



THEMATIC MEETING REPORT:
EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS OF WAR
(ERW) IN THREE VILLAGES OF
AL-AYADIYA SUBDISTRICT

FEBRUARY 2025

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE

The Returns Working Group (RWG), in coordination with the Ninewa Governorate Office, facilitated a thematic meeting to address the barriers to the safe and voluntary return of displaced families to Haruna, Sajieah, and Qabak Villages. The meeting brought together key stakeholders, including the mayor assistant of Al-Ayadiya, department of electricity, officer from the Police department, and municipalities along with some organizations.

A community dialogue conducted on 2 December 2024 revealed that a major barrier to sustainable return to these 3 locations of no return is the presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in agricultural lands, making farming unsafe and restricting economic opportunities. As a follow up to the dialogue and to address these challenges, a thematic meeting was arranged to assess the situation, clarify responsibilities, and coordinate demining efforts to facilitate safe and voluntary returns

To address this, we invited key stakeholders directly involved in mine action and return efforts. MAG (Mine Action Group) and UNMAS were included due to their expertise in demining and risk education. Shareteah Organization was engaged for its role in local advocacy and assistance. Additionally, we invited local representatives, including Ali Murad, Haroun Rashen Hassan, and Hasanen Qaleb Abed, to ensure the discussion reflected the realities on the ground and aligned with community concerns. Their participation was essential in clarifying responsibilities and coordinating demining efforts.

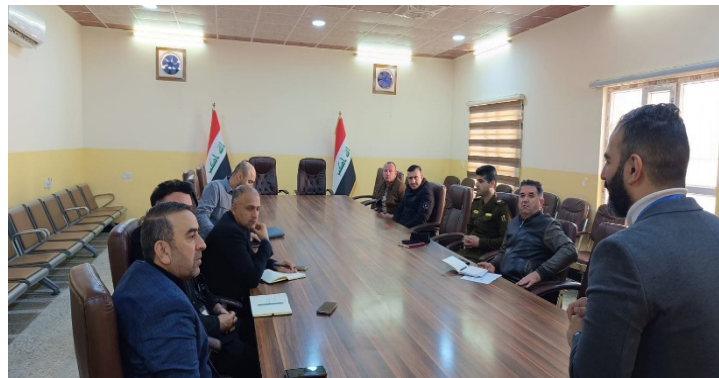


Figure 1 DS Thematic Meeting Participants

PARTICIPANT LIST

Name	Position
Government	
Mansour Jameel Mohammed	Mayor office
Muhammad Abdel Karim	Police
Sharif Muhammad Abbas	Mayor assistant for organizations Affairs
Falah Hassan Youssef	Electricity
Osama Hassan Younis	Municipality
Community Representatives	
Emad Hussain Mohammed	Community member (Qabak village)
Qassim Hussan Ali	Community member (Haruna village)
Haussain Ahmed	Community member (Sajieah village)
NGOs	
Ali Murad	MAG (Mine Action Group)
Haroun Rashen Hassan	MAG
Hasanen Qaleb Abed	Shareteah organization and representative of UNMASS
Firas Alsalman	RWG
Karam Eskander	

BASIC INFORMATION

The villages of Haruna, Qabak, and Sajieah in the Al-Ayadiya subdistrict of Telafar were historically home to Shia Turkmen and Sunni Arabs. Agriculture was the primary means of livelihoods. Displacement during the conflict led families to seek refuge in Najaf, Zakho, and Telafar city, leaving behind homes and infrastructure that were later destroyed. Limited returns have taken place, but recovery has been slow due to a lack of aid and support.

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS:

Responsibility for ERW and Mine Clearance

1. Government Entities:

- Civil Defense (Ministry of Interior) and Military Engineering (Ministry of Defense) are government actors involved in clearance. However, they primarily focus on visible threats (e.g., surface mines) rather than comprehensive clearance.
- The Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) under the Ministry of Defense oversees and coordinates clearance efforts but does not conduct actual demining operations. Instead, it assigns priorities, grants approvals, and ensures a formal process is followed.

2. Organizations:

- MAG and Shareteah are supporting actors rather than responsible authorities. They conduct thorough surveys and clearance, including removing mines under rubble and metal waste.

The Directorate of Mine Action (DMA) under the Iraqi Ministry of Defense is the sole authority responsible for overseeing and coordinating the work of these entities. DMA is tasked with:

- Developing work plans and mechanisms for clearance operations.
- Assigning specific locations and priorities for clearance.
- Granting approvals for clearance activities.

A formal process is followed to identify hazardous areas:

- Residents report the presence of ERW to their local representative.
- The representative forwards the request to the relevant security authority (Iraqi Police, Army, or other security forces).
- The security responsible authority places warning signs to alert residents to the danger.
- The request is then escalated to Ninewa Operations Command or West Ninewa Operations Command, which submits the request to DMA for further action and deployment of clearance teams.

IMPACT ON RETURN AND LIVELIHOODS

- One of the main barriers to the return of displaced families to Sajieah, Haruna, and Qabak is the presence of ERW in agricultural lands. Residents face a high risk of injury or death when working on their farms due to accidental explosions.

Residential areas within the villages are free of ERW, but contamination in surrounding farmland prevents families from resuming their livelihoods

These villages fall under military responsibility, as designated by the Directorate of Mine Action (DMA). The Military Engineering unit of the Ministry of Defense clears only visible mines, leaving buried explosives, especially under rubble, unaddressed. In contrast, demining organizations conduct thorough surveys, including rubble clearance and metal waste removal. Despite the Ministry of Defense declaring these areas mine-free, civilian incidents and reports from demining organizations indicate ongoing risks. The military lacks the capacity for full-area surveys, and an official clarification of its limited role would allow the DMA to reassign clearance responsibilities.

CURRENT CLEARANCE EFFORTS AND CHALLENGES

- The MAG is currently operating in Telafar District and part of Ayadiya Subdistrict. However, they are unable to work in the three villages because they fall under the jurisdiction of the Iraqi Army, which has primary responsibility for mine clearance in these areas.

- MAG emphasized that all clearance operations must comply with DMA's regulations and approvals. Working outside their designated areas would violate these regulations.
- **Funding constraints:** MAG noted that a portion of their funding came from a U.S. grant, which is currently paused, restricting their operational capacity.
- **Shareteah** Organization is currently working in Sinjar District and its surrounding villages under the authority of DMA. They cannot provide support in the three villages due to jurisdictional restrictions, as these areas fall under the Iraqi Army's operational zone.
- **Shareteah** representatives clarified that they conduct thorough scanning and clearance of all areas under their responsibility. However, in locations where no organization is officially responsible, they focus on clearing visible ERW (munitions identifiable with the naked eye). They cannot operate—either for full clearance or visible clearance—in areas assigned to other organizations or within military zones.

SUPPORT FROM LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- **Ministry of Interior Representative:** The police do not have the capacity or mandate to conduct demining operations. However, they are willing to support any organization assisting affected families by providing security escorts, facilitating movement, and ensuring safe access. Additionally, the Ministry of Interior representative confirmed their readiness to offer any available support for clearance efforts in Ayadiyah Subdistrict.
- **Electricity Department Representative (Ayadiya):** Stated that if families return, they will facilitate the reconnection of the villages to the national electricity grid.
- **Ayadiya Municipality Representative:** Clarified that the municipality's jurisdiction does not cover the three villages, as they fall under the Rural Development Directorate. The Rural Development Directorate was invited to the meeting but did not attend.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Need for Mine Clearance in Agricultural Lands:** The presence of ERW in farmland is a major obstacle to return and resettlement. Community representatives requested that efforts should focus on securing clearance operations in these areas as this would allow families to sustainably return and restore their livelihoods.
2. **Coordination with the Iraqi Army:** Given that the villages fall under the army's jurisdiction, advocacy is needed to expedite clearance approvals and operations.

NEXT STEPS:

- Follow up with the **Rural Development Directorate** to discuss potential support for the villages.
- Both demining organizations expressed willingness to operate in the area if the military acknowledges its lack of capacity to conduct full clearance. However, the organizations would still require funding to proceed. According to them, the first step should be for the military to officially relinquish its lead on demining efforts. The process would begin with affected families submitting requests to the Mayor, who would then escalate the request to the Governor of Nineva. The Governor, in turn, would engage with the Ministry of Defense to transfer responsibility to other capable partners. Additionally, a stronger push from UNMAS would be crucial, as they have the necessary connections and understand the formal process. To support this effort, all relevant reports will be shared with UNMAS to advocate for action.

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