



# U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

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## Media Note

### Office of the Spokesman

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## Progress in Clearing Iraq's Landmine Legacy

In May 2003, the U.S. Department of State established the first national mine action program in Iraq's history. Eight months later, professionally trained Iraqi managers and deminers are ready to tackle millions of persistent landmines and other explosive remnants of war that litter Iraq.

Since May, the Department, working with the Coalition Provisional Authority and with assistance from the Department of Defense's Humanitarian Demining Training Center, has:

- Established Iraq's National Mine Action Authority and Mine Action Center to manage strategic planning and budgeting, project coordination, donor relations, mine risk education, setting national mine action standards, and maintaining the national mine action database. Iraq's ethnic and religious communities are reflected in the composition of the staff;
- Engaged 60 Iraqi civil servants, men and women, to fill key positions at the National Mine Action Authority and National and Regional Mine Action Centers;
- Arranged for key National Mine Action Authority staff to receive senior and mid-level management training from the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining and Mine Action Unit of the Royal Military College of Sciences at Cranfield University;
- Created the 110-person non-governmental "Iraqi Mine/UXO Clearance Organization" equipped with modern metal detectors, mine detecting dogs, manual demining and explosive ordnance demolition expertise, highly qualified medical technicians, and logistic and administrative support personnel and equipment; and
- Transitioned a significant mine action program developed and operated independently by the UN Office for Project Services in the three predominantly Kurdish provinces of northern Iraq to the control of the National Mine Action Authority in Baghdad.

Until last spring, humanitarian mine action efforts were limited to the former northern "no fly" zone. Civilians living under the Saddam Hussein regime risked injury or death from persistent landmines laid by his forces. Saddam Hussein actually prohibited humanitarian demining on territory that he controlled.

Some persistent landmines found in Iraq were laid in World War II. But most were placed by Iraqi forces during Saddam Hussein's internal and external conflicts in the 1970s and 1980s. Iraq laid more mines on its own soil during the 1991 Gulf War following its invasion of Kuwait, and sowed additional mines on its territory during the 2003 conflict.

Following the liberation, Coalition forces, the Department of State's Quick Reaction Demining Force, Department of State-contracted RONCO Consulting Corporation, and some non-governmental organizations rapidly began clearing

landmines and unexploded ordnance throughout Iraq, returning valuable agricultural land and infrastructure to productive use.

Quick Reaction Demining Force clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance around downed power lines enabled Iraqi crews to repair the electrical grid system and increase power to Baghdad by fifty percent, affecting the service of over 3 million Iraqis.

To learn more about the U.S. Department of State's humanitarian mine action programs in Iraq and 35 other countries and its related small arms and light weapons abatement efforts, visit [www.state.gov/t/pm/wra](http://www.state.gov/t/pm/wra).

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