

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 3
Issue 3 *The Journal of Mine Action*

Article 22

October 1999

Handicap International

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Recommended Citation

Brigot, Sylvie (1999) "Handicap International," *Journal of Mine Action* : Vol. 3 : Iss. 3 , Article 22.
Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol3/iss3/22>

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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 prostheses, physical therapy, psychomotor therapy, psychology, and landmine action. HI presently conducts over 160 projects in rehabilitation, prevention, rural development and emergency programs in 52 countries.

Work in Europe

Because in 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 struc-

tures already in place, such as 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 community. Also needed is firm support for preventative 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 principals and has specifically tackled the following:

- Creation of re-adaptation units that provide simple orthopedic 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 community

- Close cooperation with local therapists, associations and authorities to facilitate the social and economic reinsertion of the handicapped and other vulnerable persons

- Reinforced solidarity and social cohesion in regards to health, agriculture, infrastructure and education

- Implementation of prevention programs and social assistance

A Stand Against Anti-personnel Mines

Handicap International is one of the six founding NGOs of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which was the co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997. As such a member, HI acts on its specific commitment to ban anti-personnel mines. The Mines Coordination Unit organizes programs of Mine Risk Education for those communities and countries wrought with mines. They have also started demining programs, which include training and supervision for local deminers.

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