

27 January 2009

The undersigned international and national agencies working in disability and rehabilitation in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) are concerned by the impact of the current situation on people with disabilities in the Gaza Strip.

People with disabilities and their families will have paid a much higher price during this conflict, as they have found it harder to safely evacuate into shelters, and to access emergency food and relief programmes, in addition to the disruption in their usual rehabilitation services.

Of the 1.5 million people living in the Gaza Strip, it is estimated that over 10% have moderate or severe impairments. In addition, it is estimated that as many as half of the 5,000 individual men, women and children injured over the past three weeks of conflict may suffer life-long impairment, unnecessarily exacerbated by the inability of rehabilitation workers to provide early intervention.

We are particularly concerned to:

- prioritize the identification of displaced and injured people with disabilities
- provide early intervention for those newly injured, especially those discharged prematurely from health facilities, as hospitals struggled to cope with the large number of dead and injured
- reestablish and strengthen the capacity of rehabilitation services and disabled peoples organizations to respond to the increased needs throughout the Gaza Strip
- ensure that people needing specialist rehabilitation intervention not available in the Gaza Strip are transferred without delay to the three national rehabilitation centres in the West Bank, who are ready to receive patients. This is especially critical given that Al Wafa Hospital, the main provider of specialist rehabilitation services, sustained severe damage and is not yet fully operational
- ensure that people with disabilities are fully informed of and participate in early recovery assessments and interventions
- ensure that the planning and implementation of social, relief, health, shelter and all relevant emergency interventions is inclusive.
- Ensure that the reconstruction to the buildings, especially the public used buildings, will be fully accessible for people with disabilities.

Call for Special Action

The following agencies call upon international and national relief and development workers, the donor community and decision makers to ensure the equal rights, dignity and non discrimination of people with disabilities and their families. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we call upon them to ensure their immediate access to all humanitarian interventions in the Gaza Strip, in particular those within: (1) Health and Nutrition, (2) Water and Sanitation; (3) Protection; (4) Reconstruction and Shelter; (5) Psychosocial support; (6) Livelihoods and (7) Education.

Abu Rayya Rehabilitation Centre
Action around Bethlehem Children with Disability (ABCD)
Asamblea de Cooperacion por la Paz (ACPP) Middle East
Asociacion Paz Con Dignidad
Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR)
CARE International
Campaign for Children of Palestine (CCP) Japan
Center for Environmental Diplomacy (CED)
Community Based Rehabilitation Program Southern Regions
Christoffel Blinden Mission (CBM)
DanChurchAid
Diakonia
East Jerusalem YMCA Rehabilitation Programme
El Wafa Medical Rehabilitation Hospital
Friends of Autistic Children Society
General Union of Disabled Palestinians (GUDP)
Handicap International
Health Work Committees (HWC)
Health Work Committees (HWC) - Gaza
International Relief Fund for the Afflicted and Needy (I.R.F.A.N) Canada
Irish MAP
Islamic Relief
Jerusalem Centre for Disabled Children (JCDC)
Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP)
medico international
Mercy Corps
Mundubat Palestine
National Society for Rehabilitation Gaza
Norwegian Association of Disabled (NAD)
Oxfam International
Palestine Solidarity Association of Sweden (PGS)
Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS)
Palestinian Non-Governmental Organisation Network (PNGO Network)
Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS)
QADER for Community Development
Save the Children Alliance
Solidaridad International (SI)
St. John Eye Hospital, Jerusalem
Stars of Hope – Empowerment of Women with Disabilities
Swedish Organisation for Individual Relief (SOIR)
Terres des Hommes Italy
Union of Health Care Committee (UHCC)
United Nations Association International Service (UNAIS)
Welfare Association

For guidelines on how to include people with disability in emergency response please contact Handicap International pmgaza.hi.pal@gmail.com.

For technical guidelines (in Arabic) for reconstruction projects, including buildings and house adaptations using agreed minimum standards and low cost technology, please contact Diakonia ghada_diakonia@palnet.com.

--