

“My DREAMS WERE CRUSHED TO PIECES AND MY LIFE WAS CHANGED FOREVER WHEN THE DOCTORS TOLD ME MY LEGS WOULD BE AMPUTATED.”



“I was lying in the middle of the street, and I couldn't get up or move, in fear that I would get shot again. I felt a sharp pain in both of my legs and I was overcome with panic when I realised that I could not move either of my legs. While I was losing consciousness, I thought of what would happen to Arwa if I died right there on the tarmac.”

On August 25, 2004, Rasool, a 32-year-old aspiring photographer was heading back to his photography shop when he was caught in the middle of an armed conflict. Just a few weeks before, Rasool and the love of his life, Arwa, had gotten married and his life was full of hopes and dreams. “Shrapnel hit both of my legs and no ambulance came. When the ambulance finally arrived and I was taken to the hospital, I was not treated immediately because the hospital lacked most of the necessary medications, including antibiotics. I lay in bed for weeks, anxiously waiting to find out whether or not I would be walking out of the hospital on my own two legs. After 21 days, the doctor informed me that the only thing they could do for me was amputate both of my legs below the knee,” Rasool recounted.



IOM IRAQ AND SWISSLEG PRESENTS:

RASOOL'S *story*

After losing both legs, Rasool was forced to close his small photography shop to pay his hospital bills.



“Even though Arwa was by my side, I lay in the hospital bed, in a daze from the narcotics that they gave me during the amputation. I don’t think anyone could possibly understand how I felt unless they had experienced it themselves.”

Bound to a wheelchair, incapable of providing for his wife and unable to start the life and career he once dreamt of, Rasool was forced to close his small photography shop to pay his hospital bills. He had no choice but to turn to his mother and brothers for financial aid. “They all united to help me,” Rasool explained. “Without them, we wouldn’t have been able to manage – we wouldn’t even have bread on the table.” But that was not the biggest challenge for Rasool and Arwa. “My biggest challenge over the past nine years was finding the inner strength to keep fighting. A moment of weakness would come up every now and then but Arwa was always by me side and her love helped me get through the hard times.” Arwa and Rasool decided to

continue to fight and to start a family despite the circumstances. In 2005, the couple had their first daughter, Hawra’ and a year later, they had a boy named Sijad. In 2011, they had their youngest, whom they named Zein.

“Becoming a father was a very mixed emotional experience. On the one hand, Arwa and I had a beautiful family with three healthy children. But I couldn’t be the kind of father that I wanted to be. I couldn’t have them fall asleep in my arms and then carry them to their cribs or beds. I couldn’t even take them to my mother’s house for a visit. Not to mention that I couldn’t even provide for my family, myself,” Rasool explained with a tone of frustration. But with Arwa’s resilience, Rasool found a great deal of strength. “Throughout our struggle, Arwa and I always believed that there was nothing we could have done to avoid the situation we were in, and we were driven by our faith in that we needed to start a new life and continue our battle towards being a normal family,” Rasool said.

Over 25 million land mines are scattered throughout Iraq.

Although there is no official statistic on the number of amputees in Iraq, after almost three decades of war and with 25 million land mines scattered all over the country, it isn't hard to imagine how many Iraqi people have suffered and continue to suffer as Rasool has. In addition to the thousands of amputees, the difficulty of receiving prosthetics is often enough to drive sufferers to hopelessness. "The struggle seemed to be endless. For almost nine years I went from one centre to another without any success. But in the summer of 2013, I learned about a centre in Missan," Rasool explained. With the support of his wife and barely a shred of expectation, Rasool decided to try his luck one more time.

A few months later, in September 2013, Mohammad, a man working at the centre who was trained by SwissLeg, called Rasool from the Missan Prosthetic Centre and informed him that he had heard about his struggle. "After I explained my story in detail, Mohammad asked me to transfer my documents from the last centre that I had applied to, to the centre here in Missan. Within a week of filing the paperwork, Mohammad called me to confirm that I was eligible to receive two prosthetic legs as a result of IOM and SwissLeg support," Rasool said, with a smile on his face. "When I hung up the phone, Arwa was standing there, carrying Zein, and the look of pure happiness on her face was indescribable. It seemed too good to be true."

Thanks to a partnership between SwissLeg and IOM, Rasool was called in to receive free prostheses at Missan Prosthetic Centre.

14 days later, the process began. "On Thursday, they did a full check up, on Monday they cast the first models, and the next Sunday, I had two legs!" Rasool's physicians recommended that he join a rehabilitation programme, but due to the high transport costs, Rasool simply could not afford to go back and forth from his home to the centre. "Instead, the doctors taught me what to do at home. I would use the wall to balance in order to practice walking, which took about a month," Rasool explained. Rasool admits that getting used to the prosthetic legs was extremely painful and difficult at the beginning, but he also said that now he is already feeling accustomed to them. "Even though the process of getting used to the prosthetic legs was challenging to say the least, the prostheses provided by SwissLeg are much more comfortable and easier to use than those provided by the other disabilities centres," Rasool added.

In addition to being able to stand on his own two legs, Rasool and his family have been given an opportunity to rebuild their lives and their independence. "The prosthetic legs have given me so much hope for the future. I used to depend solely on my friends and family to help me financially, and even though I am extremely grateful for their help, I reached a point where I could no longer accept it, which made me even more determined to walk." Rasool's new legs have also enabled him to socialise and meet people more easily than he did while he was in a wheelchair. "When I was in the wheelchair, it was very difficult for me to get around. I was always at home and I would rarely go out. Now I can meet people and, more importantly, I can work again." Rasool is now working at his friend's photography shop and he can provide for his family once more. "I earn only 7 USD per day, and even though it is less than what I

earned when I had my own shop, at least I can work. In addition to the happiness that comes with being able to provide for my family, the best thing about receiving the prosthetic legs is that I can spend quality time with my children,” Rasool explained. “When I was using the wheelchair, I couldn’t even hold my children or walk with them to the supermarket or anything like that. But now they are happy that they can hold my hand and go to the store to buy candy. I can finally hold their hands and walk next to them and I feel so blessed to have these moments.”

Rasool highlighted the fact that he was extremely thankful to Mohammad, IOM and

SwissLeg for their immeasurable support. “Now I can walk with total freedom, do my daily work at the photography shop and I can even drive a car. For me, this is the beginning of a new life after years of pain and agony.”

Rasool hopes to make use of his certification from the Iraqi Photographer’s Association and to continue pursuing his passion for photography. “I have learned a great deal at my current job in terms of enhancing and refreshing my skills and using programs such as Photoshop. Now I am dreaming of opening my own store again and I can finally imagine living a life like the one I had before I lost my legs.”

SwissLeg and IOM Iraq will continue to work together to give disabled individuals the chance to walk again.





“WALKING IS A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT THAT SHOULD BE AFFORDED TO EVERYONE EVERYWHERE”

In collaboration with IOM Iraq, SwissLeg launched a project in 2013 in the southern Iraqi province of Missan, aiming to address the needs of 21 Iraqi amputees with a diverse and challenging range of amputations, including symis, above-knee, through-knee and below-knee amputations. In addition, SwissLeg committed to addressing the needs of a government operated limb workshop, providing training for 10 Iraqi technicians on how to manufacture SwissLeg’s prosthetic limbs, while also improving the level of the produced prostheses.

The 21 beneficiaries received custom-fit, high-mobility above-the-knee or below-the-knee replacements, in addition to rehabilitation treatment. After completing advanced gait training, beneficiaries were able to walk independently with their new SwissLeg prostheses. IOM Iraq and SwissLeg have closely monitored the status of each amputee case to ensure that all patients are supported in their transition to prosthetic legs.

During the manufacturing process, Iraqi technicians were involved in each step of the prosthesis production and received direct support and supervision from SwissLeg experts. Technicians took patients’ measurements for custom-fit casting and assembled casts according to the SwissLeg casting technique. The SwissLeg casting technique uses low cost materials, which allows affordable prosthetic technology, while maintaining a durable and high-quality product.. Considering the cost of the prostheses and the time of implementation, SwissLeg was able to complete the project at about half the cost and half the time with higher quality results, in comparison to the previous vendor in Iraq. In addition, the technicians, patients, and Iraqi Department of Health officials were all very pleased with the excellent quality of the prostheses and the results of the training.

Today, SwissLeg provides artificial limbs to amputees in the developing world. To find out more, visit www.swissleg.com.