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Haiti: Thousands of disabled Haitians to benefit from rebuilt clinic

Port-au-Prince (ICRC) – Over the next twelve months, the ICRC Special Fund for the Disabled (SFD), with financial support from the American Red Cross and the Norwegian Red Cross, will rebuild and re-equip – and later help to maintain – one of the most important physical rehabilitation facilities in Haiti, which is managed by Healing Hands for Haiti International (HHHI). This will benefit thousands of disabled people in the country.

The clinic is due to re-open by the end of 2011. It will include facilities for consultations and physiotherapy, a workshop for manufacturing artificial limbs and other mobility devices and training rooms for HHHI staff.

"Even before the earthquake it was a challenge to help the huge number of disabled people living in Haiti. The disaster added thousands of newly handicapped patients, while our medical facilities, prosthetic clinic and workshop were completely devastated," said Eric Doubt, executive director of HHHI, shortly before the signing of a project agreement between HHHI and the SFD. "Currently there are between 8,000 and 10,000 amputees in need of professional care. We urgently need to rebuild facilities for them."

Since the earthquake in 2010, HHHI staff and volunteers have been working in makeshift facilities and, in rotation, in various hospitals and health centres. "We do a lot of work, but the therapy requires specific equipment and long-term commitment," Mr Doubt said. "For instance, two-year-old Blaurha lost one of her legs during the earthquake. For as long as she continues to grow, she's going to need a new artificial leg every few months, and each one will have to be manufactured individually."

"The humanitarian needs are enormous, so the redeveloped facility is going to be bigger and better than the previous one. Not only will it have more capacity, but we will also be helping to raise the level of service and improve the functioning of the clinic long-term," said Andreas Lendorff, a member of the Board of the SFD. "The re-opened clinic will help amputees and other disabled people, pre- and post-earthquake, to become more autonomous and to resume active lives."

The American Red Cross will finance the reconstruction, which is expected to cost 1.8 million US dollars, while the Norwegian Red Cross will fund the material, technical and educational support that the SFD will provide to HHHI for the next five years.

"The American Red Cross is pleased to be funding the reconstruction of this important facility," said Ricardo Caivano, Country Director in Haiti for the American Red Cross. "We hope that this prosthetics centre, through our collaboration with a group of outstanding partners, will meet the needs of an important and often forgotten part of the Haitian population."

"Life in Haiti is a challenge, and especially if you have a physical handicap," said Sven Mollekleiv, president of the Norwegian Red Cross and vice-chairman of the SFD. "This centre will do more than provide people with arms and legs; it will help them live with dignity. Its work is vital and life-saving. Helping people to manage their daily lives is crucial. We are glad to provide support for this important effort to give people's lives worth," he added.

HHHI was founded in 1999 and is dedicated to bringing physical medicine and rehabilitation services and programmes to Haiti, which will eventually be run by Haitians for Haitians.

Founded by the ICRC in 1983, the SFD provides support for physical rehabilitation services in more than 30 low-income countries: mainly materials and training for local experts to manufacture artificial limbs and other mobility devices, and frequently using its own, low-cost technology. The SFD has been working with HHHI since 2005.

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