

“I just want my family to be together again and I don't want anything else to happen.”

The scars on 18-year-old Anoud's face show only a fraction of the pain she has endured over the past year. In 2017, her family's house in Hawija, central Iraq, was hit by a bomb. The loss and damage was unimaginable. For the past year, her family has been separated as they desperately try to seek medical care to heal their injuries. Anoud is currently looking after her eight-year-old sister, Bushra, who is receiving treatment in a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) surgery and post-operative care unit in east Mosul. This is Bushra and Anoud's story:

Anoud, 18:

It was the fifth day of Ramadan last year when the attack happened. We were in our home in Hawija. We had fasted for five days by then. We were sitting in the garden. A rocket hit our neighbour's house. We ran to see if our neighbours were OK and we brought them all to my father's house. And that was the moment when our house was bombed.

We lost a sister and a brother in the attack. The rest of us were all injured. My mother lost her leg. I got shrapnel in my left eye, in my hand and my leg. I also broke my leg. My youngest sister's eye was severely injured and her hands were ruined.

Shrapnel hit Bushra's knee and her knee cap was badly damaged. Now her knee cap is gone. She also has shrapnel in her head. It's still there and the doctors don't want to move it because they say any movement will be fatal. She also has shrapnel in her chest, hand, and eye. She can't fully see. If she only uses her right eye she can't look straight, she has to look to the left.

They took us to Hawija hospital, but they couldn't treat us there. So they took us to Shirqat. My mother and I stayed here, but they couldn't treat Bushra and my other little sister. They sent them to Tikrit, but they couldn't treat them either, so then they were referred to Kirkuk hospital where an NGO helped them.

Bushra and my other little sister were taken to Sulaymaniyah (north-east Iraq) for treatment for six months, so we were separated.

Now my mother is in Lebanon with my youngest sister who is receiving treatment for her injuries. They have been there for two months. I talked to them last night and my mother confirmed my sister has lost her eye. The doctors did an operation on her hands and now they're fine. If she had stayed in Iraq, they would have amputated her hands. They are coming back in eight days.

I forget a lot of what happened. They were really horrific events and I spent the first six months almost asleep. I wasn't myself. It was as if I was daydreaming. I only woke up when I saw my two brothers. My dad is the only one who remembers what happened and tells me about it.

My father and one of my brothers are now living in Jeda'ah camp. My father had a stroke. He's old and he's alone a lot of the time in the camp. Life is really hard.

Bushra keeps asking for my mum but there's nothing I can do about it. After Bushra came back from Sulaymaniah she was fine and she was playing. But she could not straighten her leg or do anything with it, and then the wound got infected.

Another NGO referred us this MSF facility. It's been eight days since we've been here. The services are really good. Bushra has had two operations on her knee.

My leg still really hurts to walk on. Yesterday morning, they took x-rays of my leg, and x-rays of all the shrapnel in my hands to see what they can do.

I just want my family to be together again and I don't want anything else to happen.

This is my story. I tell it to anyone who comes to me. Even when the doctors or the organisations come, I talk about it. I like telling my story because it eases my mind and my soul. So when I get stressed and sad, this is what I do.”

Bushra, 8

“I’m not going to school right now. I've never been to school. I will go back to school when I heal. I want to learn things and to make friends there. I want to learn so I can read and write.

In Jeda’ah camp, I play with my friends. We play and we draw. I draw toys and flowers and fish, and butterflies and things like that.

In the camp we go to kindergarten. They bring us note books and we draw and we colour and we write letters there.

In the past, it was fun with all my brothers and sisters. We would play with squares and we would draw with a whiteboard.

I love my sister so much because she takes care of me. I wish my family could all be together again. To heal and to get better and to live together again.”

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Many war-wounded patients in Mosul – and in other post-conflict areas in Iraq such as Kirkuk, Anbar and Salaheddin – have endured months of agony waiting for follow-up care. They often received hasty surgery on or behind the frontlines to save their lives, and now they need additional surgery, pain management and physiotherapy to regain use of damaged limbs and muscles and to prevent losing more or all of their movement. Many people are also in need of urgent mental healthcare as they relive the violent trauma of the past and try to cope with the loss of loved ones.

In Mosul, it’s been one year since the conflict officially ended. But the battle to rebuild the city and people’s lives is far from over. Large swathes of Mosul, particularly in the west, remain decimated. Mines and booby traps still ensnare homes and health facilities.

Some people with no other option have returned to Mosul and live in their damaged homes, often without water and electricity. Poor hygiene conditions are increasing the risk of disease, and trauma injuries are a regular occurrence as people try to rebuild their houses in dangerous conditions.

Access to healthcare is a daily struggle with nine out of the 13 hospitals damaged in the conflict. The reconstruction of health facilities has been extremely slow and there are still only five beds per 10,000 people, well below the international minimum standards for health service delivery.

In 2017, MSF worked in and around Mosul to provide lifesaving services for people caught in the violence. We ran several trauma stabilisation posts in East and West Mosul, and managed four hospitals offering a range of services including emergency and intensive care, surgery and maternal healthcare. MSF currently runs a maternity hospital in west Mosul and a surgery and post-operative care facility for war-wounded patients in east Mosul.

Following the return of people to the Hawija area, MSF opened a clinic in Al-Abassi for the treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCD) and mental health care. MSF rehabilitated the water supply systems in Al-Abassi and will do the same for Al-Shajera, which will provide clean drinking water for an estimated 35,000 people and prevent the spread of waterborne diseases. MSF also opened a primary health care clinic in Hawija city, which will soon offer NCD treatment, mental health services and sexual reproductive healthcare. As more people return to Hawija, MSF will provide emergency room services in the city's hospital.