On September 23, the Obama Administration made a solemn promise to the world—the U.S. “will not use [antipersonnel landmines] outside of the Korean Peninsula.” What’s more, the U.S. will begin to destroy its stockpiles of landmines—estimated to be in the millions—so long as they “are not required for the defense of the Republic of Korea.”

Handicap International welcomes these vital steps toward compliance with the Ottawa Treaty, which bans the production, transfer, and use of antipersonnel landmines. However, Elizabeth MacNairn, executive director of Handicap International U.S., stresses that the U.S. government must find alternatives to landmines on the Korean Peninsula.

“Given that the U.S. has repeatedly acknowledged the serious humanitarian consequences of using antipersonnel landmines, it is illogical and immoral for the U.S. to continue using mines in any country,” MacNairn said. “The inevitable loss of innocent lives is an outrage.”

The U.S. statement failed to provide clear deadlines about when President Obama might submit the treaty to the U.S. Senate for ratification. “The positive announcements must be cemented into our country’s laws through ratification,” said MacNairn. “We hope that this crucial step won’t drift beyond 2016, President Obama’s final year in office.”

For more than 20 years, the U.S. has refrained from using or trading antipersonnel landmines, and landmine production ended in 1997. The U.S. is by far the world’s largest donor to projects that reduce the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war, spending $2.3 billion on mine action since 1993. Indeed, the U.S. government has generously supported Handicap International mine action projects in countries such as Lebanon, Libya, and Senegal.

Annual global funding for action against mines reached $681 million in 2012, after a decade that saw clearance or survey work release nearly 772 square miles of land.

By working towards acceding to the Ottawa Treaty, the U.S. confirms that these standards are essential and sets an example to follow. Handicap International will now work to encourage U.S. authorities to fulfill their promises while urging powers like China and Russia, which along with 33 other countries, have not joined the treaty, to follow the American example.

Handicap International has mine action projects, including mine clearance, victim assistance, and risk education programs in more than 40 countries.
Philippines: One year later
Handicap International continues to help people to rebuild their lives after Typhoon Haiyan

PROJECT UPDATE
It’s 5 a.m. in Barangay San Diego, Taguig, and a small Handicap International team arrives with a gift for Oscar Balang: a pregnant pig to help him earn money. Last year, Oscar Balang, who had a leg amputated, had been hard at work helping people with disabilities and their families since the storm struck. Generous donors have funded fleets of trucks to distribute 1,800 tons of food, 1,390 tents, and other aid. Donors like you enabled our rehabilitation experts to provide care, as well as orthopedic materials to local medical centers, and to work out the community’s most vulnerable individuals, who would otherwise struggle to access basic aid, medical care, and mobility devices.

To celebrate donors like you, we’re focusing our next donor spotlight feature to The Next Step. This issue, we highlight the incredible dedication of Rev. Joyce Myerea-Brown, who has fundraised for landmine clearance one of her chief missions in life.

Today, we are closely involved in reconstruction efforts. We’re repairing or building new homes for more than 1,000 families and helping members of 80 households to regain their financial independence.

Renewed support for Christella, 15, Haiti earthquake survivor

November 30, 2012
Christella was first fitted with a prosthesis in 2010 after her left leg was crushed in the Haiti earthquake. February 2012, doctors at a Handicap International orthopedic center where she was fitted for her first prosthetic leg, custom-fit and built by Handicap International-trained Haitian technicians.

THE BIG PICTURE
Handicap International staff have delivered 180 pigs to vulnerable families.

Emergency response launched in Iraq
Handicap International is helping thousands of displaced people in Iraqi Kurdistan

NEWS
Since the beginning of the year, more than 500,000 Iraqis have fled to the Erbil and Dohuk governorates in Iraqi Kurdistan where Handicap International has operational bases. The UN estimates that 40% of the displaced people are “vulnerable” – people with disabilities, injuries, and chronic diseases, as well as older people.

Thanks to our more than 25 years of experience in the region and an extensive network of connections, we were able to launch an emergency response in support of vulnerable Iraqis immediately following the fall of Mosul in June.

“When hundreds of thousands of people need food, shelter, and care, people with disabilities and older people need even more support because they can’t move around very easily and go out in search of assistance,” said Brunella Di Cintio, Handicap International’s head of mission in Iraq.

Haven gets a new set of wheels
NEWS FROM THE FIELD
Every day in Iraq, our mobile rehabilitation teams make a difference in the lives of displaced Iraqis. We make a special effort to help children with disabilities.

Without proper fitting equipment that is adjusted as a child grows, the child is at risk of developing more serious, permanent conditions.

Our staff found Haven, who has prenatally osteoporosis, in a displaced persons’ camp with her family. They realized that the wheelchair she was using was much too big (photo on the right). Without a fitted chair, Haven sat slumped back in her seat, which ultimately lead to further serious bone malformations.

Thank you for being part of this vital work.

Beth MacNeir
Executive Director

“People were arriving on our doorstep”
Camille Borie is the Emergency Program Manager in Iraqi Kurdistan

In an emergency situation, no one stops to rest. The working conditions are difficult and the nights shorter. This summer, our teams had to start very early in the morning to avoid the stifling, 100-plus degree heat.

Handicap International’s role in Iraqi Kurdistan is extremely important. Our mobile teams go from tent to tent and house to house to find people with disabilities, the injured, and those suffering from diseases like diabetes and cancer. We distribute made-to-fit wheelchairs, crutches, and other items that were left behind during rushed evacuations, and we ensure they receive the specific care and services they need.

The situation is deteriorated over the summer, but when armed groups advanced across Iraq in August, the Iraqi population was overcome with panic and fear. These were people who had led a normal life, with a job and a house, but lost everything in just a few hours.

Displaced people were arriving on our doorstep. We found families everywhere—packed into more than 600 schools, sleeping in mosques, churches, and, of course, on the streets. Camps are still being built to house displaced Iraqis, and to allow the schools to re-open.

I will never forget one meeting with a man who had a leg amputated. He was distraught. We were able to provide him with a prosthetic leg, and I was there when he tried it for the first time. Being able to stand again filled him with emotion. Witnessing moments like this give our staff the resolve to continue working hard.

Background
Geography
Iraqi Kurdistan is a semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq, bounded by Turkey to the north, Iran to the east, and Syria to the west. Its capital is Erbil.

History
Iraqi Kurdistan is largely populated by ethnically Kurdish who have sought independence from Iraq for decades. Kurdish rebellions in 1968 and 1991 were brutally suppressed by Saddam Hussein. Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, a Kurdish semi-autonomous government was formed. Due to the Syria conflict and external movements in Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan currently hosts hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees and displaced Iraqis.

Mandate
Handicap International launched an emergency project in May 2014 in four Syrian refugee camps to ensure that people with disabilities are able to access aid and services. Immediately following the fall of Mosul in June 2014, Handicap International launched mobile rehabilitation teams to meet the needs of displaced Iraqis.
“This gift has the power to save lives”

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

“I remember driving with companions down a road in rural Angola filled with fear—the ground was full of landmines,” said Rev. Joyce Myers-Brown. “I knew much of the rural areas had not been cleared of mines.”

Putting her passion into action, Rev. Myers-Brown has spent almost 20 years as a tireless anti-landmine advocate, and mine-clearance fundraiser. For ten years, she chaired the Adopt-A-Minefield effort of the United Nations Association Atlanta Chapter, raising nearly $250,000 for this former mine clearance program. When the program ended, Rev. Myers-Brown looked for a new landmine clearance organization to support. “I did some research and found Handicap International,” said Rev. Myers-Brown. “I respected how the organization works, its low administrative costs, and the number of countries where it works to clear landmines and explosive remnants of war.”

Since 2009, she has raised funds for Handicap International’s mine action program through her church’s alternative gift fair. After years of giving donations to other charities in lieu of holiday gifts for her grandchildren, Rev. Myers-Brown worked with Handicap International staff to create holiday tribute cards to encourage attendees at the gift fair to support Handicap International.

She tells people: “If you want to really make a difference in the world, buy a tribute card.” And to date, her efforts have brought in almost $7,000, an amount that equates to roughly 14,000 square yards of mine-free land. But it isn’t just about the money. Rev. Myers-Brown sees education and advocacy as an essential part of her efforts. She teaches children in her church’s Sunday School about landmines and recruits their help in educating others. “Roughly every two hours, someone somewhere on the face of the earth steps on a landmine, and if it is a child there is a good chance they will die,” said Rev. Myers-Brown. “However, we can do something to stop this. This is the message we try to share with as many people as possible.”

On November 16, Rev. Myers-Brown will once again set up her table in Atlanta at the Central Congregational United Church of Christ’s alternative gift fair. And once again she will tell people about the need for a mine-free world and Handicap International’s work to reach that goal. “It makes me feel that I’m making some kind of difference in a world full of war. This is one unseen terrorist that we can combat without arms, without violence. Few people need another necktie or scarf, and this gift has the power to save lives.”