
UN: FIGHT TO FREE MOSUL TO HAVE 'MASSIVE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT'

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Humanitarian agencies are warning the fight to free Mosul from Islamic State control could have a huge impact on the civilian population caught in the crossfire.

If you have the high levels of destruction that we saw in Ramadi, theres going to be a massive humanitarian impact, Lise Grande, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, told VOA.

Between 300,000 to 1.2 million people could be displaced by the fighting, Grande said.

If their homes are destroyed, they are going to be displaced for months and months on end. If there is infestation of booby traps and complex IEDs, add more months to it, she said.

Ramadi was wrested from IS control in December.

Large portions of city were flattened by rockets, mortars and airstrikes. The rest was booby trapped with improvised explosive devices, making it difficult for families trying to go home.

It was booby-trapped with some of the most complex IEDs we have ever seen anywhere, and the whole town is infested, and is infested in a way that is unpredictable, Grande said.

Ramadis hidden bombs have killed more than 80 people trying to return, and injured more. The worry is the same could happen in Fallujah, Hawijah or on a much larger scale in Mosul.

The cost of war

According to website Defense One, the State Department has awarded the Tennessee-based firm Janus Global Operations a 12-month, \$5 million contract to do initial training and to survey unexploded bombs, abandoned explosives and IEDs in Ramadi and the city's water station.

Iraq is shuddering under the weight of this brutal war, as well as economic and political crises and the earlier massive displacement of its people.

The human toll is visible everywhere: entire families crowded into bare, cement brick rooms covered in blue tarps, or crammed into run-down hotels or unfinished buildings.

Their food comes from soup kitchens or from boxes marked with the logos of humanitarian agencies. Many have lost their homes, their properties, their entire communities.

One-third of Iraqis affected

Iraq is one of the largest, most volatile humanitarian crisis in the world, Grande said.

In the past year, 1 million people have been displaced, bringing the total to 3.5 million. That number is expected to rise as the campaign against Islamic State intensifies.

If you look at the percentage of the population that has been impacted directly by ISIL, we are talking about nearly a third of all Iraqis have had to pay some kind of price, she said.

Analysts agree there is plenty of blame to go around for adding to the crisis: U.S. strategic mistakes during its occupation of Iraq, a corrupt and sectarian Iraqi government and rising political instability, ethnic and tribal divisions, and regional powers fighting proxy wars on Iraqi soil.

The say those factors are also what will make it difficult to stitch Iraq back up, even if the largely Sunni-based IS extremists are defeated.

Delicate process

Sectarian and ideological suspicions run deep in the country and divide cities, communities, and various armed groups.

We have to be frank that in cases where families have stayed under ISIS control, there is deep suspicion about their motivations for doing that by families who left, Grande said. The issue of how you reconcile those groups, of how you prevent retaliation, on either side, is absolutely huge.

Compensation will play a large role in bringing communities back together, she said, adding that there are about 1,000 small communities in Iraq in which some kind of community-level adjudication and compensation will have to take place.

Grande said effective reconciliation will need leadership at the top political level and at the community level.

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But it can be a fragile process. For example, in Yathrib, a community 45 kilometers north of Baghdad in the so-called Sunni Triangle, a compensation package was agreed on after months of negotiations. But at the last minute, one of the leaders removed his approval and the whole package collapsed, stalling the return of families to that area for months.

Families and tribes and communities [must] find ways of mending their fences, and coexisting, and living together as they did before. It's a tough process, but it's crucial, she said.

The cost of war, the cost of peace

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, as of March 31, 2016, the total cost of military operations related to ISIL since U.S.-led operations started on August 8, 2014, is \$7 billion, with an average daily cost of \$11.6 million.

By comparison, the overall humanitarian funding to Iraq in 2014-2016 is reported at \$2.34 billion, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Iraq.

For Grande, those numbers need to be recalibrated.

I think it's important to consider rebalancing international engagement, so that it is not simply the international community supporting the military side of things, but that we are also supporting the humanitarian operation, the stabilization operation, she said

Kaynak/Source: