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Arwa: An Inspiring Story for Landmine Survivors

by Mansour Al-Ezzi [Yemen Executive Mine Action Center] and Lauren Nicole Hill [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

In 1999, Arwa Ali Saeed Wais was herding sheep in Al-Atabat village in the Morais district of Al-Dhale'e governorate, Yemen. As was the tradition in Arwa's village, she spent much of her childhood caring for her family's sheep in the nearby mountainous area instead of attending school. When she was 10 years old, she stepped on a landmine. Her right leg was immediately torn off, and her left leg was severely damaged. She was sent to Ibn Khaldon Hospital in Lahj governorate, where she underwent an above-the-knee bilateral amputation. After she was discharged from the hospital, she returned home to her village, where she contracted an infection in her right leg and was sent to Al-Jemhori Hospital in Aden governorate for additional surgery.



Arwa prepares for the speech she will deliver at the MLI 2009 Clearing the Path Gala.

All photos courtesy of Tzvetanka Raytcheva

The Yemen Executive Mine Action Center and Yemen Association for Landmine Survivors transferred Arwa, then 12, to Yemen's capital, Sana'a, where they arranged for extended support and training. The Yemen government established YEMAC to cover landmine issues, and later YEMAC established YALS to provide direct support to landmine victims and to help in their rehabilitation and reintegration into their local communities.

Arwa was also assisted by the Ministry of Social Affairs, which provided her with monthly financial assistance (US\$30) while searching for employment. During that time she received sewing, computer and Internet training courses, and enrolled in elementary school. Attending elementary school was difficult for her because her class was on the second floor. After the director of the school changed her class to the first floor, attending school became easier.

While attending elementary school, Arwa also worked as a secretary at YALS. She later began to work in the documents section in Al-Thowrah General Hospital, the largest governmental

hospital in Sana'a, recording employee attendance in the database. She also spent her afternoons working as a YALS activist, assisting landmine victims. Arwa credits YEMAC and YALS for her financial and life-skills training. YEMAC provided Arwa with her first two wheelchairs. Later, after one of the wheelchairs broke, the Social Care Fund, an association addressing the needs of disabled people, provided her with another.

Arwa is currently 21 years old and is being homeschooled by the school system at the secondary level (Grade 9). This schedule accommodates her employment at Al-Thowrah General Hospital, where she continues to work in the documents section. Although most people complete schooling prior to this age, Arwa did not begin her studies until after her injury. Along with her regular employment at the hospital, she provides services to survivors through her administrative work with YALS, where she supervises victims who study in Sana'a with the association's support. Arwa continues to live in the boarding residence run by YALS and visits her family in her village during holidays.

In October 2009, due to her ongoing advocacy efforts on behalf of landmine survivors, Arwa was honored by the



Arwa meets students in Washington, D.C.

Marshall Legacy Institute at its 2009 Clearing the Path Gala in Washington, D.C. MLI President Perry Baltimore presented Arwa with the Survivors' Assistance Award. She accepted her award with a speech that earned her a standing ovation from the audience.¹

Arwa sees her greatest challenges as overcoming the effects of her disability while continuing to execute everyday tasks, and proving to herself and the people around her that she can survive and be successful in her life. Although Arwa faces the challenges surrounding her disability, she looks toward the future with both hope and enthusiasm. ↓

Biography



Mansour Mohammed Al-Ezzi has worked in humanitarian mine action for 12 years and is Yemen's National Programme Manager for the United Nations Development Programme and Director of the Yemen Executive Mine Action Center. Al-Ezzi has represented Yemen in the majority of the global mine-action conferences and is also Government Coordinator on the

implementation of Yemen's Landmine Impact Survey and Technical Survey. He has advised the Sudanese mine-action authorities on the implementation of mine-action projects and has trained program managers from Sudan, Somalia and Iraq. Al-Ezzi also established the Yemen Association for Landmine Survivors.



Lauren Nicole Hill has been a part of the CISR team as an Editorial Assistant since August 2008. She graduated from James Madison University in May 2010 with a Bachelor of Arts in communication studies with a concentration in public relations and a minor in Italian.

Endnotes

1. The Marshall Legacy Institute Gala 2009. http://www.marshall-legacy.org/news_and_events/gala-2009/Gala%20Factsheet%209.4.09.pdf. Accessed 16 April 2010.

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