

## Handicap International's intervention in Haiti: Massive rehabilitation and orthopaedic fitting needs

***Latest news: Following a second earthquake of a magnitude of 6.2 on the Richter scale which hit Haiti today at 12.30 pm (CET), Handicap International can confirm that its team in the country are all safe and sound and are continuing their emergency work with the Haitian victims.***

Lyon, Wednesday 20th January 2010. Whilst tens of thousands of injured people are still unable to access healthcare, and a further earthquake has just hit the island, Handicap International's team in Haiti has already recorded hundreds of scheduled or completed amputations. In order to ensure a sustainable response to the demand in terms of physical rehabilitation and orthopaedic fitting, Handicap International has launched a sponsorship programme for its work in Haiti.

One week after the earthquake, just twelve hospitals are operational in Port-au-Prince and they are understandably overwhelmed. On Monday 18th January, figures from the United Nations spoke of 250,000 injured people. The hospitals have set up a system to ensure the rapid rotation of these patients in order to save the most lives possible. The consequences could however be extremely serious both for those who reach the hospital too late and those who are discharged prematurely.

In these conditions, reminiscent of those found in war zones, patients who have received care or have been operated leave the hospital with no treatment advice, no post-operative follow up and no rehabilitation. They then return to the streets or the makeshift camps which have sprung up everywhere and where hygiene conditions are catastrophic, encouraging the development of infections and gangrene.

Since Saturday, Handicap International's team has recorded over 400 amputations for the Haitian capital alone. The association's American and Canadian reinforcements transiting through Santo Domingo also recorded around 20 amputations carried out on Haitian patients in the capital of the Dominican Republic. These figures will no doubt increase dramatically for all the healthcare centres providing care for earthquake victims. For the moment there are no figures available concerning the number of people suffering from paralysis resulting from spinal cord injuries.

*"It is vital that amputees and patients with other injuries are followed up immediately after their amputation or surgery in order to avoid the onset complications or permanently disabling after-effects",* explains Thomas Calvot, specialist in the care management of earthquake victims at Handicap International. *"This is the lynchpin of Handicap International's work in emergency situations."*

Handicap International has set up six mobile healthcare teams who are dispensing first aid and stabilising patients while they await hospitalisation. These teams will today be reinforced with the arrival of a physical rehabilitation physician, two orthoprosthetic technicians, an occupational therapist and a physiotherapist, with further reinforcements arriving next week. The post-operative follow up and rehabilitation work can therefore start up this week. The first assistive devices should be available in around six weeks, the time it takes for scarring from amputations to heal. This work will need to be continued over the years to come, with very large numbers of Haitian patients.

**To ensure the sustainability of its work in Haiti, Handicap International is today launching a sponsorship programme for its work in the country, based on a monthly donation of 22 Euros (75% tax deductible for French taxpayers)**

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