

## Bilal Mahmud's way back to life

For the doctors at the hospital of Hebron it was beyond all questions that Bilal (born in Yatta, resident in Hebron West Bank, aged 19 at this time) would never again obtain consciousness. Therefore they've closed the wound on his smashed skull without removing the bullet. Bilal was shot in his head by Israeli soldiers while he was trying to retrieve children from the firing zone. Amazingly, Bilal awoke from his coma after 12 days.



Bilal and his daughter in January 2011: „Thanks to YMCA I feel as a simple human being again.“

This incident happened during the second Intifada in 2000, when Israeli soldiers attacked a school. The soldiers used teargas and live ammunition; the schoolchildren defended themselves by throwing stones. Bilal and his friends tried to bring the children to safety when he was hit by a bullet.

Until that point Bilal was a happy 19 year old boy, he had many friends and worked in his uncles' construction business. He just recently had become engaged and was building his future house in order to get married. The two years after his injury were the worst of his life. He was forced to stay in a hospital in Jordan, his face deformed, distracted with pain, completely isolated from his former social environment in the West Bank. It has taken 20 surgeries so far to remove the bullet from Bilal's head. Luckily, it didn't hurt his eyes. In the beginning Bilal even suffered from short-term memory loss. For every surgery the same scar is opened, which goes from one ear to the other along the hairline. But it is not just for the plastic surgery that Bilal looks fine again.

When Bilal returned to Hebron after the two years at the hospital he spent most of his time at home. He didn't dare to go outside. He was socially isolated and he didn't have any perspective.

In 2002 Nader Khallafko from the YMCA Hebron visited Bilal. They talked weekly about Bilal's case and his needs. "Thanks to Nader the past eclipsed my memory slowly. I was given fresh hope. After just a few meetings I was able to approach people, to talk to them and to build up new relationships. The relations with my uncles, my cousins and my wife improved also. I stopped to vent my accumulated aggression and anger on them. I'm able to accept now my new life and to imagine a better future. Thanks to YMCA I feel as a simple human being again."

Bilal isn't able to work because he still has to undergo a surgery every 3-6 months in Amman and he has to show up at the hospital daily after the surgery for a minimal scarring. The regeneration phase takes on average 40-50 days. Bilal was forced to sell everything he owned, even his wife's gold that he had received as dowry when getting married in 2001. Henceforth his family pays for his living and his journeys to Jordan. The Palestinian Authority pays for the surgeries but not for the journeys and hotel accommodation. 300 Swiss francs are paid monthly by the PLO for providing the means of

subsistence and the YMCA helps Bilal to get drugs from MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) and further help from other organisations.

In addition, the YMCA supports Bilal and his brothers in building a toilet right next to their house. In the less developed regions of the West Bank a lot of houses do not have their own toilet. The doctors had to take bone material from Bilal's leg in order to rebuild Bilal's skull. As a result his leg became very sensitive against the cold. Having to leave the house in winter to go to the toilet caused Bilal a lot of pain.

After the regeneration phase of his next surgery, Bilal is going to visit the YMCA assessment centre in a few months. That's where he'll find out what his talents and possibilities are and what profession he therefore could learn. It is Bilal's dream to run his own food store one day. The YMCA will organise the professional training and help Bilal to find a adequate locality, to establish the locality and to fill it with a basic stock of goods.

Today Bilal and his wife have two daughters (8 months and 6 years) and a 3 year old son. Thanks to the YMCA they are looking forward to a promising future.