaders, were also trained. Please see Table 1 below for the beneficiaries' age and gender breakdowns.

MAG Iraq's significant support from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, General Directorate for Mine Action and provisional educational departments in Sulimaniyah, Kirkuk and Diyala enabled MAG to successfully implement the project. Similar ministerial and governmental support will also facilitate the implementation of future SA/LW risk-education projects in the

Kurdistan Regional Government and the rest of Iraq. MAG worked closely with the Deputy Director SA/LW in the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, Major Mansour, throughout the project to update him on the project's successes and to discuss future steps. Coordination with Major Mansour ensured that SA/LW risk-education activities were integrated with the Iraqi government's plans for implementing the U.N. Programme of Action on SA/LW. The project's continued support will enable all project partners, in particular the Basra ones, to implement future risk-education activities with the government's support.

Beneficiaries	Adults		Children	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
SALW risk education sessions	3,548	3,152	3,018	2,562
Teachers trained	121	95		

(Click image to enlarge)  
 Table 1: Breakdown of Project Beneficiaries.

**Conclusion**

The SA/LW risk education project has great potential for expansion and replication in other parts of Iraq. To date, MAG remains the only organization conducting SA/LW risk-education in Iraq.

Should suitable funding become available, the MAG Iraq program would continue to work closely with the Ministry of Interior to ensure work in this area is aligned with local priorities and legal frameworks. A Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices survey<sup>2</sup> on SA/LW at this stage would be a useful tool to verify informal reports of how accidents occur, which would ensure that as more accident information becomes available, risk-education messages are targeted to address the most common causes of SA/LW-related accidents. The delivery mechanisms of these messages could also be further developed. Radio and television may be appropriate media to reinforce face-to-face risk-education delivery and reach a wide audience. Poster competitions like the one MAG conducted could expand to reach a wider group. MAG will continue deploying teams to deliver integrated SA/LW and mine-risk education in the Kurdistan Regional Government and accessible areas in the center of Iraq as part of its ongoing humanitarian mine-action programming. ↴

**Biography**



**Meredith Wotten** was, until recently, the Project Manager for MAG Iraq, managing relationships with local partner organizations. She previously worked for Mines Action Canada, Landmine Survivors Network and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

**Kirsty Jenatsch** is the Programme Officer for MAG Iraq. Jenatsch has worked previously with refugees and vulnerable migrants in Australia, Bangladesh and Vietnam, as well as with young landmine victims in Cambodia.



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### Endnotes

1. These statistics were provided to MAG in an official letter from the Kirkuk Provincial Department of Health in May 2008 and are available on request.
2. A KAP survey is a representative study of a specific population to collect information on what is known, believed and done in relation to a particular topic, in this case, what is known, believed and done in relation to small arms and light weapons in the surveyed areas of Iraq.



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