Return
Challenges for persons with disabilities do not end once return begins. Information on the return process is often not presented clearly enough, using means everyone can understand. In addition, transport services do not take into account the needs of certain persons (e.g. using large trucks that are difficult to climb into), and often rely on central drop-off locations that are far from the place of origin, making it difficult for some to reach their homes. Furthermore, people often find themselves returning to environments which prove more challenging than the camp which was their temporary home. For persons with disabilities, especially for those who have received appropriate services for the first time while displaced, this can be a major deterrent to resettlement, as was seen during refugee return from Kenya to southern Sudan in recent years.

Examples of solutions:

- Include persons with disabilities in the planning phase to ensure the return process is adapted appropriately.
- Arrange adapted transport for those who require it, and organise assistance and transport to the specific place of origin, including support to carry rations and personal items.
- Provide information and appropriate referral towards services available at the place of return.

A step forward...
Despite major advances towards better inclusion of persons with disabilities in displacement contexts, a lot of work still needs to be done. Handicap International and a number of other stakeholders have been lobbying for a UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion on Disability. This Conclusion, which member states will adopt in 2010, will help promote implementation of the recent UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in humanitarian situations, especially in refugee and other displacement contexts. It will provide practical guidance for all actors who share responsibility to fully include persons with disabilities in assistance programmes and initiatives for durable solutions.

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Second African Decade of Persons with Disabilities
Aïda Sarr and Kudakwashe Dube

1999-2009 was the first African Decade of Persons with Disabilities, established by the African Union to encourage the full participation, equality and empowerment of people with disabilities in Africa. During the first Decade, the Secretariat prioritised facilitating partnerships throughout society; assisting the most vulnerable groups – such as persons with intellectual disabilities, persons who are deaf-blind and those with albinism – to have a voice; and launching the African Campaign on Disability and HIV/AIDS to mainstream disability in AIDS services and response programmes.

The Secretariat also advocates for the ratification and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and monitoring of different protocols relating to the rights of disabled persons in Africa.

The Decade has now been extended to 2010-2019 – the Second African Decade. The Secretariat is part of the broader movement against conflict and is currently cooperating with the African Union on matters related to disability, peace and security and the plight of disabled people in countries emerging from war situations. An important aspect of this work is to advocate for the implementation of policies related to disability by agencies involved with disaster management, refugees and other displaced persons, including policies and strategies for repatriation and resettlement. For instance, when the camps in Gulu, Uganda, were dismantled in 2009, disabled persons were left in the camp with few support services. Their plight was addressed after an international outcry and intervention.

Words and images
The words and images used by the media can create either a positive view of persons with disabilities or an insensitive portrayal that reinforces common myths that leads to discrimination. The Secretariat has run training workshops for journalists and facilitated the creation of a network of African journalists to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. At least 200 African journalists have been trained and are now running regular disability-focused columns in a range of African media.

The Secretariat has produced guidelines for journalists, as well as other training resources such as an advocacy and lobbying manual, an evaluation manual and a resource mobilisation/fundraising manual for DPOs. Online at: http://www.africandecade.org.za.

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