

Environmental policies and cooperation is vital for Iraq's future after Daesh

A statement of the Iraqi Environment and Health Society-UK

A committee of Iraqi and British scientists and health experts has called for an urgent evaluation of the environmental damage caused by Daesh (ISIS) in Iraq, and its potential impact on public health.

The Iraqi Environment and Health Society-UK (IEHS-UK) is calling for the Iraqi government and international communities to ensure that the defeat of Daesh is a turning point for Iraq's degraded and war-damaged environment, that the effects of the latest conflict on health and the environment are fully assessed and addressed, and to ensure that recovery and reconstruction in affected areas is guided by sustainable environmental principles.

Daesh has used deliberate attacks on the environment as a weapon of war, causing severe pollution, threatening the health of communities in affected areas. This has included attacks on oil refineries and facilities, including fires at 19 oil wells around the town of Qayyarah, some of which burned for nine months until March 2017. Sporadic attacks on wells and pipelines are ongoing. The fires have caused severe air pollution, affected the soil, ground water and livestock of nearby towns and villages and IDP camps. Daesh also set fire to sulphur stockpiles at the Al-Mishraq Sulphur Plant, creating a huge plume of sulphur dioxide and hydrogen sulphide, killing 10 and hospitalising 1,000. The environmental consequences of these pollution incidents must be fully addressed.

The intense fighting to expel Daesh from Fallujah, Ramadi, Tikrit and Mosul has left urban areas in ruins and created millions of tonnes of rubble, often mixed with hazardous waste. Industrial sites containing toxic substances have been damaged and waste management systems have collapsed increasing the risks from communicable diseases. The collapse of local administrations responsible for pollution control is worsening the situation and there are significant concerns over the conflict's impact on drinking water resources in the region.

Speaking at an IEHS-UK conference on the pollution in Iraq in July 2017, Iraq's Ambassador to London, His Excellency Dr. Salih Husain Ali AL-Tamimi said: "What is unbelievable is that Daesh also succeeded in using basic chemical weapons in Mosul and Taza in Nineveh. This is proof that terrorists have the intention of destroying everything in Iraq including its people. I urge the international community to unite their effort with the Iraqi government to provide humanitarian aid to the displaced people in Iraq because the suffering of civilians has been extreme"

Dr. Jehan Baban, the President of IEHS-UK, said: "Another important and serious cause of environmental damage in Iraq is Daesh. This criminal organization that destroyed Iraq environment and heritage and has left a terrible legacy of death, destruction, pollution and millions of internally displaced Iraqi citizens with detrimental effect on economy and health."

The one day conference on Saturday 8th July 2017 at University College London, on Environmental Pollution in Iraq: Challenges and Remedies, was organised by The Iraqi Environment and Health Society-UK (IEHS-UK), and sponsored by RSK Group PLC. In a special session devoted to discussing post-Daesh environ-

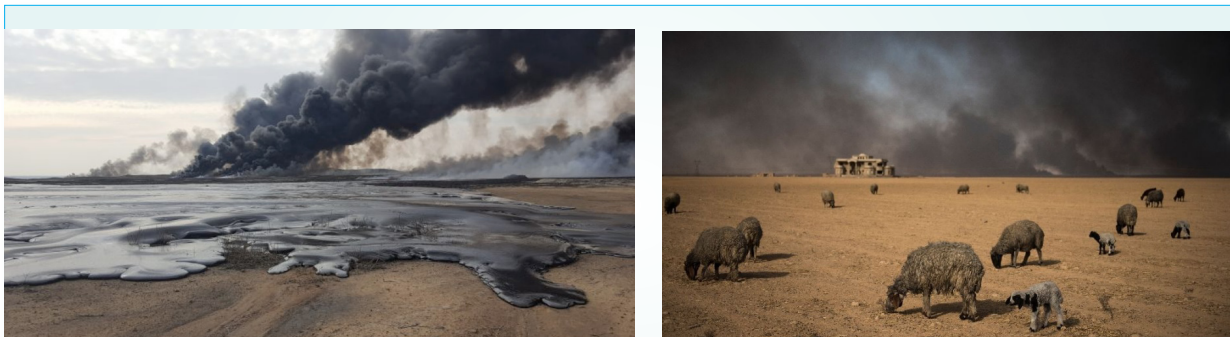


Figure 1: Environmental damage around the town of Qayyarah

mental challenges, the conference identified three challenges for Iraq.

Firstly, while the liberation of Mosul is a great victory, it must be matched by further political and economic victories, particularly in commencing national reconciliation and dealing with the causes of extremism and terrorism in Iraq. This must include achieving progress on the state of Iraq's environment, which is directly linked to the life and health of the Iraqi people and the future of their country.

Secondly, a scientific and planned approach is needed to reconstruction and rebuilding to create safe and sustainable urban environments. This entails rebuilding what has been destroyed by Daesh, including critical infrastructure, housing stock and waste management services, and in ensuring that displaced communities can return to a clean and safe environment.

Thirdly, the sustainable reconstruction of Mosul and other affected areas will require the support of the international community, including in the provision of technical and scientific expertise, to ensure that reconstruction is undertaken in and creates a clean, healthy and safe environment. The conference called for cooperation between international allies and for the comprehensive collaboration with scientists and experts from international organisations, NGOs and the private sector concerned with environmental issues to help in planning and implementing actions to provide remedies for the environmental challenges. This would also require that local authorities address the concerns of communities over pollution threats

and ensure their active involvement in decision-making over subsequent clean-up and remediation programmes.

The conference sessions covered many themes of current concern in Iraq such as water, air and soil pollution, pollution by radiation and chemicals, desertification and the Iraqi National Strategy on the Environment. Speakers also addressed the current legislation related to the environment, renewable energy policy, past-pollution issues and the need to update the national curriculums for environmental education in primary and secondary schools and colleges in Iraq. Alongside the Iraqi Ambassador, the conference also welcomed his Deputy, and Cultural and Medical attachés'. Attendees comprised experts, scientists, civil society organisations and medical professionals concerned with environmental pollution in Iraq and its impact on public health. The conference also heard from a number of Iraqi post-graduate PhD students who are studying environmental subjects at British universities.

The Iraqi Environment and Health Committee in UK (IEHS) was founded in June 2015 in London. Among the aims of the IEHS are to organise workshops, conferences and seminars concerning with environment and its impact on public health in Iraq. The IEHS also seeks to raise awareness and influence environmental and health policy-making in Iraq, and to promote scientific knowledge regarding environmental pollution within the Iraqi community.