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Jaipur Foot Camp Brings Renewed Hope to Landmine Victims in Kabul

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Help Handicapped International

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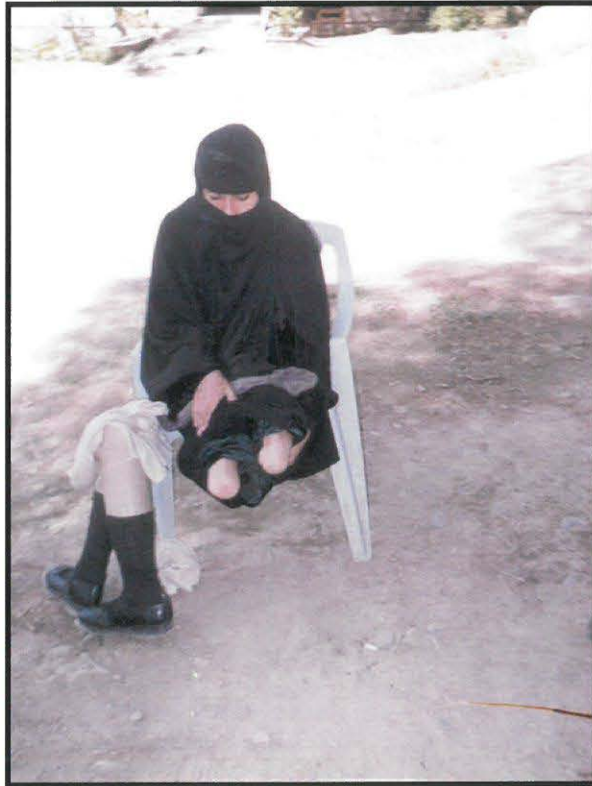
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JAIPUR

Brings Renewed Hope to Landmine Victims in Kabul

Foot Camp

Faribo, a 23-year-old girl and resident of Kabul, Afghanistan, lost both of her legs in a landmine explosion. After the accident, she felt like a burden to her family. Through an advertisement on television, Faribo heard about the Jaipur Foot Camp and decided to see what it had to offer her. At the camp, she received a light and comfortable prosthesis. Faribo testifies that it has given a new meaning to her life.



It is experiences like this that incite Help Handicapped International (HHI) to organize camps in various parts of the world for the free fitting of Jaipur, an Indian prosthesis. These prostheses have proved to be durable, versatile and cost-efficient.

Background

HHI has focused its work in the strife-torn areas of Kenya, Burundi, Sudan and recently, Afghanistan. The number of landmine amputees in these areas is overwhelming, and concerted relief efforts are limited due to shortages of funding, impassable geographical terrain and inadequate security considerations.

In light of the nearly 300,000 amputees—mostly landmine and war victims—an advance HHI team went to Kabul in August 2003 to explore the possibility of conducting a Jaipur Foot Camp there. Discussions were held and officials promised whatever assistance was possible for the war-ravaged city. It was decided that a one-month camp would be conducted at the orthopedic center inside Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital in Kabul. Although the technicians at this center were inexperienced in Jaipur foot technology, they could provide valuable assistance to the team from India, as well as act as interpreters.

The team working at the camp in Kabul was comprised of a project coordinator, a counselor and experienced technicians. Machinery and raw materials were flown into Kabul from India in October 2003.

In order to notify survivors in the area about the camp, the following steps were taken:

- Banners were hung at strategic places in Kabul, especially at the entrances into Kabul from the provinces.
- Pamphlets were placed at various locations within the city,

on many cabs and buses in Kabul as well as distributed through young people who normally sell newspapers at traffic junctions in Kabul.

- Announcements were made on the local radio and television.

- Journalists from three local newspapers—*Anees*, *Hewad* and *Kabul Times*—were invited to and carried them the activities of the camp prominently in their newspapers.

- An FM channel—Radio Sada'i Azadi—also covered the event.

- Kabul television featured the activity in their weekly "Health" program.

- HHI staff went to some health centers around Kabul and requested they send their handicapped patients for free fitting of the prostheses.

This multi-media coverage helped to mobilize beneficiaries and over 400 limbs were fitted at the camp within a one-month time period.

The camp was a unique experience both for HHI as well as the amputees. Indo-Afghan relations have always been warm, so the HHI team was well-received, and they built a rapport with the local officials, beneficiaries and the technicians.

Conclusion

The experiences related by some of the amputees were heart-wrenching. The joy of being able to walk again within a few hours of entering the Jaipur Foot Camp was a sight worth seeing. Dr. Najeeb, a practicing medical doctor in Paghman (about 40 km from Kabul) came to the camp on a Friday when his clinic was closed. Being a landmine amputee himself, he understood the plight of the hundreds of thousands of his countrymen waiting for prostheses. He said, "I am really grateful to this team from India carrying out such humanitarian work."

The concerned ministries of the government of Afghanistan were also very cooperative and requested that HHI organize more camps, especially in the provinces where humanitarian activity has been very limited. After the severe Afghanistan winter, HHI plans to conduct additional camps in Ghazni, Khost, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar provinces.

* Photo by the author.

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