

**HANDICAP
INTERNATIONAL**

Co-winner of Nobel Peace Prize

Iraq

Warning: civilians in danger!



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Civilians are the main victims of conflicts in Iraq

Since 1979, and the rise to power of Saddam Hussein, Iraq has endured three deadly wars, bloody repression, including of the country's Kurd and Shiite populations, and a trade embargo lasting more than a decade. On March 20, 2003, a coalition of British and American forces launched a military operation in Iraq. Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown three weeks after troops entered the country. This third Gulf War officially ended on May 1, 2003. After a mission lasting almost nine years, the last American soldiers left Iraq on December 18, 2011. The war had a dramatic impact on the civilian population, as revealed by figures published by [Action on Armed Violence](#)

- At least 250,000 civilians reported killed or injured between March 2003 and January 2012.
- During the same period, the IBC recorded 162,000 deaths, of which 79% were civilians.

The withdrawal of American troops has not led to a more stable situation and armed violence continues to be a problem:

- The number of civilian deaths between January and November 2012 ([6,460 recorded](#)) makes Iraq the second most dangerous country in the world for civilians, after Syria.



The proliferation of small arms¹ among the civilian population poses a significant threat to the Iraqi population. Fifty-six percent of civilian deaths or injuries since 2003 have been caused by small arms. According to Amnesty International, before 2003, 15 million small arms and light weapons were in circulation in Iraq (for an estimated population of 25 million). In 2008, a report by [Amnesty International](#) revealed that contracts and orders for the transfer of more than one million small arms have been made since 2003.

Officials from the Pentagon have admitted that a large proportion of these weapons could have fallen into the hands of individuals, militias or armed groups. They also admitted to losing track of [54% of weapons](#) (190,000 weapons) delivered to Iraq in 2004 and 2005 and initially intended for the police and armed forces.

Photo: a man waits for a replacement prosthesis in an orthopedic-fitting centre set up by Handicap International in Souleymaniah, Iraqi Kurdistan. He was amputated after being injured by a stray bullet while picnicking in a public park ten years ago.

What is a light weapon?

A light weapon is a firearm that can be transported and used by a single individual. This category includes pistols, automatic pistols and rifles (pump-action rifles, assault rifles, sniper rifles, etc.)

Bullet lodged close to the heart



Mr. Fakhir Madhi is 58. He is the father of seven children. He lives in Al-Amarah, near Missan. Fakhir worked as a doctor before his accident in 2011. While attending a football match won by the Iraqi national team, he was hit by a stray bullet fired in celebration. The bullet that hit Fakhir could not be removed, because it was lodged too close to his heart. The terrible pain he suffers on a daily basis has prevented him from performing the work he loves. His doctors have told him that his life is permanently in danger because, with one wrong move, the bullet could enter his heart. The practice of firing into the air

during celebrations or protests—very common in Iraq—is unfortunately the cause of a large number of accidents.

Mines and explosive remnants of war: a major threat

According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), after decades of war and conflict, Iraq is now the world's most heavily contaminated by mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). The expression "explosive remnants of war" is used to designate different types of unexploded devices such as grenades, shells, rockets or cluster bombs, which can remain active and dangerous after the end of an armed conflict. Civilian populations are the main victims of these types of weapons.

These weapons were used on a massive scale during internal conflicts, the Iran/Iraq War (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1991) and the Anglo-American military intervention in 2003. According to a 2011 UNICEF briefing note, Iraq, which has a population of 31 million, is contaminated by 25 million anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. The United States, France and the United Kingdom also dropped nearly 20 million cluster munitions on Iraq and Kuwait in 1991. In 2003, the United States and the United Kingdom deployed between 1.8 and 2 million cluster munitions.

- At least 1,700 sq.km of land in Iraq is contaminated by mines and explosive remnants of war
- At least 1.6 million people live under the threat of these weapons.
- Between 2001 and 2011, more than 20,000 people fell victim to mines and explosive remnants of war.
- In 2011, 85% of identified victims were civilians and 40% of them were children, according to the 2012 *Landmine Monitor*.

The presence of mines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war has had a direct impact on the development of the country. Eighty percent of affected areas in the south of Iraq consist of agricultural land, often owned by the country's poorest populations who have no other means of earning a livelihood, according to the GICHD, Iraq mine action strategy of 2010-2012. In order to survive, they put their lives on the line by entering mined areas. Iraq ratified the Ottawa Mine Ban Convention in 2007 and signed the Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2009.

An innocent victim of cluster munitions.

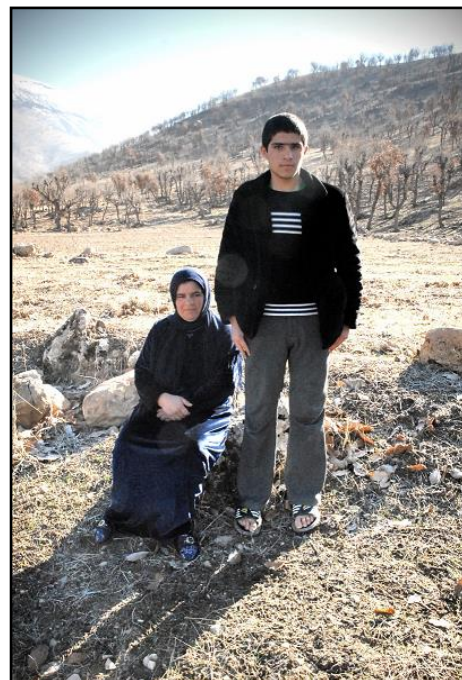


On June 29, 2003, Wahid, then 12, was walking with his nine-year old brother in Kerbala, his neighbourhood in the southwest of Baghdad, when a strange metallic object caught his eye. Wahid grabbed it and the object exploded. The area had been bombed with cluster munitions. Wahid suffered serious, multiple injuries. His right hand was torn off and he had to have three fingers on his left hand amputated. His body was riddled with shrapnel, including his torso, skull, ankle and knee. He had four operations and will suffer the side effects of his accident for the rest of his life. His parents had to sell most of their possessions to pay for his medical costs.

When mines are child's play

The tiny village of Sharkan, in the region of Choman, in the north of Mosul, sits in a valley bordered by hills and snow-topped mountains. Shy and avoiding eye contact, Rabin Ibrahim brings tea and begins his story: "I don't remember much because I fainted when the mine exploded," he recalls.

"It was only afterwards that I heard my older brother and cousin were dead. When we found it under a stone, we just wanted to play with it, especially the lead balls inside. So my brother tried to open it with a metal rod and I don't remember anything that happened afterwards. That was just over ten years ago, just above the house, in a field of tall grass where I used to play with my brother." Rabin pulls up his trouser leg to reveal the scars that cover his legs—the indelible evidence of a childhood game that's far from rare in this part of the world.



Nasrin, Rabin Ibrahim's mother, speaks up in a strong, confident voice. Just as Saddam Hussein's army took her husband from her during a local revolt, it also took the life of her son and nephew ten years later. Nasrin refuses to see history repeat itself. She explains why she takes part in Handicap International's work: "After my oldest son died, I was determined to avoid another tragedy, so I help provide small farmers and children with information on mines," she says. "We explain the dangers to them and show them how the alert system works." She visits homes, mosques and schools in the surrounding area to help raise the awareness of everyone exposed to mines on a daily basis.

20 years of action by Handicap International in Iraq

Handicap International intervened in Iraq in 1991, to aid victims of the Gulf War. As well as performing risk education about mines and explosive remnants of war, from April 2013, the organization wants also to raise awareness of the dangers involved in the improper use of small arms. In addition to our field operations, the charity hopes to persuade political decision-makers to

regulate the trade in these weapons. Handicap International continues to provide support to the KORD orthopaedic-fitting center, which it founded when it first intervened in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Weapons clearance and risk education on mines and explosive remnants of war



Immediately following the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Handicap International launched a series of operations to reduce the daily threat to the local population from mines and explosive remnants of war, including weapons clearance, risk education and the orthopedic-fitting of victims.

Handicap International's teams also engage in awareness-raising campaigns, including the display of 50,000 posters in hospitals, mosques and on walls in Baghdad, and the direct distribution of 200,000 risk education leaflets. The organization has also arranged information meetings with imams and doctors working in hospitals

and clinics, who then pass on the prevention message to the rest of the population.

Due to the extremely unstable security situation in Iraq, Handicap International currently raises public awareness through its Iraqi partners in anti-mines action centers. In 2012, staff in 35 anti-mines action centers in the north and south of the country, were trained to provide risk education on explosive remnants of war. These officers subsequently directly raised the awareness of 8,500 Iraqis, half of whom were children. Handicap International also produces manuals, information boards, leaflets, etc. for use by trained Iraqi staff.

A campaign to limit the risks associated with small arms

Handicap International is concerned about the risks linked to small arms. The association already conducts such preventive actions in Libya and wants to undertake projects to take into account the scourge of small arms. At first, the association will identify the most dangerous areas in Iraq and achieve prevention messages adapted to the needs of communities. This information is essential to reducing the number of small arms accidents already responsible for injuring or killing 140,000 civilians since 2003, equivalent to around 40 civilians a day over the last ten years.

In addition to its actions in the field, Handicap International is supporting the regulations governing these weapons. Handicap International has already earned a strong reputation for its work against the unacceptable impact of weapons on civilians. Handicap International is one of six founding organizations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) which helped secure the adoption of the Ottawa mine ban convention in 1997. The organization was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 with other NGO members of the ICBL. In 2003, Handicap International also joined the campaign against cluster munitions. It is one of the founding members of the Cluster Munitions Coalition (CMC), which played a key role in the adoption of the Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions, which was opened for signature in 2008. The organization continues to engage with governments to ensure they meet their obligations under both conventions, particularly as regards victim assistance.



Handicap International backs moves to adopt a far-reaching treaty to ban the illicit trade in small arms. Negotiations on the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) will be held in New York from March 18-23, 2013.

According to Marion Libertucci, Handicap International's weapons advocacy manager: "The aim of this treaty is to regulate the trade in conventional arms (arms that do not fall under the category of biological, chemical or nuclear weapons) to avoid all irresponsible transfer (to governments that do not respect human rights, for example) and to prevent and combat the illicit trade in

these weapons."

The process of securing this treaty, which is backed by numerous civil society organizations and supported by several states, including in Europe and Africa, came to a dead end in July 2012, when first-round negotiations failed after the United States refused to adopt the treaty in its current form. However, the vast majority of states signalled their desire to continue with the treaty negotiations.

Handicap International has condemned attempts by some states to push for a watered-down version of the treaty which does not explicitly mention munitions or weapon types and components, which is not based on a strict authorisation framework, and which does not bind states to provide transparent information on exports. Only clear, comprehensive and binding provisions will prevent the irresponsible or illicit transfer of these weapons.

Orthopedic-fitting in Iraqi Kurdistan

Handicap International launched operations in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991, to aid victims of the Gulf War as well as victims of mines and explosive remnants of war. The charity began orthopedic-fitting and rehabilitation activities, such as the orthopedic-fitting center Kurdistan Organization for Rehabilitation of the Disabled (KORD) in Soulaymaniah, in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In 2003, in addition to managing two rehabilitation centres and three mobile branches active in isolated areas, and occasionally in war zones, the organization supplied physiotherapy equipment and prostheses to the Institute of Medical Technology in Baghdad, looted during the conflict, and which has, as a result, been able to resume its orthopedic-fitting activities from which 300 amputees have already benefited.

In 2008 and 2009, Handicap International provided its support to Doctors without Borders to supply reconstructive surgery services to Iraqis injured during the war.

Handicap International continues to support KORD by providing practical training and technical support to Iraqi physiotherapists and orthoprosthesists.

Muhammad Ali : the mine that tore off his leg costs no more than \$5.



Muhammad Ali says he is a lucky man. He “only lost one leg: others are crawling around on all fours like children,” he said. As he was trying to demine his own field, in 1992, Muhammed stepped on a Valmara, an Italian bounding anti-personnel mine that torn off his leg. The Valmara is a curiously shaped device with small prongs that often attracts the attention of children. The mine has a lethal height of 45 cm and a radius of 20 m. If Muhammed says he was lucky, that’s because he’s aware of what could have happened to him. He is 60-years-old and has visited KORD for the last 20 years to modify or change his prosthesis. The mine that tore off his leg costs no more than \$5 to produce, but like all explosive remnants of war, it has turned the lives of thousands of Iraqis upside down.