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MORE THAN 1,000 PALESTINIANS RECEIVE THE GIFT OF HEARING AS PART OF ISRAEL-PALESTINE HEARING MISSION OF PEACE

*Starkey Hearing Foundation, Sheba Medical Center, American Friends of Sheba
Medical Center, and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel
Team up in Cross-Border Humanitarian Effort*

MINNEAPOLIS (May 26, 2011) – The Starkey Hearing Foundation and its Israeli partners concluded today its Israel-Palestine Hearing Mission of Peace in the West Bank region, fitting more than 1,000 Palestinian children and adults with hearing devices. The Starkey Hearing Foundation hopes the three-day effort will promote greater communication and understanding among the local communities through improved hearing.

In an unprecedented manner, the Starkey Hearing Foundation Israel-Palestine Hearing Mission of Peace brought Americans, Israelis and Palestinians together for the mission which was held Tuesday, May 24 through Thursday, May 26 at the Khaled ben Said school in Tulkarem, Palestine (West Bank region). This first-of-its-kind hearing mission to the area involved the coordination of medical and security personnel, along with volunteers, from all three countries made possible through the collaborative efforts of the Starkey Hearing Foundation, the Chaim Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer in Israel, the American Friends of Sheba Medical Center in New York, and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel.

“The Starkey Hearing Foundation Israel-Palestine Hearing Mission of Peace is a humanitarian effort unlike any hearing mission we have done before anywhere in the world,” said Bill Austin, Founder, Starkey Hearing Foundation. “In our ongoing desire to deliver the gift of hearing to those in need, we thank our Israeli partners and the Palestinian people for giving us the opportunity to bring about a life-changing event for each of the recipients we were able to help. It is our hope that this work will make possible greater understanding and communication.”

During the three-day Israel-Palestine Hearing Mission of Peace, Austin led a team of audiologists from the Starkey Hearing Foundation, along with experts from the Sheba Medical Center and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel. The group worked together to fit each of the recipients who ranged in age from four to 75, and hailed from as far as Hebron in the South, to Jenin in the North.

Among the recipients who received hearing aids were sisters Aya Ayman Ahmad Daghmarsh, 10 years old, and Youmna Ayman Ahmad Daghmarsh, nine years old. The girls were both diagnosed with hearing loss at the age of five and spent several years in a special boarding school away from their family. In order to transfer to a school nearer to their home, their teachers requested that the parents fit them with hearing aids which the family could not afford. The Starkey Hearing Foundation was an answer to their prayers said their father. "I must admit I nearly cried to see them receive the hearing aids. This is a present from above for us. We thank everyone who made this dream come true."

Also receiving a hearing aid was Raneem Rami Jamal Shallakh, four, who suffers from 80 percent hearing loss. Raneem's father could not afford the cost of a hearing aid for his only daughter. When it was placed in her ear she could finally say "mom" and "dad" out loud. "Yesterday I wouldn't have believed this," said her father. "Now I'm planning to take my little girl to speech classes to help her speak better."

Among the older recipients were 52-year-old Faiz Ibrahim Salah Sha'aban, who resides in the Nur Shams Refugee Camp and works as a driver for the local public transportation system; and 51-year-old, Omar Shade Mezid of Anabta. Mezid told Foundation staff that he believes his hearing loss came as a result of working in a stone quarry 10 years ago. Today, Mezid works as an accountant for the Office of Education and has faced many difficulties hearing people in everyday communications.

Said Professor Zeev Rotstein, Director of Sheba Medical Center, "The hospital's vision includes helping our neighbors here. This is something that we have placed an emphasis on for years. On a personal level, one-to-one, when you take away the politics, I feel that we can certainly maintain a true dialogue and partnership between Israelis and Palestinians. During the Starkey Hearing Foundation Mission we have managed to give children the ability to hear for the first time in their life. And I hope they will also hear our calls and yearning for true peace between our peoples."

"The American Friends of Sheba are very pleased to have participated in this important effort, and to have brought the Starkey Hearing Foundation together with the hospital," said Mrs. Helene Feldman, chairman of the American Friends of Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer. "Sheba Medical Center truly is a hospital without borders!"

Said Hadas Ziv, Director of Public Outreach, Physicians for Human Rights- Israel, "The lives of these individuals were changed by medical teams and they can now hear. We are extremely proud to be part of this life transforming effort together with the Starkey Hearing Foundation and Sheba Medical Center."

Hearing missions are the primary way the Starkey Hearing Foundation realizes its goal *so the world may hear*. Each year, the Foundation conducts hearing missions both in the U.S. and internationally, and has set a goal of reaching 1,000,000 individuals in need by the end of this decade.

According to the Foundation, hearing loss is pervasive affecting 63 million children alone worldwide. Yet, with the help of a hearing device, hearing loss can often be corrected in a majority cases, giving an individual the opportunity to better connect with their family, the community, and the world around them.

The Starkey Hearing Foundation team is committed to creating a sustainable model for its missions that provides the hearing aid recipients with the tools and resources to properly maintain them, including a year's supply of batteries, as well as instruction on how to properly care for and maintain the devices. The Foundation also identifies local certified hearing health organizations to assist the recipients following the mission, if needed.

About the Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer

Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer has been the Starkey Hearing Foundation's lead partner in the region, providing medical staff and technicians, ground support and local coordination for the mission. The Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer is a university-affiliated tertiary referral hospital that serves as Israel's national medical center in many fields. Adjacent to Tel Aviv, it is the most comprehensive medical center in the Middle East, renowned for its compassionate care and leading-edge medicine. In addition to being a global center for medical education, it is also a major medical-scientific research facility that collaborates internationally with the bio-tech and pharmaceutical industries to develop new drugs, treatments and technologies.

About American Friends of Sheba Medical Center in New York

American Friends of Sheba Medical Center in New York has been the focal point in leading, guiding and supporting the Starkey Hearing Foundation in accessing the needed resources at Sheba and in Israel. This organization has played a vital role in bringing together the Foundation with Sheba Medical. Their vision of this mission, and commitment has been critical. American Friends of Sheba Medical in New York has been instrumental in advancing Sheba's interests and access to the United States for more than 60 years.

About Physicians for Human Rights-Israel

Physicians for Human Rights-Israel has worked closely with the Starkey Hearing Foundation and Sheba Medical Center to organize patient identification in the area, as well as pre-mission efforts to collect ear molds for each of the recipients. PHR-Israel has also worked in the coordination of security efforts with the Palestinian authority to ensure the safety of the team and recipients throughout the mission. Physicians for Human Rights-Israel is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that strives to promote a more fair and inclusive society in which the right to health is applied equally for all. PHR-Israel stands at the forefront of the struggle for human rights and the right to health particularly, in Israel and its occupied Palestinian territory.

About Starkey Hearing Foundation

The Starkey Hearing Foundation is striving to change the social consciousness of hearing and hearing loss prevention. Hearing loss affects one in 10 Americans, and 63 million children worldwide, yet many do not have access to the hearing devices that can help correct that disability. The Foundation now delivers more than 100,000 hearing aids through hearing missions in countries stretching from the U.S. to Vietnam. Since 2000, the Foundation has supplied more than 500,000 hearing aids to people in need and is striving to achieve its goal of distributing over one million free hearing aids in this decade. In addition to giving the gift of hearing, the Foundation partners with Best Buy and the GRAMMY Foundation to promote 'safe hearing', and recently launched a campaign aimed at preventing hearing loss among teens and young people called *Listen Carefully*. For more information on the Starkey Hearing Foundation, visit www.starkeyhearingfoundation.org.

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