

Handicap International:

ALERT – World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic victims : the testimony of Shoudchai Phanthavong, road traffic victim

Shoudchai Phanthavong was involved in a road traffic crash, at 29 years old. She has vivid memory of the post-crash scene, where 6 of her friends died for lack of emergency care.

“I remember the day well. It was a special time during Lao New Year. I went to the next village on my motorbike. Everyone was in such a good mood, we stayed together all day.



My friends asked me to go back with them by truck. I knew the truck driver well and he took a big group of us home. There were lots of people in the truck, most of them standing on the back. People were singing and laughing- the party atmosphere was in the air. I was in the cab of the truck, behind the driver's seat. The driver was going too fast and I asked him to slow down but he was drunk and he didn't listen to me. After a few seconds, we met a car coming around a bend and we had to stop quickly. **Suddenly the truck flipped and rolled over. Most of the people in the cab and the back were thrown onto the ground, some crushed by the truck. Some, like me, were thrown onto the stone barriers on the side of the road.**

The scene after the crash was like a nightmare. There were bodies everywhere. Some were crying for help. Some were silent. Some were walking around in a daze. Out of 32 people, nobody escaped uninjured. The hardest part for me is that people passed us on the road, afraid to help. In Laos there is a cultural fear of helping people after an accident, in case you will get the blame for the injuries. People are also afraid of the person dying in their vehicle on the way to the hospital. **Six people died at the scene. Some died from bleeding, which could have been stopped. They might have survived if they had gotten help quickly.** Luckily, finally, some people helped some of us. Out of four of us who were taken to the hospital, I am the only one who survived.

I had to have two operations on my leg. Finally they took my right leg, from the hip. The following two years were very hard for all of us. The treatment was long and expensive; my family had to pay 33 million kip (around \$4000) in total for all of my treatment and rehabilitation. We also lost lots of money from the income that I lost, as I could not continue with my market stall. During this time I made some small income from selling banana leaf and making fishing nets, to help feed my children but it was not enough.

Honestly, I wanted to die because I felt so bad but my daughter gave me strength. She said: “Even you have an impairment or not- no matter – you are still our mother.” When I heard that I told myself, “You have to be patient and strong with this challenge in your life.” I practiced walking every day and completed my exercises. I was fitted with a prosthetic leg at the Centre for Medical Rehabilitation (CMR) in Vientiane. I can walk fluently now with my new leg.

I was lucky because I got the opportunity to receive training in Thailand on how to make prosthetics. I got a job working at CMR making prosthetics and wheel chairs with a regular salary every month.

I am happy that I am alive and that I can work to support my children, the same as anyone else.

I remember those who died on the road with me that day. I will never forget them.”