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## LAND MINES POSE SERIOUS DANGER TO RESIDENTS OF IRAQ'S MOSUL

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Mosul has been liberated from "Islamic State" (IS) but for residents of the Iraqi city, the horror will not be over for some time. Remnants of dangerous explosives are lethal traps. Children in particular are in danger.

It was "hell on earth," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. The self-proclaimed "Islamic State" (IS) committed numerous war crimes during its reign over Mosul. Tens of thousands of residents were expelled or used as human shields. The terror organization controlled Mosul from 2014 until the Iraqi Armed Forces recaptured the city last week. Mosul has been officially liberated from IS since Monday - even though a few isolated fighters remain in the city.

Read more: Amnesty says US-led coalition violated international law in Mosul

The Battle of Mosul has left behind significant destruction. Over many months, buildings and streets were reduced to rubble and ash. Suicide bombers blew themselves up and snipers fought on street corners. Almost 1 million people fled the city.

Explosives lurking everywhere

The number of people returning to their homes has been growing since the victory over IS. According to the aid organization Handicap International, around 200,000 people have returned and even more are expected to go home in the coming weeks.

But returnees still face mortal danger, warns Handicap International. Numerous explosives and explosive remnants of war (ERW) may pose a threat to civilians for years and decades to come. One wrong step can lead to the loss of life - or serious disabilities. The immediate aftermath of war can be particularly dangerous, as very few demining operations have taken place. Handicap International thus intends to educate civilians and aid workers about the dangers of explosives that have not yet been neutralized.

"People must warn children and teens in particular. They should by no means defuse explosives by throwing stones at them - this is life-threatening," Iwona Tscheinig, managing director of Austrian aid organization Together Against Land Mines, told DW. "It is best to mark the spot and report it to the military."

The threat of explosives is especially high in neighborhoods that suffered significant destruction and many dead have been found. It is difficult to estimate how long it will take for a city like Mosul

to be cleared entirely, said Tscheinig, but work has already begun.

### Deadly legacy of war

Iraq has been riddled with land mines for decades now. According to DEMIRA, a German mine clearance and explosive disposal organization, around 20 million land mines and between 2.6 and 6 million unexploded bombs remain in the country. They are a direct consequence of the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf Wars. Iraq is one of the world's most severely affected countries when it comes to mines and unexploded ordinance.

The exact location of the landmines is unknown, making it even more difficult to clear them, and the consequences are terrible. According to DEMIRA, thousands of people in Iraq have been killed or injured by remnants of wartime munition, but no official statistics have been kept. Civilians are often the victims, many of them children.

Although the Iraqi Army has recaptured Mosul, its inhabitants will face life-threatening conditions for years to come. Iraq has been celebrating the city's liberation for a week, although perhaps not voluntarily, as the state ordered the festivities.

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