

An Amputee's Response to Violence

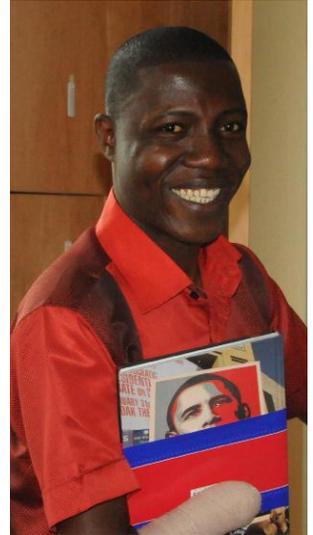
Jabaty Mambu was a 15-year-old high school student on January 6, 1999, when rebels surrounded his family's house in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and threatened to burn it down. Others escaped, but Jabaty and three friends did not. They were lined up with other youths from the neighborhood, one of whom was shot dead before Jabaty's eyes. The rebels pinned Jabaty to the ground, cut off his right arm below the elbow, and left him for dead. He was taken to a local hospital where he recovered for six weeks, then moved to a displaced person's camp and in early 2000 to a Médecins Sans Frontières amputee camp. Sierra Leone's civil war ended in 2002. Jabaty is now 28.

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After all that happened, I and many of the youths at the camp were discouraged and didn't even want to go out in the street. But I felt that the only way to overcome the trauma was to go register again at a school. Some of the journalists who visited the camp gave us money to use for our education. So one of the camp staff took me to Albert Academy and talked to the principal. He looked at me and said, 'Okay, come and take the test to be admitted.' I succeeded in passing the test and began to attend school again.

I had to walk very far, from Aberdeen to Circular Road, for classes each day. I was the only amputee at the school, but I wanted to be included in all activities. So I participated in running, football — all the sports. And I became known in that school and the principal and other pupils came to respect me. I graduated in 2003, but I remained active in sports. I am now president of the Sierra Leone Amputee Sports Club, which was established in 2001 mainly by friends of the amputees. With the idea that sporting activities can play a vital role in the recovery of marginalized groups, our organization established a football team just for amputees. In 2005, some friends from the United Kingdom paid for five of us to take a certificate course in computer literacy. These broader activities make the Club able to help amputees with the basic skills of life.

I am an advocate for war victims, and I like to engage with the public. In 2005 the Special Court for Sierra Leone asked me to be the liaison between the Court and 231 amputees in the camp. I talked to community groups and schools to explain the concerns of the amputees. Between 2006 and 2009, I traveled to the Hague several times to take part in the trial of Charles Taylor. Including amputees in the justice system was a vital step in reconciliation.



U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT
Disability activist Jabaty
Mambu after being
presented with a book by
Ambassador Michael

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Still mindful of things that I can do, I always like adventure. If they said, 'Jabaty, go to space,' then I would go!

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAMS