

## **PRESS RELEASE**

13<sup>th</sup> October 2003



### **IRAQ: HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL MAINTAINS ITS TEAMS AND ACTIVITIES**

**Since the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Iraq on the 19th August, the ever-deteriorating security conditions have forced the organisation to adjust its strategy to make sure that the current situation will not undermine our projects.**

The attack on the United Nations has led to a large number of foreign humanitarian aid workers leaving Iraq. In spite of growing tensions and the very difficult working conditions, Handicap International had chosen to maintain its international team of 20 or so staff in the country. However, the increase in the number of security incidents targeting humanitarian aid workers, the killing of a mine clearance officer from a British organisation, and the increasing intensity of the attacks have made it necessary for Handicap International to change its strategy.

#### **Mine clearance**

The organization's two mine clearance teams, frequently forced to travel through dangerous areas, have unfortunately had to slow down their activities. Training a team of Iraqi deminers remains one of our priorities. The demining coordinator based in Baghdad is currently implementing the new plan supported by short-term missions from the Amman-based deminer.

#### **Physical rehabilitation**

The orthopaedic project of temporary prostheses is continuing. It has even been extended to a second orthopaedic centre in Baghdad (Al Kanat). The training of Iraqi physiotherapists will continue either in Baghdad or Amman depending on the security conditions.

#### **Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) and mine risk education**

Since the beginning of September, the Iraqi UXO and mine risk education team has grown from 10 to around 60 members, organizing the mass distribution of leaflets and posters and holding information sessions in schools and mosques.

In total, the number of Iraqi team members working for Handicap International has gone up from 30 or so in August to more than a hundred today. The preparation for piloting activities from Amman has been ongoing for several weeks now and will be punctuated by short-term experts' missions to Baghdad as regularly as the situation allows.

In the current chaos, the Iraqi population is, more than ever, in need of our help. With these arrangements, Handicap International intends to continue providing its assistance in the best possible conditions.

#### **Notes for Editors**

Handicap International is an international NGO working in 55 countries worldwide. Its mission is to provide support to disabled people, landmine victims and vulnerable populations. It is a co-founder of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which was awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

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