



ISSUE BRIEF

LANDMINE EMERGENCY

**Twenty years on from the Ottawa Treaty
the world is facing a new humanitarian crisis**

January 2017



SUMMARY

Twenty years on from the historic Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty, the world is facing a new landmine emergency. The regional conflict in Iraq and Syria has resulted in a scale of contamination not seen for decades.

Global deaths and injuries from landmines hit a ten-year high in 2015 – a staggering 75% increase on those recorded in 2014. This trend is set to continue unless urgent action is taken and more funding provided to respond to this new emergency, as well as to legacy contamination from the latter part of the 20th Century.

Every day in Iraq and Syria, people are losing lives, limbs and livelihoods from indiscriminate weapons that have no place in modern warfare. The legacy of the treaty must mean more than this: the world must respond and say, once again, that use of these weapons is not acceptable. Action must be taken to remove these indiscriminate killers once and for all.

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WHAT IS A LANDMINE?

An anti-personnel mine is an explosive munition that is deployed to explode by the presence, proximity or contact of a person and which is placed under, on or near the ground.

Anti-personnel mines are 'dumb' weapons, meaning they cannot tell the difference between a soldier and a civilian and they keep functioning long after a conflict has ended.



Above: Landmines cleared by MAG in Mosul and awaiting destruction.

Cover photo: Communities fleeing the fighting in Mosul arriving at a camp for internally displaced persons.

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NORTHERN IRAQ: Clearance of mines is a priority for the survival of people who have recently returned to areas close to Mosul.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1990s, an estimated 26,000 people a year were victims of landmines. They were either killed or permanently maimed, with life-changing implications for those in some of the world's poorest countries.

Landmines were not a new phenomenon to warfare, but there was a significant increase in their production and use in internal, regional and international conflicts in the last quarter of the 20th Century. Their proliferation was fuelled by the low cost and ease of production, with some 600 different types in circulation by the 1990s.

Some of the most heavily affected countries at the time were Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Iraq, Mozambique, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, with dozens more also contaminated.

In all these countries, regardless of the actual level of the contamination, landmines created fear and denied communities the opportunity to return to their homes and rebuild their livelihoods.

The increased use of landmines left a deadly legacy, but the crisis bore a valuable fruit.

In the face of this indiscriminate slaughter, governments and civil society were forced to acknowledge civilians as a disproportionate number of war-related casualties.

Twenty years ago, a historic treaty banning anti-personnel landmines was negotiated and signed by 122 nations in Ottawa.¹ It was unique for being the first disarmament treaty to have humanitarian concerns at its centre. Recognising this, the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, stated that the treaty was 'a landmark step in the history of disarmament' and 'a historic victory for the weak and vulnerable of our world'.

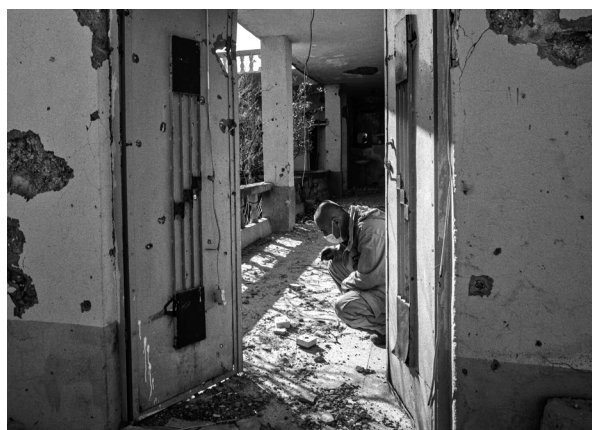
Much progress has been made since 1997, with 27 countries and one territory declaring themselves mine free. However, a new landmine emergency is now unfolding. This unacceptable and stigmatised weapon has emerged as a weapon of choice for Da'esh in the Middle East, with devastating consequences.

¹ The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty is one of the world's most successful treaties. Also known as the Ottawa Treaty, it has 162 States Parties to date. Anti-personnel landmines are among the most stigmatised weapons in the world.

THE NEW LANDMINE EMERGENCY

The extensive deployment of landmines in Iraq and Syria is resulting in mine contamination on a scale not seen for decades, exacerbating an already complex humanitarian emergency.

In 2015, 6,461 people were reportedly killed or injured by landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) – a 75% increase on the reported casualty rates in 2014. The true toll of such weapons – largely in use in Iraq and Syria, but also in Yemen and the Ukraine – is likely to be significantly higher than the official figures suggest, and will only be fully documented as access is gained to contaminated and contested areas.



NORTHERN IRAQ: A MAG demining supervisor checks a building for booby-traps.

Landmine clearance activities currently taking place in areas formerly occupied by Da'esh are revealing contamination on a scale not seen since the early 1990s, when the horror of these devices gave the world a call to action. Since September 2015, the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has cleared over 11,000 newly laid landmines in Iraq and Syria, the majority of these in the last six months in areas previously occupied by Da'esh.

Iraq, already among the most landmine-contaminated countries as a result of previous conflicts, now looks set to take an unenviable first place on this list. Meanwhile, indications from clearance activities in Syria – which before the current conflict had minimal contamination – suggest that this troubled country will now be catapulted to a much higher position on the roll call of highly contaminated states.

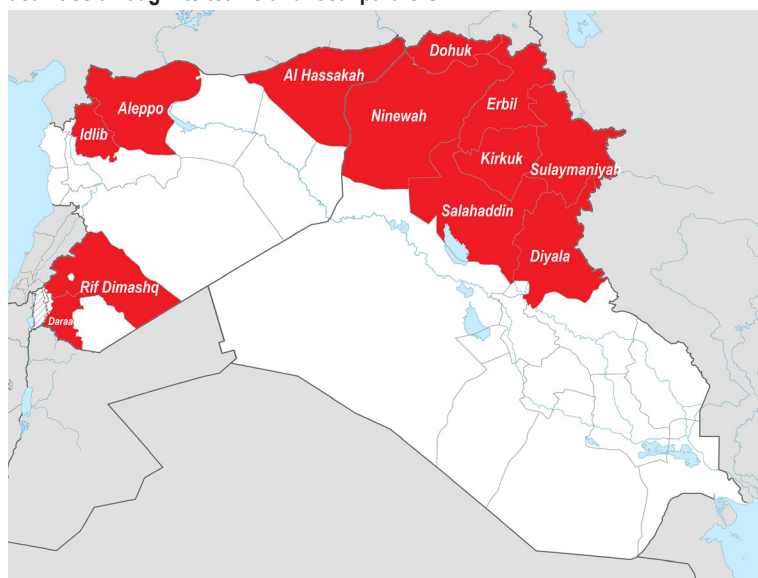
Da'esh's Deadly Production Line

It is widely acknowledged that the Da'esh insurgency in the Middle East is one of the most brutal in the world and that their actions have created a vast humanitarian crisis. Millions of people have been uprooted from their homes across both Iraq and Syria and are in huge need of protection and assistance. What is less well known is the deadly use to which Da'esh has been putting improvised landmines and booby-traps in and around towns, villages and homes.

Da'esh has been producing and deploying landmines on an industrial scale. They are the predominant type of deadly device that MAG responds to in areas where the active hostilities have ceased, from Ninewa and Diyala Governorates in Iraq to Al Hasaka and Al Raqqa in Syria.

The landmines are shocking not just because of the volume in which they are being found but also because of their impact. These improvised landmines are sensitive enough to be triggered by a child but powerful enough to disable a tank. For many civilians, whether they are fleeing current hostilities or looking to return home once their villages have been retaken, clearance of landmines is a vital priority for survival.

Governorates in Iraq and Syria where MAG is implementing activities through its teams and local partners:





IMPROVISED LANDMINES

The landmines used by Da'esh are not made in formal munitions factory but are locally designed and manufactured on a systematic and industrial scale. Landmines are defined by their method of activation not by how, where or by whom they were made. The anti-personnel landmines used by Da'esh are banned under the Ottawa Treaty in the same way as any other.

Use of improvised or artisanal landmines is not a new phenomenon. MAG and other humanitarian NGOs have been responding to them in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Colombia and elsewhere for almost three decades.

Official Assessments of the Threat

It is impossible to estimate accurately the number of mines that have been laid across Iraq and Syria over the last few years. What is clear from the evidence on the ground is that the contamination is immense and may even be worse than that witnessed in the 1990s.

The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated in its 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan for Iraq that nearly all areas retaken from Da'esh require clearance of explosive devices, to make it safe for returnees. This threat is further emphasised in relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.

Security Council Resolution 2299 for example, emphasises the importance of stabilisation efforts in areas in Iraq liberated from Da'esh

and encourages the Government of Iraq and its partners to accelerate such clearance efforts in order to create conditions for the safe return of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). It also encourages member states to continue to support these efforts. Security Council Resolution 2332 also states the Council's grave concern over the indiscriminate use of such weapons against civilians in Syria by all parties to the conflict, including government forces.

MAG'S RESPONSE

MAG has been responding to the new landmine emergency in the Middle East since mid-2015. With an established programme in Iraq running since 1992, MAG was able to rapidly expand its capacity to conduct emergency clearance in areas retaken from Da'esh in Iraq as well as open up a new base in Syria. Since September 2015, more than 11,000 improvised landmines and other UXO have been cleared, each one a life saved.

MAG currently has more than 90 teams conducting these life-saving clearance activities across northern Iraq and north-east Syria. All teams are recruited from the local community, ensuring the sustainability of the operations, as well as creating employment opportunities in areas that have been devastated by the conflict. With the scale of the task increasing as new areas are retaken from Da'esh, much more funding is required to ensure the humanitarian response keeps pace.



NORTHERN IRAQ: MAG is conducting mine risk education to help vulnerable people stay safe until the danger is cleared.

THE LEGACY LANDMINE ISSUE

Widespread use of landmines in the latter part of the 20th Century created a humanitarian crisis. Their legacy and devastating impact prevails to this day.

In spite of the new and significant threats being faced in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Ukraine, it is important to note that the Ottawa Treaty has in many ways been a huge success. Twenty years on from its agreement, landmines remain one of the most stigmatised weapons in the world, vast numbers of government stockpiles have been destroyed, and production by the majority of the world's arms producers has ceased.¹



BATTAMBANG PROVINCE, CAMBODIA: Maneurm was only able to farm four of her 15 hectares because of the presence of mines. "Before MAG came, we were only able to earn US\$1,400 per year from planting rice and vegetables in the land around the minefields," she said. After the land was made safe, she hoped to earn as much as US\$6,000 from the additional crops.

Twenty-seven countries as well as one area (Taiwan) have been declared mine free since the Treaty entered into force. Since its establishment in 1989 MAG has cleared more than 4.6 million mines and unexploded bombs, making millions of acres of land safe for communities across 24 countries.² Only a few countries, primarily Afghanistan, Cambodia and Iraq, are now

deemed to have massive scale contamination from historical conflicts, compared to around 30 in the mid-1990s.

In 2014, at the Third Review Conference to the Ottawa Treaty, states set a 2025 target for clearance of mine contaminated areas. Humanitarian mine action organisations, together with national authorities, have outlined work plans for completion in some of the world's most contaminated countries.

Between 2017 and 2025 it is estimated that full decontamination could be achieved in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Somaliland, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe. This would return vast areas of land to impoverished and vulnerable communities, enabling access to areas for housing, educational and medical facilities and livelihood opportunities.

Unfortunately, insufficient funding for clearance activities means that meeting these deadlines looks increasingly challenging. Achieving the projected work plans developed by MAG and other mine clearance organisations and authorities would require an increase of as much as double global funding commitments. This would need to come from the national budgets of affected and donor states.

It is critical that the funding to deal with today's emerging landmine crisis does not impede or undermine progress towards dealing with the legacy of these historical conflicts.

¹ Ninety-one States Parties have destroyed more than 51 million stockpiled anti-personnel landmines since the Convention came into force and an additional 65 States Parties have never stockpiled them. Eleven states globally still produce anti-personnel mines (down from 54 in 1997), though most are not thought to be actively doing so.

² Angola, Burundi, Cambodia, Chad, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gaza, Iraq, Kosovo, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Swaziland, Tanzania, Vietnam.



CONCLUSION

Twenty years on from the historic Ottawa Treaty the world faces another landmine emergency. In spite of the success resulting from the efforts of signatories to the treaty, the activities of Da'esh and other warring parties in conflicts around the world are causing another wave of civilian casualties.

This crisis must not be allowed to derail progress towards dealing with legacy contamination issues in places like Cambodia, Angola and Afghanistan; nor must it be allowed to subvert the now-established international norm that says landmines – improvised or otherwise – are illegal and have no place in modern warfare.

The vision of the Ottawa Treaty must be upheld, defended and delivered upon by its signatories, including by meeting the urgent funding needs both for legacy and new contamination, and holding to account those that breach its obligations.

States, champions and supporters of the treaty have a choice in this historic anniversary year. They can let the legacy of one of the world's most successful treaties be damaged, or they can redouble their efforts to eliminate these deadly and indiscriminate weapons.



MOXICO PROVINCE, ANGOLA (above): During Angola's civil war, 600,000 people became refugees in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia, while a million more were internally displaced. Many are still returning, and one of the key factors in deciding where they will resettle is the agricultural opportunities afforded by safe and accessible land.

NORTHERN IRAQ (top): Hamid's son was killed by a mine when the family returned home after their village had been retaken from Da'esh.

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Issue Briefs are part of MAG's policy and advocacy work. Reflecting the experience and realities faced by the organisation's global programmes, they aim to inform and influence policy and good practice on specific issues for the benefit of communities affected by violence, conflict and insecurity.