



**NEWS**  
RELEASE

# IRAQ FACING “AID DESERTS” AS AREAS COULD BECOME NO-GO ZONES FOR HUMANITARIANS

**Global organization Mercy Corps warns that extremist groups put humanitarian operations at risk**

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## **ABOUT MERCY CORPS**

- Leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible
- Empowering people to survive through crisis, build better lives and transform their communities for good
- Meeting the urgent needs of today through emergency response and disaster preparedness
- Building a stronger tomorrow by connecting people to the resources they need to strengthen their community from within
- About 5,000 team members reaching nearly 22 million people
- \$436.6 million total operating revenue in FY2017; 87% channeled directly into programs in more than 40 countries

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ERBIL, IRAQ – Global organization [Mercy Corps](http://mercy Corps.org) warns that extremist activity is increasing in Iraq, which is threatening to create no-go areas, and creating the risk that these areas could become “aid deserts.”

The rise in insurgency threatens humanitarian operations in parts of Iraq as access and safety are increasingly precarious. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, there have been almost 2000 security incidents involving extremist groups<sup>1</sup> since January 1, 2018; and despite ISIS having been pushed out of Mosul, ISIS elements have regrouped in the provinces of Kirkuk, Diyala, Salahaddin, and parts of Anbar.

*“What we are reading in the media and what we are seeing on the ground in Iraq simply doesn’t add up,” says Tanya Evans, Iraq Country Director for Mercy Corps. “If anything, extremist groups are growing in confidence. As the reconstruction efforts continue to stall, groups like ISIS are filling the cracks.”*

*“In some of the worst-affected areas, we face daily challenges in reaching vulnerable populations. If aid workers can’t reach communities, we face the very real danger of creating aid deserts in areas where the humanitarian needs are overwhelming.”*

The global humanitarian organization, which is currently supporting peacebuilding efforts in several of the affected areas, calls on the international community to invest in programs that will address the deep divisions that have been created after fifteen years of conflict.

*“The key to tackling this problem isn’t military intervention, it is helping people rebuild their lives,” says Evans. “Alongside physical infrastructure and emergency aid, there needs to be much more investment in peacebuilding and good governance.”*

*“Fifteen years of conflict have left a country divided; bridging the cultural, tribal and religious divisions is critical if Iraq is going to begin a new chapter. It isn’t just about rebuilding towns, we need to invest in rebuilding communities.”*

Mercy Corps has operated continuously in Iraq since 2003, providing assistance to 5 million Iraqis affected by war, violence and displacement in all 18 governorates. Currently the organization is addressing the needs of people



affected by conflict, providing lifesaving supplies and working with communities to recover and rebuild.

Join us and [support Mercy Corps' work](#) in Iraq and elsewhere in the world.

**For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact Anthony Gale at [agale@mercy Corps.org](mailto:agale@mercy Corps.org) +44 7534903812 (London) or Christy Delafield at [cde lafield@mercy Corps.org](mailto:cde lafield@mercy Corps.org) +1 202.394.1712 (Washington)**

**Notes to editors:**

1. Based on available data (see <https://www.acleddata.com/>), fighters, cells or sympathizers of ISIS have been involved (as the originator/perpetrator or as a target of military/security operations) in almost 2000 security incidents between 1 January 2018 and 31 January 2019.

2. Mercy Corps has been working in Iraq since 2003. Our work focuses on four main areas:

**Humanitarian Response:** Distributing multi-purpose cash assistance and non-food hygiene items to internally displaced communities and households living in camps across Iraq.

**Water and Sanitation (WASH):** Provision of WASH services in camps, including access to safe drinking water, solid waste management and the rehabilitation of water networks and water treatment plants.

**Conflict Management and Social Cohesion:** Encouraging reconciliation and social cohesion by providing capacity-building training and empowering local leaders to resolve disputes and reform policies.

**Formal and Informal Education:** Creating safe spaces for conflict-affected young people in Iraq and providing critical psycho-social support and skills building activities. Alongside this, Mercy Corps has opened over 40 accelerated learning centers across the country, ensuring that young people who have missed out on multiple years of their education can access government accredited courses to gain the learning they need to enroll back into the formal education.