



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Photo Courtesy of MAG



Delivering Mine Risk Education in Sinjar

Zeran fled his home in Iraq's Rambusi village—located in Sinjar District, Ninewa Governorate—with his wife and extended family in 2014 when the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) overtook the area. They were initially trapped in the Sinjar Mountains and escaped after 15 days, but it would be years before they—and many others—could return home. “I was 22 years old at the time, my family and I were so frightened... but luckily, we survived and managed to go to Dohuk,” Zeran said. He and his family stayed at one of Dohuk's internally displaced person (IDP) camps for one year before relocating to Ninewa's Sinuni District where they lived with friends for more than three years.

Although ISIS left Rambusi in 2017, Zeran and his family could not return initially due to the extensive presence of explosive remnants of war (ERW) and mines. ERW and mine contamination in the land and in people's homes remains a key barrier to return for many of the 1.2 million people who remain displaced across Iraq. In response, the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) began clearing the land in 2018 and, with USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) funding, is delivering critical explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) to support IDPs and facilitate safe returns.

In 2020, MAG noted an increase in returns due to fears about the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in IDP camps, and it began delivering EORE to recent returnees over the phone to mitigate COVID-19 risks. With MAG's support, Zeran, his wife, and their child returned home during this period in June 2020 to raise their family on their land. “MAG's community liaison team contacted us when we arrived to the village and gave us a risk education session on explosives and sent us mobile messages with all the information that will help us to identify dangerous items and stay safe,” he said.

With USAID/BHA funding, MAG helped 820 households safely return to their homes in Sinjar between June and November 2020 through its EORE activities. USAID/BHA continues to support life-saving protection services and remains committed to helping displaced families return to their homes and rebuild their lives in Sinjar and throughout the country.