

Medical Aid for Palestinians statement at UPR-Info's pre-session on Israel 13 Dec. 2017

I am a Palestinian from Khan Younis in Gaza. I work for Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), a medical and development organisation.

This is MAP's first time engaging in the UPR process. In preparing, I met with Palestinians with disabilities involved in MAP's disability programme, a quarter of them disabled by explosive weapons used by the Israeli military.

I will discuss violations of Palestinians' right to health and the right of Palestinians with disabilities to full and equal participation in society.

First, I will discuss barriers restricting patients' access to medical treatment.

I will then address Israel's failure to protect Palestinian medical facilities and personnel or to ensure independent investigations into such attacks.

Third, I will share how I and others with disabilities in the occupied Palestinian territory, seven percent of the population, face serious violations to our human rights, as enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Israel ratified in 2012.

Right to health

During the first UPR cycle, Israel accepted Australia's recommendation to "take steps to ensure the rights to health, education and other rights dependent on freedom of movement are protected".

Despite this, we continue to face significant barriers to accessing health care.

In 2016, Israeli authorities denied one in five Palestinians from the West Bank a permit to travel to hospital in East Jerusalem or Israel. The World Health Organisation expects this year to be the lowest for Gaza exit approvals since recording began in 2006, with 46% of patients denied or delayed from January to December. At least 18 patients from Gaza have died this year after their exit for care was denied or delayed by Israel.

Israel restricts the movement of Palestinian ambulances. In almost all cases, Palestinian patients, even emergency cases, are forbidden to enter East Jerusalem or Israel in a Palestinian registered ambulance. Instead they undergo a 'back-to-back' transfer, causing harmful and even life-threatening delays.

To protect Palestinians' right to health, we recommend that the Government of Israel:

- Take immediate steps to end restrictions on the movement of Palestinian patients, health-workers and Palestinian-registered ambulances

Protection of medical facilities and personnel

In the previous UPR cycle Israel accepted France's recommendation to "fight impunity by thorough and impartial investigations on all the allegations of human rights violations". However, the Israeli Government has continued to fail to set up independent investigations into suspected unlawful

attacks. This includes attacks on medical facilities and personnel in 2014 and previously. Israel has continued to fail to cooperate with international investigations including concerning Israel's 2014 military offensive on Gaza and denied the UN Commission of Inquiry entry to Gaza. Impunity for attacks makes repetition more likely.

To protect Palestinian medical facilities and personnel we recommend the Government of Israel:

- Fully engage without delay with all international efforts to promote impartial investigations into attacks on medical infrastructure and personnel and other alleged violations of international humanitarian law, and pursue accountability when violations are identified

Specific barriers to the rights of people with disabilities

In its second-cycle UPR, Israel accepted Canada's recommendation to "take further steps in the area of promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities." Despite this, these continue to be obstructed by occupation and tightening closure in Gaza.

Israel accepted Norway's recommendation "to take measures to provide for the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilian population". However, Israel failed to protect civilians during its 2014 military offensive on Gaza, including taking all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk. Palestinians with disabilities, including those with mobility restrictions, hearing and visual impairments, had severe difficulty evacuating civilian buildings under attack. When preliminary warnings were given by Israel, these were not effective for individuals with disabilities to evacuate safely. An 18-year-old woman with a physical disability involved in MAP's disability project died alone in her home, when her father was unable to evacuate her during an Israeli attack.

Israel's 2014 offensive caused an increase in disability in Gaza. More than 2,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, were killed and 11,000 injured. 10% became physically disabled. Gaza's only dedicated rehabilitation hospital, Al Wafa, was destroyed, severely restricting access to rehabilitation services despite increased need.

Israel accepted New Zealand's recommendation to "take further steps to overcome the obstacles faced by persons with disabilities in accessing the labour market." Occupation and closure impacts employment opportunities for Palestinians with disabilities. At 43% Gaza unemployment is the world's highest, rising to 90 % among people with disabilities.

The power crisis affecting Gaza since June has left many without mains electricity for 18-20 hours per day, increasing the barriers people with disabilities face. Without electricity, people with disabilities are unable to use lifts to exit their homes, and 1,200 Palestinians in Gaza who use electric wheelchairs or scooters are unable to fully charge them.

To protect Palestinian disability rights, we recommend the Government of Israel:

- Protect and promote the right of Palestinian people with disabilities to full and equal participation in society by taking meaningful steps towards ending the blockade and closure of Gaza and enabling Gaza's development
- Meet its obligations as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention by immediately ensuring adequate access to electricity supply for Gaza's population

MEDICAL AID FOR PALESTINIANS works for the health and dignity of Palestinians living under occupation and as refugees