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### **The Amputation of Hope or Hand**

It was a star lit night of 11/12 October when I walked into the makeshift operation theatre established in Muzaffarabad Army Stadium. The room was a multi- functional one as it was being used as a store, tea bar and resting area for medical staff. In one corner, some chairs were offered to me and my friends of KLWT volunteers, followed by hot tea which came as a very



welcoming gesture after a long journey from Islamabad. Two of the Doctors accompanying the KLWT team wanted to liaise with the Army doctors for future medical planning and operations in and around Muzaffarabad. The presence of diesel generated electricity in a city otherwise deadly dark and the drinking of tea had raised my sugar level to be more aware and alert as the affects of journey and fast (roza) started retarding. Then I saw him, Mr. Yusaf, bearded, middle aged, medium built and height, clad in what was sometime a white shalwar qameez. His eyes had a story which I wanted to know so I took my tea cup and offered it to him. He at first

refused politely with a nod but took it once I insisted. "What happened?" I asked. His frozen eyes moved to give me a sign of life as he slowly started moving his hand under a bundled blanket on a long table covered with stitching thread, a razor blade and some blood. "This is my son, Khizar Yusaf !" he replied. I peeped into the blanket only to find a very pale face of an eight years old boy, sleeping peacefully under anaesthesia. The face now had a name. He was no more a number or a statistic. I wanted to know more so I repeated my question to Yusaf. He was constantly moving his hand over the glucose fed arm of Khizar and periodically looking at the slow flow of drops in the plastic bottle as if wandering how long will this ordeal of his life last. I waited for his response as he decided to share his short story with me. "Khizer was in school at Garhi Dupata when it all happened. His Mother ran towards the school to get him out. On her way to the school she came under one of the houses and could not reach him. She still lies there." He looked at me and finding me lost with words, decided to continue. "Khizer came under rubble in school injuring his left hand and fracturing his left leg at multiple places. My village was cut off due to landslides and despite all our efforts we could not evacuate him by a helicopter. Then, fifteen men of my village volunteered in evacuating Yusaf on foot across the landslides to Muzaffarabad. This was a very slow process and if we had made it earlier maybe this would not have happened." I followed his stare only to be looking at an amputated hand of Khizer. Across the wall under the same roof, the General Officer Commanding responsible for relief operations was holding a conference to ensure no more Khizers lose either their limbs or hopes.