

## Somewhere around the world a child goes blind every minute

Worldwide, 161 million people are blind or visually impaired. Ninety percent of the blindness and visual disability is in low income or distressed nations, where people are ten times more likely to become blind than their counterparts in economically developed nations. The rate of blindness is expected to double by the year 2020 unless sight-saving medical and surgical expertise is made available.

The Eye Defects Research Foundation is taking action to give the gift of sight to needy children throughout the world. In direct response to the outreach from the US Multi-National Forces serving in Iraq, the foundation provided corneal transplants to 6 children in January of 2007.



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## Gift of Sight for Iraqi Children



**Above Left:** Batool Jafri, M.D. begins her corneal transplant on 2 year old Ameer. **Above Right:** Ameer post-op

The Eye Defects Research Foundation was contacted by Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in late summer 2006 about the possibility of performing a cornea transplant on an Iraqi infant, Dhirar who suffered from a congenital corneal opacity. As our foundation collaborated with Mending Kids International to secure a host family for Dhirar here in Los Angeles, the US Multi-National Forces stationed at the National Iraqi Assistance Center in Baghdad informed us little Dhirar was one of over 500 pediatric ophthalmology patients in dire need of surgical assistance. Sending an ophthalmologist to a secure location in the Middle East to perform corneal transplants was a fraction of the cost of bring one child to Los Angeles for surgery and would be much less traumatic on the patients.

With the aim of providing immediate treatment to children suffering needless blindness and who are without access surgical treatment the foundation embarked on it's first 'Vision Mission' to Amman Jordan in early January 2007.

After reviewing the difficult ophthalmology cases with our founder and medical director, Yaron S. Rabinowitz, M.D., cornea specialist, Batool Jafri, M.D. offered to donate her surgical expertise and personal time to make this mission a reality. Tissue Banks International agreed to donate corneal tissue, and the Eye Specialty Hospital in Amman Jordan agreed to participate by waiving over 80% of the cost for pre-op, surgical and post-op care for all the children. The Alcon Foundation provided much needed financial backing by making a grant of \$10,000 in support this effort.

After waiting several months, the foundation finally received medical approval from the Jordanian Ministry of Health, and in early January of 2007 the mission would commence. This late timeframe posed a difficult challenge, however the dedicated men and women of the United States Multi-National Forces serving in Iraq and Jordan played a critical role in the last minute execution of this medical relief effort.

**The total per child cost was just \$3,000 to deliver the precious gift of sight.**

*“Thank you for your extremely kind and generous offer of assistance for Iraqi children in need of eye surgeries. With your aid, the potential to so significantly change the lives of these children is truly staggering. We now have over 500 pending cases where, given the proper resources and professional expertise, a life can be saved or a child can be given a chance at a better future. Of those 5000 cases, 85 are ophthalmology patients. The situation is challenging, however we have wonderful and caring people working with us who make all the difference in the world. Thank you for being a part of that team.”*

**- Lance S. Carr**

**CAPT. United States Navy**

**Director, National Iraqi Assistance Center Multi-National Force- Iraq**

The foundation would like to express sincere gratitude to Alcon and Tissue Banks International for their generous donations

The Alcon logo is displayed in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The word "Alcon" is written in a single line, with a registered trademark symbol (®) positioned to the upper right of the letter "n".

**TBI / TISSUE BANKS  
INTERNATIONAL**

## Letters of Support

September 2006

Ms. Navratil,

Thank you for your extremely kind and generous offer of assistance for Iraqi children in need of eye surgeries. With your aid, the potential to so significantly change the lives of these children is truly staggering. We welcome this opportunity to partner with you and are ready to facilitate this project in every way we can.

Please allow me to introduce the National Iraqi Assistance Center (NIAC) and our program. We offer assistance in five primary areas – Compensation Claims, Employment, Detainee Issues, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Medical Services. Within the Medical Services Section, we have authorization from the Iraqi Ministry of Health to coordinate the health care cases that are sent abroad and we are the official conduit for providing that assistance.

The NIAC and its supporting teams, HOC-Kuwait and CALT-Jordan, work together to facilitate care for medical cases wherein Iraqis are unable to find suitable treatment within Iraq. The Iraqi medical system is presently unable to provide all the care currently required. To assist Iraqi citizens to receive that desperately needed care, we identify alternative services for patients after they have progressed through local Public Health Clinics, hospitals and other organizations and exhausted the limited medical resources available to them in Iraq.

We do not provide any financial resources; we act as the central point of facilitation for the medical cases. We work with many international organizations and governmental agencies worldwide to coordinate the treatment. Our program has helped patients receive heart surgeries, eye surgeries, and reconstructive plastic surgeries in the US, Jordan, Turkey and Kuwait. In the past year alone, we have enabled more than 65 patients to receive life-saving or life-changing procedures outside of Iraq.

The NIAC is located in Baghdad's International Zone and is supported by the Multi-National Forces – Iraq, Civil Military Operations Directorate. We are Iraqis helping Iraqis, as 24 local national Iraqis, and 6 Iraqi ex-patriot Bi-cultural, Bi-lingual Advisors (BBA's) comprise the majority of the staff. We also have 3 Coalition Force members providing guidance and liaison for the NIAC, along with 3 military members each in Civil Affairs Liaison Team (CALT) Jordan and Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC) Kuwait.

We receive patients from walk-ins and referrals from throughout Iraq. The local Iraqi doctors on staff, along with Iraqi-American Advisors, screen each patient to determine suitability for care abroad. As you can imagine, the demand far exceeds the supply of care we can offer. Each day we'll have 10 – 25 patients looking for care, of those only a few will qualify for our program. Unfortunately, our roster of those needing care has grown to over 2200 through the almost 4 years we have had this program. We

now have over 500 pending cases where, given the proper resources and professional expertise, a life can be saved or a child can be given a chance at a better future. Of those 500 cases, 85 are ophthalmology patients. The situation is challenging, however we have wonderful and caring people working with us who make all the difference in the world. Thank you for being a part of that team.

As we move forward together, my staff looks forward to working with you. We are thankful for this huge and very rewarding opportunity to help Iraqi children and we can't wait to start!

Dr. Ali is our Lead Doctor and Captain Suzanne Tetreault is our Medical Officer in Baghdad. LTC Bernita Johnson is our Medical Officer in Kuwait. Suzanne will be your primary contact and she will coordinate arrangements on our end.

We are excited for the prospect of offering training to Iraqi doctors as we move forward with this effort. Please let us know the criteria you have and we will work with the Ministry of Health to facilitate the process.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to work with you!

My Sincerest Regards,

**Lance S. Carr**

**CAPT USN Director, National Iraqi Assistance Center, Multi-National Force – Iraq Civil Military Operations**

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January 2008

Ms. Navratil:

I commend you for pushing forward your 2008 expansion plans for your life-altering corneal transplant program to needy children of Iraq. Your efforts have a major impact on promoting peace and goodwill throughout the world.

Six days a week, 30 dedicated Iraqi professionals risk their lives to help their fellow citizens who are in dire need at the National Iraqi Assistance Center. One of the busiest sections is the Medical Section staffed by Iraqi doctors. Your generous offer to provide skills and training to Iraqi ophthalmologists is extraordinary and will produce dramatic results.

When I arrived at the NIAC, I inherited a backlog of 2000 case files. In February 2006, similar to your 2007 mission and the larger mission you are attempting, we established a corneal transplant program for Iraqi children with Anadolu Johns Hopkins in Istanbul, Turkey with the assistance of the Istanbul Rotary Club. The Anadolu Johns Hopkins medical staff were able to complete corrective surgery on two patients. On the return flight to Baghdad, one little boy, who had completed the procedure, touched his father's face, and said, "Dad, I've never seen your face before." To the best of my knowledge, this program has only helped these 2 children, the results from your recent mission have made a much greater impact by changing the lives of 6 children and winning the hearts and minds of their family.

Every Iraqi patient comes from a family, a neighborhood, a community. The impact of these life-altering surgeries can extend to entire geographic regions. An act of charity can overcome hatred, intimidation, and ignorance. An act of charity is more powerful than any man-made weapon system.

In closing, on behalf of the dedicated American military and Iraqi professionals, who staff the National Iraqi Assistance Center in Baghdad, as well as the Civil Affairs support staff in Amman and Kuwait City, I commend you for supporting this noble cause.

Best regards,

**Tom Eichenberg**

**COL Army Reserve, Civil Affairs Branch, Former Director, National Iraqi Assistance Center,  
Multi-National Force – Iraq Civil Military Operations**

## Patient Update

### About Nada



NAME Nada Samir

LOCATION Southern Iraq

AGE 8.5 years old

LIVING FAMILY Father & Grandmother

Nada is an only child and lives with her father and grandmother in a very poor area in the south of Iraq. Her village has very poor water and little electricity.

Nada loves to sing and dance and was accompanied by her grandmother on the mission to Amman. Both Nada and her grandmother are outgoing and cheerful. Nada enjoys singing and dancing and throughout the mission had a smile on her face and a sing for everyone.

Nada's grandmother's dream was for her to attend school and learn to read.

**January 2008-** One year after surgery and Nada is now attending school and thriving. Her corneal transplant was a complete success and her family is amazed at her progress. As you see below, Nada's cornea is clear and beautiful.

