Press Release
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HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

HAITI EARTHQUAKE
Over 1,000 amputees according to Handicap International

Faced by the sheer number of injured people, Handicap International's health team in Haiti estimates the number of amputees to be over 1,000. Whilst continuing to provide emergency aid, Handicap International is already planning its long-term action.

To care for the maximum number of injured people, Handicap International currently has around 30 staff (of which 8 are expatriates) split into six mobile healthcare teams. The workforce should reach around 100 people (of which 15 are expatriates) in two to three weeks' time.

In Port-au-Prince, two of those teams, composed of rehabilitation specialists, are intervening directly in 8 hospitals, where only the most severe cases are taken in due to the massive influx of wounded people. The majority of operations are amputations. Some patients with closed fractures are having to leave without treatment, waiting until the most urgent cases have been attended to. Based on our work in these 8 hospitals, where more than 500 amputees have already been identified, and on data from other organisations, we estimate the number of amputees to be over 1,000.

"The situation in Haiti today is really unprecedented" explains Thomas Calvot, specialist in the care management of earthquake victims at Handicap International. "*This is due to the sheer number of the injured - 250,000 people according to the UN – and the destruction of health facilities. In emergency situations, doctors often have no other choice but to amputate. In the massive earthquakes in China in 2008 and Pakistan in 2005, the situation was less critical as hospitals were still working efficiently. In Haiti, no organisation is in a position to cover all the needs in this area. We are already working with partner organisations in order to take care of the maximum number of injured people, in a coordinated manner."*

With the agreement of hospital managers, Handicap International's teams are giving post-operative rehabilitation care, distributing walking aids and orthopaedic equipment and setting up a long-term follow-up system of these patients. *"You must keep your joints moving"*, Dr Colleen O'Connell repeats tirelessly to amputees, in overcrowded hospital wards. "Y*ou must do exercises every day to avoid muscular contraction. This is vital in order to fit you with an artificial limb later on."*

The other four mobile units from Handicap International are working within four neighbourhoods in the capital (Carrefour, Carrefour Feuilles, Christ-Roi and Pétionville) to provide care and distribute walking aids in camps of homeless people and in smaller gatherings of people.

Artificial limb fitting will be needed on a massive scale. This activity will only be able to start in March, once limbs have had sufficient time to heal following an amputation. Handicap International will produce between 300 and 400 emergency prostheses in the first six months. These temporary artificial limbs will then have to be replaced by final ones. Our aim is to create and coordinate a structure for rehabilitation and artificial limb fitting, building long-term capacity by training Haitian personnel to ensure the project's sustainability.

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Notes for editors
Already present in Haiti since 2008, Handicap International was able to provide a rapid response to the devastating earthquake that hit the country on 12th January. The organisation has already coordinated an inter-agency logistics platform in Haiti for the transport of humanitarian aid following the four cyclones that hit the country in summer 2008. Since the earthquake, our teams have also been delivering emergency aid through a fleet of trucks. The organisation is already planning its work in Haiti over the next few years.