

Distinguished Committee Members; thank you for giving Medical Aid for Palestinians the opportunity to present at this meeting.

Palestinians with disabilities played an active role in identifying the issues I will present, providing information to MAP through focus groups, interviews and a participatory photography project.

Despite being protected under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, Palestinians with disabilities in the occupied Palestinian territory continue to face serious violations to their human rights resulting from Israel's policies and practices as an occupying power. MAP welcomes UN Security Council resolution 2475, which has important implications for the protection of Palestinians with disabilities in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In Gaza, Israel's intensified closure regime – imposed since 2007 and deemed to constitute the “collective punishment” of its 2 million inhabitants by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 Michael Lynk in his June report to the Human Rights Council – is a key driver of humanitarian needs and economic near-collapse. Some 96% of aquifer water is undrinkable, 68% of people are food insecure, and 80% of people are dependent on some form of international assistance.

These poor socioeconomic conditions disproportionately impact persons with disabilities, with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs assessing that people with disabilities in Gaza “are among the most vulnerable groups in a society already in crisis.” Where unemployment among Gaza's general population has reached 47%, among those with disabilities it is as high as 90%.

Limited electricity supply and frequent power cuts further impede the rights of Palestinians with disabilities in Gaza, for instance preventing those with physical disabilities from charging electric wheelchairs. Last month, this already dire situation was exacerbated due to Israel's decision to suspend imports of fuel for almost three weeks, which consequently resulted in shutting down Gaza's only power plant, leaving people with an inadequate four hours of mains electricity per day.

The number of Palestinians in Gaza with a disability has increased as a result of Israel's military offensives and use of force. During the 2014 offensive on Gaza, 11,000 Palestinians were injured, 10% of whom were physically disabled. The use of force by Israel's military against the ‘Great March of Return’ demonstrations has also caused high numbers of disabling injuries. Between March 2018 and October 2019, 7,996 Palestinians suffered limb gunshot injuries. Among those injured, 149 amputations were carried out, 24 people were paralysed due to spinal cord injuries and 15 people suffered permanent loss of vision as a result of injuries caused during the demonstrations. An estimated 1,200 Palestinians still require extensive limb reconstruction treatment. Israel's “dual-use” list severely restrict entry of carbon fibre components used to stabilise and treat limb injuries, and carbon fibre and epoxy resins used to produce artificial limbs, resulting in patients being fitted with heavier, less comfortable alternatives. Challenges to providing adequate treatment by a health system that has been pushed close to collapse by the closure mean that many others with complex limb injuries are at risk of permanent loss of function and lifelong disability.

Barriers to freedom of movement imposed by Israel limit professional development opportunities for Palestinian health workers and prevent some Palestinian patients from being able to access vital health care, further increasing the number of Palestinians with a disability. With certain medical specialties only available in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, or abroad, including ophthalmology, many patients require referral outside Gaza for treatment. Last year Israel denied 9% of exit permit

applications and delayed 26% past the appointment date. MAP works with individuals in Gaza who lost their vision after being unable to access eye surgery in East Jerusalem.

Across the occupied Palestinian territory, poverty rates have worsened as a result of lockdown measures. Palestinian Authority monthly revenues have declined to their lowest levels in two decades, with drastic consequences for public welfare, employment, and financial stability. As their access to the workforce is already compromised, this situation is disproportionately affecting people with disabilities, pulling them more rapidly into poverty.

To protect Palestinian disability rights, MAP urges the Committee to:

- Call on Israel, the Occupying Power, to adhere to its legal obligations and ensure the respect and fulfilment of the rights of Palestinians with disabilities under its effective control in the occupied Palestinian territory;
- Demand Israel to cease all forms of collective punishment, including the unlawful closure of the occupied Gaza Strip, with immediate effect; and
- Urge Israel, the Occupying power, to ensure the protection and fulfilment of the specific needs of people with disabilities in the occupied Palestinian territory to maintain their health, safety, dignity, and independence throughout the COVID-19 outbreak and related health emergencies

Thank you for listening.