



# THE NEXT STEP

NEWS FOR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS

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## Historic Laos visit

### NEWS

In early September, President Barack Obama made an historic visit to Laos, where Handicap International donors have been making a difference since 1983. He was the first sitting American president to visit, yet his trip came more than 40 years after the end of the Vietnam War. Over nine years, the U.S. dropped more than two million metric tons of bombs on the country, including 270 million sub-munitions.

"The war did not end when the bombs stopped falling," President Obama said. "Eighty million cluster munitions did not explode. They were spread across farmlands, jungles, villages, and rivers." He pledged to double U.S. funding—to \$90 million over three years—to clear the bombs and munitions polluting Laos.

Such explosive pollution poses a constant danger. Laos reports at least 50,570 casualties from munitions, mines, and other explosives—including nearly 30,000 deaths. Those who survive often suffer disabling injuries. Such unexploded ordnance (UXO) robs Laotians of land they need to use for farming, or for building infrastructure like roads, schools, and hospitals.

The risks are clear to Nouay Phonesomxay. He is a Handicap International deminer, but one with an intimate connection to the weapons he destroys. As a nine-year-old, Nouay was playing outside and threw what he thought was a stone. When it hit the ground and exploded, shrapnel flew up and hit his hands, face, and eye, causing him to lose the tips of four fingers and suffer from multiple scars. "Sometimes my hands hurt when the weather changes, but I keep going, because my work protects other people from having accidents like mine," said Nouay.

Thanks to committed Handicap International donors, victims of mines and explosive remnants of war have received support, as well as access to physical therapy and mobility devices. And since 2006, deminers have destroyed more than 25,000 UXO.

The critical work of preventing injuries and unnecessary deaths isn't only done by deminers. Risk education officers visit with children and adults in villages suspected of having UXO nearby. They use illustrations and stories to teach the crowds how to behave when they encounter UXO. Spotting, avoiding, and reporting suspicious objects to village leaders is key.

Thanks to you, Handicap International continues its work clearing landmines, training Laotians to stay safe, and urging the U.S. to join the treaties banning cluster munitions and landmines.



See the land you're clearing and lives you're saving through your gifts to Handicap International: [bit.ly/ClearLaos](http://bit.ly/ClearLaos)



Top: Community based risk education officers teach the villagers of Pounseeeyrng about the dangers of UXO and how to reduce their risk of an accident.

Left: Injured by UXO when he was nine, Handicap International Deminer, Nouay Phonesomxay, now works to make others safe.

Right: A risk education session takes place in the village school. Illustrations are used to teach children how to spot, avoid, and report suspicious objects.

## Freeing Colombia of mines

After more than five decades of conflict, Colombia's warring groups signed a peace deal in August 2016. In that time, landmines, improvised explosive devices, and other unexploded ordnance (UXO) killed or maimed more than 11,000 people, and left 31 of Colombia's 32 regions contaminated.

Handicap International is one of two humanitarian organizations accredited to clear mines in Colombia. Our teams recently began the careful work of returning land to communities for farming and development.

Since 1998, our donors have also provided physical therapy to 1,138 people, run weapons risk education projects, and supported the advocacy work of disabled persons organizations.



### Did you know?

Every day in 2015, 90 people were killed or injured by an explosive weapon.

**11,700 Americans**

signed a Change.org petition demanding that the U.S. stop bombing civilians, and ban cluster munitions.

Thank you

## Nepal: Your impact in new mini doc



Handicap International's work before, during, and after the Nepal earthquake is featured in a short documentary film, *On Shifting Ground*. Produced as part of the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize Coalition's Storytelling Program, the film features the work of Handicap International and five other Hilton Laureates, all recipients of the Hilton Humanitarian Prize—the largest humanitarian prize in the world.

Thanks to donors like you, the impact we made in Nepal will be shown across the world. In September, the documentary was previewed at the Clinton Global Initiative in New York, and had its premier in the United Kingdom.

# Qasef: Syrian refugees on the bombs that forced them to flee

## PROJECT UPDATE

“It was continuous shelling every day,” explained Hamida, who fled to Jordan with her family. “The children were extremely frightened by the sound of bombs...If you go through something like this, you will never forget.”

Since 2011, the Syrian war—the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War—has led to hundreds of

thousands of deaths. More than 10.9 million Syrians—equivalent to half of the Syrian population—have been affected in some way.

In September, Handicap International released a new report showing how the use of explosive weapons in populated areas is the largest factor in the displacement of Syrians. *Qasef: Escaping the bombs* is the result of interviews with Syrian refugees like Hamida in

Jordan, and found that the individuals fled their homes between two and 25 times before making the difficult choice to leave their country for safety. The findings are not surprising given the sometimes-incessant use of explosive weapons in populated areas in Syria.

Thanks to donors like you, Handicap International employs more than 300 local and expatriate staff, who help Syrians caught in the conflict,

and those who have fled to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq. The provision of psychological support is a key component of our actions, as the conflict’s invisible scars are profound.

Handicap International campaigners are also working tirelessly to encourage world leaders to sign a political declaration to stop the bombing of civilians.

**Add your voice:**  
[bit.ly/StopBombingCivilians](http://bit.ly/StopBombingCivilians)

## Note from the Executive Director



The best way to experience the life-changing work of Handicap International is to see it in person. Once you observe the dedication of the staff, the conditions under which they work, and the satisfaction of those we serve, our mission takes on new meaning. Unfortunately, not everyone can see our impact up close. Instead, we have in this issue’s cover story on Laos some photos by two staff members, Sara Goldberg and Molly Feltner, who visited the country in May.

We are also trying to get to know you a little bit better. So on the back page you’ll find a short survey. Please spend a few minutes filling it out or responding via email.

Finally, a personal note of thanks to our *First Responders*, especially Col. Mike Burton and Hope Randall, who took time to contribute to our back-page story. I’m an HI *First Responder*, too. My wife and I give every month to HI as a way to provide help in every crisis throughout the year. I encourage you to join us. I never forget that we can’t do what we do without you.

Jeff Meer, Executive Director  
Twitter: @Jeff\_HIUS

## Syrian crisis response 2015



**171,023**  
beneficiaries



**33,699**  
recipients of rehabilitation



**81,503**  
people taught to spot and avoid mines and other weapons



**9,879**  
people received mental health and protection services

\*It's possible that an individual can be counted more than once if he or she received more than one service.

# Safa: A new leg and a fresh start in Jordan



## THE BIG PICTURE

### ← July 2016

Now eight, Safa is still a refugee in Jordan, living with her father, mother, and siblings. Handicap International has been with her every step of the way as she grew. In the spring, the team measured her for a new prosthetic leg.



### ↑ June 2013 →

Safa was living in Syria when a bomb strike damaged her leg so badly that doctors had to amputate.

Just six years old at the time, she and her family fled to Jordan, where Handicap International gave her a wheelchair and fit her with her first prosthetic leg. Here, her physical therapist Bara'ah helps her get used to crutches.



### July 2016 ↑

Thanks to you, Safa’s new leg is ready. Handicap International physical therapists will continue to work with her so that she never misses a beat walking, jumping, and playing with her friends.



Shaista is now more independent and feels more accepted after receiving prostheses from Handicap International.

## Because of you, Shaista walks today



### BENEFICIARY STORY

Shaista and her parents were returning from their rice plantation in Kashmir, India when a truck came hurtling down the road and plowed into then four-year-old Shaista. Her family rushed her to a hospital in Srinagar, where the doctors prepared her family for the worst: “She won’t live,” they said.

They operated seven times on her head, neck, arm, and leg. The pain was so bad, she begged doctors to inject her with poison so she would die. The doctors refused to give up, ultimately saving her life by amputating her right arm and left leg.

The years that followed were dark. Shaista lived at home with her three brothers, and grew up in the shadows. Shaista was unable to walk or play with the other children, and at school, her classmates teased her. “They called me ‘handicapped,’” she recalls. “They used to say, ‘you’re useless,’ or ‘you’ll never find a husband.’”

When she was ten, Shaista was fitted with her first artificial leg. However, it did not help much: “It was too heavy, and I couldn’t walk.”

*Road accidents kill 260,000 children each year and are the leading cause of death worldwide among 15–29 year olds.*

In 2011, Handicap International, in partnership with Hope Disability Center, set up a rehabilitation camp near her village to provide care to people living in this remote region. Shaista visited, the team fit her with a new leg, and gave her physical therapy sessions to help her regain flexibility and learn to walk.

Thanks to donor support, in 2015, she was given two new prostheses: one for her leg, and another for her right arm. “That made a really big difference,” she says. “I feel more independent, but above all, my disability is less visible. People stare at me less.”

Today, Shaista is homeschooled. “We want her to succeed, but it’s not easy for her to stay motivated,” her mother says. “In the meantime, she helps out around the house. We’re

lucky to be able to rely on support from Handicap International. We couldn’t manage without it.”

Handicap International Physical Therapist, Muddasir Ashraf, monitors her progress closely. “We’re going to take her measurements again soon to fit her with a new, better-adapted prosthesis that she’ll get later this year,” says Muddasir.

Because of our donors, Shaista will continue physical therapy sessions with Handicap International and will receive new arms and legs as she grows.

**Handicap International donors have been making a difference in India since 1988.**

“Everyone deserves a chance.”

**Elise Cartuyvels,**  
Program Communication Officer,  
visited India in May 2016.

The people are welcoming in Jammu and Kashmir, a state in northern India. Most surprising was the hard contrast between their kindness and the beauty of the surroundings, and the difficult struggles they face every day.

The regional conflict is a constant presence. Some people were victims of mine explosions and unexploded ordnance. I sometimes struggled to understand how children missing limbs could have such hope. But they did. The HI team’s support really improves their self-confidence and autonomy.

I will never forget Fayaz, who lost his legs from a mine explosion when he was two. Today, Fayaz is a courageous five-year-old, eager to learn at school, and to play his favorite sport—cricket.

HI’s physical therapists amazed me. They are diligent about finding individuals missing from the crowds—people unable to leave their homes. They believe everyone deserves a chance, and ensure all are included.

## Background

### Geography

Located in South Asia, India is the seventh-largest country by area and the second-most populous country—with 1.2 billion people. India shares borders with Nepal in the north, with Pakistan in the northwest, and with Bangladesh in the east. Its capital city is New Delhi.

### History

India is an emerging world power with a flourishing economy. However, 30% of its population still lives below the poverty line—including between 55 and 90 million people with disabilities—and major economic and social disparities exist between its different states. The most vulnerable populations are often the most impacted by natural disasters—such as droughts, typhoons, flooding, earthquakes, and landslides.

### Mandate

Handicap International ensures that as India develops, especially in its most remote parts and those regions most impacted by natural disasters, that policies and actions meet the needs of people with disabilities. Handicap International employs 21 Indians, and one expatriate staff to carry out its mission.

## Sahil receives the gift of sports

### BENEFICIARY STORY

Sahil, 10, lives in northern India. He was born with a congenital disability that caused his limbs to develop with malformations. “For years, he couldn’t move around by himself or play with friends,” says Nisara, his

mother. “He often asked ‘why can the other children play and not me?’”

Thanks to you, in Sept. 2015, Handicap International and our partner Hope Disability Center set up a rehabilitation camp near Sahil’s village. There, physical therapists worked to restore his flexibility and make his limbs stronger.

Access to sports is one important way to build confidence, especially in young beneficiaries like Sahil. So, Handicap International fit Sahil with his own wheelchair, giving him greater mobility and opening the door to more easily play cricket, his favorite sport, with the other children.



Sahil plays cricket in the schoolyard with his friends.



# First Responders: Giving with their heads and their hearts

## DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Each year, more and more Handicap International donors are choosing to donate through the monthly giving program. Each *First Responder* has their own reasons for giving monthly. For some, it is the ease of automatic debits. For others, it allows them to feel connected and support urgent needs year-round. Whatever their reasons, our monthly donors are making a big difference.

For retired U.S. Air Force Colonel Mike Burton, the decision to give is rooted in personal experience. “I was assigned to a base in Thailand during the Vietnam War,” he told us from Vancouver, WA. “All our missions were directed to Laos. I served as a liaison with the Lao ground forces and saw first-hand the destruction our bombing was doing.”

Like many HI donors, he is passionate about our work in Laos clearing UXO and supporting accident survivors. After 1975, Col. Burton worked with Laotian refugees in the U.S. and learned that many of the bombs never exploded. “I am particularly concerned about the people who have suffered injuries as a result of the UXO, and ensuring that we are doing all we can to remove and neutralize these deadly weapons. Handicap International is a leader in these efforts.”

Today, being a *First Responder* allows him to help the injured get the medical care and economic support they need to live healthy, productive lives, and support efforts to clear weapons and provide risk education. “If injury from the cluster bombs can be prevented for just one person, then my efforts will be of value.”

Hope Randall, from Washington, D.C., said, “I’ve always been passionate about supporting people with disabilities. I work in global

health, so I know how difficult it can be to get by, even without a disability. How can a child with a disability reach his/her full potential without supportive structures to help? The physical needs only scratch the surface. It’s also the emotional needs, the need to feel fully accepted and included. That’s what drives me to donate.”

Whether giving \$5 or \$500 a month, *First Responders* deliver a reliable stream of support that helps HI respond to new emergencies and disasters, like the hurricane in Haiti, while providing ongoing funding for programs like those in Laos, Syria, Colombia, Nepal, and India.

Within her first week on staff, Digital Marketing and Communications Officer Michele Lunsford joined the *First Responders* program online. “I wanted to be part of our work, and not just through my job,” she said. “Giving monthly allows me to support children like Shaista, children affected by the war in Syria, children avoiding landmines in Laos—all children with disabilities, desperate to be included.”

For Ms. Randall, being a *First Responder* means making a difference year-round. “I want my funds to go where it is most needed,” she said. “Rather than feeling at a loss when a crisis occurs, I like the idea of preparing in advance to help HI deploy resources where and when it is needed.”

Monthly giving is also a smart financial decision. “I wish I could give more,” explains Col. Burton. “But I need to stay within a budget. The monthly donor plan allows me to control cash flow and still make a substantial contribution.”

*First Responders* receive an annual statement, as well as special correspondence throughout the year. “The best part,” says Ms. Lunsford, “is feeling connected to everything HI does and everyone we help.”



## Thank you

to our *First Responders*. Their support helps us act quickly when disasters like Hurricane Matthew strike. Join them, or make a special donation to ensure we can continue providing aid and care to Haiti in the months ahead.

**Below are some of the faces of the people they have helped in past emergencies.**



WORD SEARCH

S	R	S	O	P	S	W	O	I	Y	H	P
G	L	V	L	L	Z	V	C	F	R	G	P
E	D	A	A	V	I	L	A	S	A	H	C
G	N	D	N	N	V	C	I	P	T	I	L
N	V	X	D	F	O	A	B	M	N	L	U
A	Y	I	M	J	Y	Y	M	I	E	T	S
H	A	X	I	L	W	K	O	F	M	O	T
C	A	S	N	N	B	N	L	E	U	N	E
B	G	M	E	K	C	Y	O	S	C	D	R
F	A	R	S	E	Z	V	C	A	O	X	V
Q	U	W	Y	N	C	D	R	Q	D	D	F
C	J	M	R	O	P	W	A	I	R	Y	S

CLUSTER  
HILTON  
INDIA  
CHANGE  
SYRIA  
LANDMINES  
QASEF  
COLOMBIA  
DOCUMENTARY

We want to hear from you!

Please answer the four quick questions below. You can mail the survey in the enclosed return envelope or send your answers and any other feedback via email to [ReachOut@handicap-international.us](mailto:ReachOut@handicap-international.us). Thank you, in advance!

1. What inspires your support of Handicap International?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you feel *The Next Step* shows the impact of your support?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What feature would you like to see in a future newsletter?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Is there anything else you want us to know?  
\_\_\_\_\_