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## Project aids Iraqi land-mine victims

By Lisa Baker  
Rotary International News

24 July 2007

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More than 50,000 Iraqi women and children have lost limbs to land mines, leaving them unable to work or attend school. Prosthetic limbs are very expensive in Iraq, and with hospitals frequently shutting down because of wartime conditions, prostheses — or even basic medical care — are difficult to find.

In response, the Rotary Club of Montgomery Village, Maryland, USA, along with District 7620, created a Rotary centennial project in 2003 — the Basra Prosthetics Project — to help train Iraqi Ministry of Health physicians in Basra and raise money to provide necessary prosthetic limbs and equipment.

Montgomery Village Rotarians enlisted the help of numerous Rotary clubs as well as outside organizations for the project. In 2006 after three years of fundraising, they were finally ready for their first training mission, but traveling to Basra was no longer safe. With the help of the Jordanian Embassy in Washington, D.C., the King Hussein Medical Center in Amman, Jordan,

opened its doors to the project. Members of the Rotary Club of Amman Cosmopolitan also opened their homes to the project by hosting all the volunteers.

In May 2006, eight Iraqi doctors and six people with amputations joined trainers and Rotarians in Jordan to learn how to correctly fit prostheses and get trained in prosthetic physiotherapy. The goal of this mission was to teach doctors to make more prostheses accurately and quickly to help more civilians.

"There are up to 5,000 amputees, not only from Basra but from three other nearby areas," says Dr. Muslim A. Yousif, manager of the Basra Prosthetic Center in Iraq. "Currently, we can only produce approximately 50 prostheses monthly."

Linda A. Smythe, chair and founder of the Basra Prosthetics Project says, "It would take years just to make prosthetics for those 5,000 people, but that number is constantly rising. We are trying to train Iraqis to look after their own people by teaching them how to make more prosthetics and fit them faster."

To date, the Basra Prosthetics Project has received more than US\$400,000 in donations from Rotarians and other project partners, including Al Hussein Society for the Habilitation/Rehabilitation of the Physically Challenged; the Jordanian Embassy in Washington, D.C.; Hanger Orthopedic Group; the International Monetary Fund; the Iraqi Ministry of Health in Baghdad; the Mosaic Foundation; Physicians for Peace; Security International; and the U.S. Department of State. The project still needs to raise money for training and supplies and to collect prosthetic devices.

"It brings tears to your eyes to see it happen," says Smythe. "Nothing has moved me more than seeing amputees get up and walk — you know you have affected their lives in so many ways."

Contact the [Basra Prosthetics Project](#) for information on how to help.

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