

## People with Disabilities cross sectarian divisions to ensure inclusion in the New Iraq



IRAQ — February 28, 2008 — Organizations representing people with disabilities (PWD) from across Iraq came together to form an alliance, Iraqi Alliance of Disability Organizations (IADO). The nonprofit Mercy Corps played a key role in forging the Alliance, which will work to advocate for the rights of PWDs in the new Iraq.

The 33 participants were from 30 organizations that represent more than 150,000 people with diverse disabilities including amputees, and the blind and deaf. The meeting was to formalize the Alliance and vote on bylaws.

It was attended by five government officials – Senator Sheikh Kasem Koli Khafaji, Mr. Abdel Ghafar Saadee (Ministry of Labor), Mr. Falah Alyaseri (Ministry of Civil Society), Mr. Fadel Abbas (Ministry of the Environment) and Mr. Ali Monem About (Ministry of Human Rights). The officials were invited to provide input on the bylaws and to observe and certify the election.

The bylaws state that the organization is a network of non-profit, non-governmental organizations that exists independent of political, religious, ethnic and sectarian affiliations.

“From the North to the South we have joined our voices together to advocate for all of our people in the new Iraq,” said Moaffak T. Hashim, newly appointed director of the Alliance. He identified the next steps as reaching out to other organizations that represent PWDs and raising awareness about the Alliance.

The formation of the Alliance has been one of the USAID investments in Iraq and has been supported by Mercy Corps.

“We are very proud to be involved with this organization that has come together across the lines that are currently dividing Iraq,” said Tiana Tozer, PWD program manager, Mercy Corps Iraq. “People with disabilities are among the most vulnerable people in Iraq. Everyday they face social stigmas, and lack resources, rights and opportunities to fully participate in society.”

Since 2003, Mercy Corps has worked through the USAID Community Action Program to directly engage Iraqis in the rebuilding and renewal of their country. Village by village and community by community, Mercy Corps is helping Iraqis take charge of their future. It has worked hard to build a seasoned staff, and now Iraqi national staff members are responsible for most day-to-day program management, with expatriates providing oversight and technical support.

### ABOUT MERCY CORPS:

Mercy Corps works amid disasters, conflicts, chronic poverty and instability to unleash the potential of people who can win against nearly impossible odds. Since 1979, Mercy Corps has provided \$1.3 billion in assistance to people in 100 nations. Supported by headquarters offices in North America, Europe and Asia, the agency's unified global programs employ 3,500 staff worldwide and reach nearly 14.4 million people in more than 35 countries. For more information, visit [www.mercycorps.org](http://www.mercycorps.org).