

Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center of Colombia



El Centro Integral de Rehabilitación de Colombia (CIREC) is a nonprofit organization based in Bogotá, Colombia that focuses on the rehabilitation of disabled individuals by strengthening physical and social capacities in order to improve independence and quality of life. It was established in September 1976 by Dr. Jeannette Perry de Saravia and Father Joaquin Castro in hopes of addressing the needs of the disabled in Colombia.¹ Many of these disabled individuals are victims of anti-personnel mines; they face physical, economic and social obstacles as a result of their disabilities and are in need of rehabilitative treatment, prosthetics, orthotics or mobility aids. As the majority of AP mine survivors cannot pay for these services, CIREC is dependent on the support of partners and donations to fund their activities. Their primary funders include *Colnodo* (the Colombian Association of Nongovernmental Organizations for Communication), *Fundación Panamericana de Desarrollo* (the Pan American Development Foundation), *El Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* (the Colombian Family Welfare Institute), *La Organización de Los Estados Americanos* (the Organization of American States), the Norwegian Government, the Star of Hope Mission, the United States Agency for International Development, and the Office of Weapon's Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA).

Since its inception, CIREC has become a respected organization in Colombia and is especially well-regarded for its work in prosthetics and its psychosocial rehabilitation programs involving sports, culture, art, leisure, education and other activities.² In addition to assisting persons with disabilities, CIREC focuses on other underrepresented groups in Colombia including women and those living in poverty. CIREC also strives peaceably for economic development, human rights and social justice in areas of the country where violence is common. In addition, in February 2012 CIREC received the Quality Management Certification ISO 9001:2008.³

Seeds of Hope

The *Semillas de Esperanza* (Seeds of Hope) program is one of CIREC's most influential projects. Operating in regions affected by intense violence, Seeds of Hope sends medical brigades to remote rural districts to provide therapy to PWDs. The Seeds of Hope program also helps conduct community message campaigns and develop small businesses, so that PWDs are able to gain economic and psychological independence. As a result, PWDs are reintegrated as self-sufficient, productive members within their families, workplaces and communities. The program also supports the rights of PWDs through community leadership, social awareness and inclusion activities. Finally, Seeds of Hope is the vehicle for CIREC's mine-risk education program. In the same communities where the Seeds of Hope program is being carried out, MRE tools are distributed to community leaders—many of whom are landmine survivors themselves—for use in educating others on the appearance, location and dangers of landmines and unexploded ordnance. Seeds of Hope is active in 50 townships in 10 departments (Antioquia, Bolívar, Cauca, Cundinamarca, Meta, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Santander, Sucre and Tolima) and boasts a support network of more than 3,577 members.⁴

Other CIREC projects include:

- *Trabajando con Calidad* (Working with Quality), an 18-month project funded by *La Fundación Panamericana para el Desarrollo* for CIREC to design and implement a comprehensive program aimed at improving the quality of CIREC management practices and operations.
- *Un Regreso a la Capacidad Creativa* (A Return to Creative Capacity), a 12-month project funded by the U.S. Department of State in which CIREC will run four rehabilitation brigades serving 199 PWDs and work toward minimizing the risk of landmine accidents in the municipality of San Francisco, Antioquia.

- *Entrando en la onda TIC* (Entering the ITC Wave), a 12-month project in which CIREC will train PWDs to use computers and Internet tools. This project is funded by *El Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones* (the Ministry of Information Technology and Communication), and *Colnodo*, an organization based in Bogotá and focused on development through electronic communications.
- A four-month cooperation agreement with *El Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar* (the Colombian Family Welfare Institute) that promotes familial well-being and the rights of disabled children and adolescents through workshops and family-strengthening intervention strategies.
- *Mejorando la calidad de vida de sobrevivientes de mina antipersonal y munición sin explotar* (Improving the Quality of Life of Anti-personnel Mine and UXO Survivors), a 12-month project funded by the Norwegian Government involving specialized care, training and support for young survivors of landmines and unexploded ordnance in Valencia, Córdoba.
- *Puentes para Paz y Pan* (Bridges for Peace and Bread), a 12-month project funded by *Premio Estrella de Esperanza* (Star of Hope Award). In this project, CIREC focuses on empowering the community of Mirandita, Antioquia to self-sustainability by providing educational materials and constructing an organic garden for the school of Mirandita to improve the diet and nutrition of the children and community.

Since 1993, CIREC has presented the Star of Hope Award to disabled individuals who have returned to productive roles in their families and communities. Aimee Mullins, an American athlete and model who had her legs amputated below the knees at age one, was invited to tell her story at CIREC's 2011 Star of Hope Award Ceremony.⁵ More than 400 people attended the ceremony, which was held at *Club El Nogal* on 19 September 2011 and covered by a number of major Colombian news stations.

In addition to presenting awards, CIREC has also received numerous awards for its service to the people of Colombia. Most recently, CIREC was recognized when the U.S. Department of State honored Dr. Jeanette Perry de Saravia for 35 years of dedicated service to victims of landmines and PWDs. 🌐

~ Dan Baker, CISR Staff

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A display of prosthetics at a CIREC clinic.
Photo courtesy of Survivor Corps/CISR.

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