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Handicap International

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Handicap International

Presence World-Wide

Officially started August 3, 1982, Handicap International (HI) works to provide rapid intervention on behalf of the handicapped and the most vulnerable populations when armed conflict upsets existing systems of assistance and solidarity. In countries where the economic problem is severe or where their expertise in prevention and socioeconomic development is requested, HI also steps in to assist. Technicians in the association offer expertise in prosthetics, physical therapy, psychotherapy, psychology, and landmine action. HI presently conducts over 160 projects in rehabilitation, prevention, rural development, and emergency programs in 52 countries.

Work in Europe

While many countries western solutions are not appropriate, Handicap International focuses on developing simple techniques for the fabrication of prostheses for the most destitute of the handicapped. HI’s socioeconomic programs enable the construction of survival strategies which Third World and former Eastern Bloc countries, who are affected by famine, underdevelopment and war, can implement for themselves.

HI’s work in Europe seeks to integrate handicapped children into the social fabric. To bring about this integration HI facilitates their acceptance into non-specialized structures already in place, in schools, leisure and vacation, training, modern communication and by encouraging an active role of their families.

Treatment, Prevention, Integration

HI describes its three-pronged approach as “multi-disciplinary programs designed to improve the living conditions of individuals faced with handicap or vulnerability.” Real solutions will happen when the communities of the Third World derive technical support from local opportunities and then put those into practice in close cooperation with the handicapped communities. HI gives support for preventive measures that work according to the shape of the local economic and social conditions.

More specifically described, HI’s three priorities are: the reinforcement of local capabilities, support for development and integration initiatives and the prevention of handicap-inflicting conditions. Overseas work for HI integrates all of these priorities and has specifically tackled the following:

- Creation of re-adaptation units that provide simple orthodox devices made from locally available materials.
- Intensive training of local technicians, from the handicapped population if possible, and the insertion of those technicians and their services into the communities.

Contact Information

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The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and in internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863 on the principles of Henry Dunant and the meeting of the Geneva Conventions, the ICRC has also originated the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movements, and plays a significant role in providing aid to landmine victims.

ICRC Work with Landmine Victims

The systematic use of violence to resolve human conflicts is as old as humanity and shows no sign of going out of fashion. The use of landmines is widely regarded as a technology of mass destruction:,mines in present day warfare, however, go far beyond purely military activity. Their use affects the physical and psychological health of individuals, and is a barrier to development and the environment. Landmines render whole regions unusable, and show no sign of going out of fashion.

The ICRC’s main role in relation to the war wounded is not to treat them, for this responsibility is the governments involved in the conflict and hence their army medical services. The task of the ICRC is first and foremost to ensure that all involved are familiar with the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and apply them, meaning they are trained to care for victims of landmines as well as their own and afford medical establishments and personnel the protection to which all are entitled.

Nevertheless, local medical services are often completely overwhelmed in conflict situations and the ICRC is then called on to step in to help the war wounded. When supplying hospitals with medical equipment and medicines is not enough, the ICRC must set up its own surgical facilities to offer the wounded care that the authorities cannot provide.

Some countries simply lack the surgical infrastructure necessary to care for war wounded; in others, access to existing hospitals is denied to certain victims for political reasons, or is simply not available because of geographical factors and the ICRC means of transportation. The ICRC first attempts to solve such problems by either providing medicines, dressing materials and surgical equipment to local structures or by negotiating with the authorities to obtain access to surgical care for all the wounded, in accordance with the principles of the Geneva Conventions. Where these attempts are insufficient, the ICRC helps to set up first-aid posts and transportation facilities where possible, send surgical teams to work within existing structures, or open new ICRC administered facilities for surgical care and rehabilitation. Special consideration is given to establishing safe blood transfusion services and prosthetic workshops for the rehabilitation of physical limbs, which are both in high demand for landmine victims.

In the last 15 years, the ICRC has organized over a dozen of its own surgical units in conflict zones. Most of them have had to treat large numbers of landmine victims, attesting to the fact that the use of this low technology weapon is becoming more widespread, especially in internal conflicts.

Current Activities

In June 1999 the ICRC launched an appeal for 105 million Swiss francs (U.S. $90 million) to fund its activities for mine victims over the next five years. The financial appeal covers all the ICRC’s activities relating to mine victims.

Goals:

- To reduce the risk of mine-related incidents through mine awareness programs currently being conducted by the ICRC in six countries.
- To provide mine victims with treatment and physical rehabilitation in 23 limb-fitting centers that the ICRC is running in 11 countries, and to continue its support for similar centers run by ministries of health,