NEWS

On September 23, the Obama Administration made a solemn promise to the world—the U.S. “will not use [antipersonnel landmines] outside of the Korean Peninsula.” What’s more, the U.S. will begin to destroy its stockpiles of landmines—estimated to be in the millions—so long as they “are not required for the defense of the Republic of Korea.”

Handicap International welcomes these vital steps toward compliance with the Ottawa Treaty, which bans the production, transfer, and use of antipersonnel landmines. However, Elizabeth MacNairn, executive director of Handicap International U.S., stresses that the U.S. government must find alternatives to landmines on the Korean Peninsula.

“Given that the U.S. has repeatedly acknowledged the serious humanitarian consequences of using antipersonnel landmines, it is illogical and immoral for the U.S. to continue using mines in any country,” MacNairn said. “The inevitable loss of innocent lives is an outrage.”

The U.S. statement failed to provide clear deadlines about when President Obama might submit the treaty to the U.S. Senate for ratification. “The positive announcements must be cemented into our country’s laws through ratification,” said MacNairn. “We hope that this crucial step won’t drift beyond 2016, President Obama’s final year in office.”

For more than 20 years, the U.S. has refrained from using or trading antipersonnel landmines, and landmine production ended in 1997. The U.S. is by far the world’s largest donor to projects that reduce the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war, spending $2.3 billion on mine action since 1993. Indeed, the U.S. government has generously supported Handicap International mine action projects in countries such as Lebanon, Libya, and Senegal.

Annual global funding for action against mines reached $681 million in 2012, after a decade that saw clearance or survey work release nearly 772 square miles of land. By working towards acceding to the Ottawa Treaty, the U.S. confirms that these standards are essential and sets an example to follow. Handicap International will now work to encourage U.S. authorities to fulfill their promises while urging powers like China and Russia, which along with 33 other countries, have not joined the treaty, to follow the American example.

Handicap International has mine action projects, including mine clearance, victim assistance, and risk education programs in more than 40 countries.

Handicap International’s biggest annual landmine awareness event is the Pyramid of Shoes in Lyon, France. Each shoe represents a life or limb lost to a mine.

Of every 10 mine and ERW victims, 7 are civilians, including 3 children.

Only 3 are soldiers.

Aiding Gaza’s injured

The onset of conflict in July forced Handicap International to temporarily suspend its normal rehabilitation projects inside the Gaza Strip. However, some staff members remained during the fighting and were able to source mobility devices such as wheelchairs and crutches for hospitals treating the injured. With the first ceasefire in early August, our staff and local partners deployed nine mobile rehabilitation teams comprised of physical therapists, social workers, and mental health specialists.

Today, Handicap International has expanded to 15 mobile teams which have helped more than 4,000 people with injuries and disabilities and distributed more than 600 wheelchairs, crutches, and other mobility devices.

Stemming the tide of Ebola

Handicap International has launched Ebola prevention campaigns targeting people with disabilities in Sierra Leone and Liberia. People with disabilities, especially those who are blind or deaf, are often not educated about health and disease prevention because the information is not shared in a format they can understand. This lack of awareness makes them more vulnerable to contracting disease and less likely to seek appropriate care.

Together with 10 local partners, staff organize information sessions to educate people with disabilities about how Ebola is transmitted, how to reduce the risk of transmission, how to spot the symptoms of the virus, and what to do if they suspect someone has been infected.
Handicap International continues to help people to rebuild their lives after Typhoon Haiyan

As a loyal friend of Handicap International, I hope you’ll enjoy our fourth issue of The Next Step. Your generosity is incredible. This summer, your compassion ensured that thousands of Iraqis with disabilities and injuries fleeing to Iraq from Kurdistan were met by Handicap International staff in Sula, Lebanon and Libya. You enabled our staff to make life-saving Ebola prevention messages accessible to people with disabilities.

And, your foresight means that five years after the devastating Haiyan earthquake, a beautiful girl called Christella is standing tall on her new prosthetic leg, custom-fit and built by Handicap International-trained Haitian technicians.

To celebrate donors like you, we’re highlighting a new donor spotlight feature to The Next Step. This issue, we highlight the incredible dedication of Rev. Joyce Myers-Brown, who has fundraised for Handicap International’s mission in Haiti. Thank you for being part of this vital work.

Beth MacNair
Executive Director

Renewed support for Christella, 15,
Haiti earthquake survivor

November 30, 2012
Christella was first fitted with a prosthesis in 2010 after her left leg was crushed in the Haiti earthquake. Ten years later her prosthesis is still holding up to the rigours of childhood play.

July 1, 2014
Handicap International helped Christella’s mother, Cadet Marie, to open a small shop so that she could better support Christella and her six other children. Thanks to the business and investment skills she learned through Handicap International’s vocational training program, Cadet Marie makes enough profit to pay for her children’s school fees and health care expenses. “I am happy—my business is doing better and better,” said Cadet Marie.

June 27, 2014
Now a young woman, Christella outgrew her original prosthesis and was having trouble walking. Handicap International brought her to an orthopedic center where she was fitted for a new prosthesis. “Now I can play soccer again with my friends and walk to school without a problem,” said Christella.

Emergency response launched in Iraq

Handicap International is helping thousands of displaced people in Iraqi Kurdistan

People have been cut off from the care they need to stay alive.

For example, 13,000 Iraqis had fled to Erbil and Dohuk governorates in Iraqi Kurdistan where Handicap International has operational bases. The UN estimates that 40% of the displaced people are “vulnerable”—people with disabilities, injuries, and chronic diseases, as well as older people.

Thanks to our more than 25 years of experience in the region and our extensive network of connections, we were able to launch an emergency response in support of vulnerable Iraqis immediately following the fall of Mosul in June.

“When hundreds of thousands of people need food, shelter, and care, people with disabilities and older people need even more support because they can’t move around very easily and go out in search of assistance,” said Benedetta Di Cintio, Handicap International’s head of mission in Iraq.

Emergency response in support of vulnerable Iraqis

People have been cut off from the care they need to stay alive.

“People were arriving on our doorstep”

Camille Borie is the Emergency Program Manager in Iraqi Kurdistan

In an emergency situation, no one stops to rest. The working conditions are difficult and the nights short. This summer, our teams had to start very early in the morning to avoid the stifling, 100-plus degree heat.

Handicap International’s role in Iraqi Kurdistan is extremely important. Our mobile teams go from tent to tent and house to house to find people with disabilities, the injured, and those suffering from diseases like diabetes and cancer. We distribute made-to-fit wheelchairs, crutches, and other items that were left behind during rushed evacuations, and we ensure they receive the specific care and services they need.

The situation deteriorated over the summer, but when armed groups were advancing across Iraq in August, the Iraqi population was overcome with panic and fear. These displaced people had led a normal life, with a job and a house, but lost everything in just a few hours.

Displaced people are arriving on our doorstep. We found families everywhere—packed into more than 600 schools, sleeping in mosques, churches, and, of course, on the streets. Camps are still being built to house displaced Iraqis, and to allow the schools to reopen.

We’ll never forget one meeting with a man who had a leg amputated. He was distraught. We were able to provide him with a prosthetic leg, and I was there when he tried it for the first time. Being able to stand again filled him with emotion. Witnessing moments like this give our staff the resolve to continue working hard.

Background

Geography
Iraqi Kurdistan is a semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq. It is bordered by Turkey to the north, Iran to the east, and Syria to the west. Its capital is Erbil.

History
Iraqi Kurdistan is largely populated by ethnically Kurdish people who have been independent from Iraq for decades. Kurdish rebellions in 1961 and 1991 were brutally suppressed by Saddam Hussein. Following the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, a Kurdish semi-autonomous government was formed. Due to the Syrian conflict and current movements in Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan currently hosts hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees and displaced Iraqis.

Mandate
Handicap International launched an emergency project in May 2014 in four Syrian refugee camps to ensure that people with disabilities are able to access aid and services immediately following the fall of Mosul in June 2014. Handicap International deployed mobile rehabilitation teams to meet the needs of displaced Iraqis.
“This gift has the power to save lives”

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

“I remember driving with companions down a road in rural Angola filled with fear—the ground was full of landmines,” said Rev. Joyce Myers-Brown. “I saw on subsequent mission visits how landmines transformed the country. Friends had been injured or killed by landmines, and the landmine pollution in Angola was so significant, that even after surviving an accident; there was fear one might be struck again.”

“Putting our passion into action, Rev. Myers-Brown has spent almost 20 years as a tireless advocate and mine-clearance fundraiser. For ten years, she chaired the Adopt-A-Minefield effort of the United Nations Association Atlanta Chapter, raising nearly $250,000 for this former mine clearance program. When the program ended, Rev. Myers-Brown looked for a new landmine clearance organization to support. “I did some research and found Handicap International,” said Rev. Myers-Brown. “I respected how the organization works, its low administrative costs, and the number of countries where it works to clear landmines and explosive remnants of war.”

She tells people: “If you want to really make a difference in the world, buy a tribute card.” And to date, her efforts have brought in almost $7,000, an amount that equates to roughly 14,000 square yards of mine-free land.

But it isn’t just about the money. Rev. Myers-Brown sees education and advocacy as an essential part of her efforts. She teaches children in her church’s Sunday School about landmines and recruits their help in educating others. “Roughly every two hours, someone somewhere on the face of the earth steps on a landmine, and if it is a child there is a good chance they will die,” said Rev. Myers-Brown. “However, we can do something to stop this. This is the message we try to share with as many people as possible.”

On November 16, Rev. Myers-Brown will once again set up her table in Atlanta at the Central Congregational United Church of Christ’s alternative gift fair. And once again she will tell people about the need for a mine-free world and Handicap International’s work to reach that goal. “It makes me feel that I’m making some kind of difference in a world full of war. This is one unseen terrorist that we can combat without arms, without violence. Few people need another necktie or scarf, and this gift has the power to save lives.”

© Joyce Myers-Brown
Rev. Joyce Myers-Brown educates people who attend her church’s alternative gift fair about landmines and mine clearance.

A sign warns of hidden landmines in Huambo, Angola, where Rev. Myers-Brown worked.

Handicap International’s website has the most up-to-date news, plus photos and videos of the people your donations help. www.handicap-international.us

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A sign warns of hidden landmines in Huambo, Angola, where Rev. Myers-Brown worked.

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$2 per paycheck fits a child with a new prosthesis. Talk to your office representative to sign up. CFC#51472

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GIVE THE GIFT OF PEACE

Make a donation in honor of loved ones and receive a Limited Edition mine action holiday card featuring deminer Jonathan Matambo and his dog Katja.

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$15+ Supports a mine-free world


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SAVE LIVES.
BRING JOY.
HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL