

Press release: UK aid removing Daesh explosives and helping Iraqis return home

More than a million Iraqis whose lives have been devastated by Daesh safely returned home in 2018, made possible in part thanks to a huge UK aid funded mine clearance mission.

The Department for International Development (DFID) has today (Saturday 5 January) announced further support to clear explosives from schools, hospitals and roads in Iraq, eradicating one of the lasting impacts of Daesh's reign of terror across the country.

Thousands of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) continue to threaten the lives of Iraqi men, women and children trying to rebuild their lives after the conflict and the UK's vital work will help even more people to return to normality without continued risk to their lives.

With the support of UK aid, approximately 16,500 explosives, 800 suicide belts and a staggering 2,000 deadly explosives traps were cleared in Iraq last year.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

Daesh's sickening use of explosive traps continue to threaten children in their schools, mothers in hospitals and thousands of innocent people trying to return to a normal life.

Thanks to this UK aid funded work, people can return to work, children can go back to school and lives are slowly being rebuilt.

The UK is a world leader in demining. I believe the UK public supports this work and can very clearly see its impact, in changing and saving lives.

This new funding will support projects across the country's Sinjar Province, an area with a historically large population of Yezidis who have been displaced by Daesh in their thousands, and one of the areas worst impacted by Daesh occupation.

UK aid will support six explosive clearance teams who will be deployed across the region making schools, hospitals and critical infrastructure safe from suspected explosive.

There is more work to do with 1.8 million people still displaced, many living in camps across the country. For many of them deadly explosives, rigged, booby-trapped and hidden on an industrial scale mean that they are unable to return to their homes.

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has called the use of explosive traps a Daesh strategy to 'win on the cheap', continuing to devastate Iraq even as the Iraqi people try to rebuild.

UK aid funded explosive clearance teams have found:

- A hospital used as Daesh's HQ in Mosul where 3,500 explosive hazards, including hand grenades and missiles, had to be secured;
- A school in Fallujah rigged with 13 IEDs, which could have seriously injured or killed the 450 children attending the school;
- The British-built 'New Bridge' in Fallujah was rigged with 44 IEDs and 400 kilograms of explosives, blocking the only connection to Baghdad – preventing businesses from operating;
- A school in West Mosul which was used as a bomb factory, where 1,500 explosives, including 15 suicide belts, were found and secured.

UK aid is funding education experts to teach children and adults on how to keep safe from undiscovered explosives and what to do if they see a suspected device. Last year, DFID's support educated more than 400,000 people on the risks. This education may save their lives.

With hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq still in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, the UK has supported more than 400,000 people with food and provided life-saving healthcare services to over four million people since 2014.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- The additional support announced by DFID today is £5 million which will go to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS). This is in addition to ongoing UK aid support for explosive clearance efforts in Iraq.
- In total, the UK has contributed £24.9 million to demining projects in Iraq since 2015, with £14.2 million from the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund and £10.7 million from DFID.
- Between 2016 and 2018, UK support contributed to a total of 663 infrastructure sites being cleared from explosive hazards, and 4.4 million square metres of land made safe. Between January and March 2018 alone, UK aid supported enabled the opening of 41 key installations such as the British built Iron and Al Karmah bridges in Fallujah.
- In April 2017, DFID committed to triple global spend on mine action to £100 million over three years. Our work is focused on some of the most heavily contaminated countries in the world, including Iraq.
- Using DFID funding, UNMAS will also support the national demining authority in Iraq to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to effectively regulate, coordinate and manage mine clearance.
- UK aid is providing this funding to UNMAS as part of an effort to

stabilise Iraq, provide humanitarian support to those in desperate need, and assist the return of displaced people to areas previously under Daesh occupation.

- In total, the UK has provided over £100 million to stabilisation efforts in Iraq since 2015, which includes: securing liberated areas, clearing Daesh-laid explosives, supporting the renovation of water facilities, power networks, clinics and schools and supporting communities who lived under Daesh occupation.
- To support stability in Iraq and support it in becoming a democratic, political and economic partner of the international community in the long-term, the UK backs Iraqi-led political and economic reforms, commercial links between Iraq and UK as well as a long-term military security commitment between Iraq, the Coalition partners and NATO.

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