

# Medical Aid for Palestinians input to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

## ***Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Context of Armed Conflict***

8 June 2021

### Introduction and overview

Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) is a humanitarian and development organisation, operating in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and Lebanon since the 1980s. Our key areas of work are women and children's health; disability; mental health and psychosocial support; emergency response and complex hospital care; and advocacy.

MAP takes a rights-based approach to disability in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and is particularly concerned to ensure our humanitarian and development work is inclusive of all persons with disabilities. We focus on removing the barriers and using our projects to support the participation of people with disabilities in society, as well as ensuring that our health, development and humanitarian programmes are also inclusive of persons with disabilities. We also have some specific targeted medical rehabilitation programmes working with local partners. A core commitment of MAP is that our programmes, both mainstream and targeted, promote a rights-based approach to change practices and challenge public perceptions of disability, by supporting people with disabilities to take the lead on breaking down the barriers in the communities they live in.

In section 1, we provide a legal and contextual overview of the violations against the enjoyment of rights and protections of persons with disabilities in the occupied Palestinian territory resulting from the policies and practices of Israel as an occupying power, specifically during its military offensives. In section 2 we provide answers to some of the questions raised by the Special Rapporteur in his questionnaire requesting input to his upcoming report. We are ready to provide any further information, including specific case studies from MAP's programme and with our programme partners, including DPOs, as may be helpful to the preparation of this report.

## Section 1

### Legal framework for disability rights in the occupied Palestinian territory

Israel has held the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza under belligerent occupation since 1967. Israel's conduct in this occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and toward the population under its effective control, including Palestinians with disabilities, is therefore bound by its duties under international humanitarian law and obligations international human rights law. This was confirmed in the International Court of Justice's 2004 Advisory Opinion on the Wall in the oPt, which considered that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are applicable in

the oPt.<sup>1</sup> UN treaty bodies have consistently reaffirmed Israel's obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Conventions and have repeatedly deplored Israel's ongoing refusal to accept this applicability and to fulfil such obligations.<sup>2</sup>

Israel ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2012. It is therefore obligated to ensure and promote the rights of all persons with disabilities within its jurisdiction, including those under its effective control in the oPt.<sup>3</sup> The Geneva Academy has emphasised, *"a prolonged occupation will lead to high expectations with regard to fulfilling the occupied population's human rights, including those contained in the CRPD."*<sup>4</sup> In its list of issues for the review of Israel, the Committee of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requested information on measures taken to fulfil its obligations under the CRPD toward persons with disabilities in the oPt. This included measures taken to implement obligations under Article 11, including:

*"Measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, to improve their living conditions, and to ensure their freedom of movement, access to humanitarian assistance, and access to services and goods in the community, including water supply, electricity, health care, education, rehabilitation, housing, and work and employment, particularly in the Gaza Strip"*<sup>5</sup>

The State of Palestine also ratified the CRPD in 2014. The main legislation outlining the rights of people with disabilities in the oPt is the 1999 Law N°4 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This legislation has not been updated since ratification of the CRPD and so needs updating to be compliant with international legal frameworks on disability rights. The Ministry of Social Development, with support from UNICEF and the Palestinian Disability Coalition, is currently reviewing the law.<sup>6</sup> Israel's continuing status as an occupying power limits the State of Palestine's effective control over its own territory and its ability to fully realise the rights of persons with disabilities under its jurisdiction.

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<sup>1</sup> ICJ (2004), <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/131/131-20040709-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See: UN Human Rights Council (2021), <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/46/L.31> and CERD (2019), [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/ISR/INT\\_CERD\\_COE\\_ISR\\_40809\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/ISR/INT_CERD_COE_ISR_40809_E.pdf) (paras 9-10); CESCR

(2019), <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4sIQ6QSmIBEDzFEovLCuW0fekJcyLVE4h%2FkYmh4jSatSY66nsJOxboaAu4bfCDK5HY6MTTcGy79Oycfl9hr1wv3zD%2FCRDXz86uGTURI%2BJvrNJQLfgjL9vVSE7OE5dJet> (paras 6-7); CEDAW

(2018), [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fISR%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fISR%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en) (paras 14-15); CAT

(2016), <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPrICAqhKb7yhsmEKqNhdzbr4kqou1ZPE79BvBJe97SSM1KP2v4ng3Dhx74ohsby7x4AIEgvGhwtvav7rPvZmtwppwObldkyK%2BM9cNY7svWLIYmp6PB4chW8O> (paras 8-9)

<sup>3</sup> Geneva Academy (2019), <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/joomlatools-files/docman-files/Academy%20Briefing%2014-Interactif.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Geneva Academy (2019), <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/joomlatools-files/docman-files/Academy%20Briefing%2014-Interactif.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> CRPD (2020) CRPD/C/ISR/Q/1

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fISR%2fQ%2f1&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fISR%2fQ%2f1&Lang=en)

<sup>6</sup> UK Aid (2019),

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818130/query-12-Gaza-mapping.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818130/query-12-Gaza-mapping.pdf)

UN Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019) urges:

*“all parties to armed conflict to take measures, in accordance with applicable international law obligations to protect civilians, including those with disabilities, and to prevent violence and abuses against civilians in situations of armed conflict”.*

It further urged member states including Israel to emphasised *“the need for States to end impunity for criminal acts against civilians, including those with disabilities, and to ensure that such persons have access to justice and effective remedies and, as appropriate, reparation”*, and urged member parties to armed conflict to *“allow and facilitate safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to all people in need of assistance.”*<sup>7</sup>

## Violations of the rights of people with disabilities in the occupied Palestinian territory

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 255,224 Palestinians have a disability in the oPt, comprising 5.8% of the population in Gaza and the West Bank.<sup>8</sup> This is likely an underestimate, given that the World Health Organization estimates that 15% of the world’s population live with a disability. One fifth of Palestinians with disabilities are children.<sup>9</sup> The rights of Palestinians with disabilities are routinely violated across the occupied Palestinian territories, with Israel’s repeated failure to ensure – and active obstruction of – the attainment of Palestinians’ rights to movement, access, protection and life.

### Excessive use of force and violations of the right to life

Across the oPt, Israeli forces regularly use excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate force and lethal force against protected Palestinian civilians, including people with disabilities, in violation of Article 10 of the CRPD regarding the right to life. In 2018, Al-Haq documented the killing of 10 Palestinians with disabilities by Israeli forces in the oPt.<sup>10</sup> Al-Haq’s documentation shows *“Israel’s failure to carry out genuine and impartial investigations into cases of killings involving Palestinians, fostering and entrenching a culture of impunity.”*<sup>11</sup> Israel’s failure to ensure effective access to justice for people with disabilities, a violation of Article 13 of the CRPD, is an ongoing trend.<sup>12</sup>

During the 2018-2019 ‘Great March of Return’ demonstrations, Israeli forces killed people with disabilities amid its widespread and systematic use of excessive force, including live ammunition. The UN independent Commission of Inquiry into the protests *“found reasonable grounds to believe that Israeli*

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<sup>7</sup> UNSC Res 2475 (2019) [https://undocs.org/s/res/2475\(2019\)](https://undocs.org/s/res/2475(2019))

<sup>8</sup> PCBS (2018), [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_Preliminary\\_Results\\_Report-en-with-tables.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_Preliminary_Results_Report-en-with-tables.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> PCBS (2018), [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_Preliminary\\_Results\\_Report-en-with-tables.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_Preliminary_Results_Report-en-with-tables.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Al-Haq (2019), <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/6108.html>

<sup>11</sup> Al-Haq (2019), <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/6108.html>

<sup>12</sup> See Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, UN Human Rights Council (2009) <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/12session/A-HRC-12-48.pdf> and the Report of the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict (2015) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/coigazaconflict/pages/reportcoigaza.aspx>

*snipers shot ... persons with disabilities, knowing they were clearly recognizable as such.*<sup>13</sup> More than 7,000 people were shot with live ammunition and an estimated 1,200-1,500 people suffered complex limb injuries requiring multiple surgeries and extensive rehabilitation care. 156 limb injuries resulted in amputations.<sup>14</sup> In addition, OCHA estimates that 52,400 people would suffer mental health problems related to the protests.<sup>15</sup>

Excessive force is routinely used against Palestinians by Israeli security forces in the West Bank. Since 2008, 608 Palestinians have been killed – 562 by live ammunition.<sup>16</sup> Such killings reached international attention last year when Eyad Hallaq, a 31-year-old Palestinian man with autism and a mild learning disability, was fatally shot by Israeli police while on his way to the Elywn El Quds Occupational Training Centre in the Old City of East Jerusalem on 30 May 2020.<sup>17</sup> More than one year later nobody has been held accountable for Eyad’s killing.<sup>18</sup>

### Restrictions on freedom of movement and access

Across the occupied territories, Palestinians with disabilities face a matrix of restrictions on their movement, from the illegal closure and blockade of Gaza to the web of military checkpoints and bureaucratic obstacles to movement in the West Bank. According to Human Rights Watch, there exists “a state policy of “separation” of Palestinians between the West Bank and Gaza, which prevents the movement of people and goods within the OPT,” violating Article 18 of the CPRD.<sup>19</sup>

The illegal closure and blockade of Gaza has prevented the movement of two million Palestinians in and out of the Strip for 14 years including for medical treatment, as well as limiting necessary materials and fuel needed to ensure an “adequate standard of living and social protection.”<sup>20</sup> People with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the poor socio-economic conditions, largely caused by the intensified closure.<sup>21</sup> UN OCHA has stated that people with disabilities in Gaza “are among the most vulnerable groups in a society already in crisis.”<sup>22</sup>

The closure is a primary driver of humanitarian needs and economic near-collapse in Gaza, and the ICRC has determined it to constitute “a collective punishment imposed in clear violation of Israel’s obligations under international humanitarian law.”<sup>23</sup> MAP’s assessment is that the UN’s warning since 2012 that Gaza

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<sup>13</sup> OHCHR (2018),

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=24226&LangID=E>

<sup>14</sup> OCHA (2020) <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/two-years-on-people-injured-and-traumatized-during-the-great-march-of-return-are-still-struggling/>

<sup>15</sup> OCHA (2020), <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/two-years-people-injured-and-traumatized-during-great-march-return-are-still-struggling>

<sup>16</sup> OCHA oPt (2021), <https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties>

<sup>17</sup> UN OHCHR (2020), <https://www.facebook.com/UNHumanRightsOPT/posts/un-human-rights-office-press-statementisraeli-security-forces-yet-again-use-leth/1435945163260471/>

<sup>18</sup> Al Jazeera (2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/5/30/how-a-palestinian-man-with-autism-was-killed-by-israeli-police>

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch (2021), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>

<sup>20</sup> CRPD, Article 28

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch (2020), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/03/gaza-israeli-restrictions-harm-people-disabilities>

<sup>22</sup> OCHA (2017), <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/gaza-people-disabilities-disproportionately-affected-energy-and-salary-crisis>

<sup>23</sup> ICRC (2010) <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/update/palestine-update-140610.htm>

would be unliveable by 2020 has indeed come true.<sup>24</sup> Some 96% of aquifer water is undrinkable.<sup>25</sup> Almost half of the population (46%) lives below poverty line and many residents struggle to afford nutritious food, with 62% of households food insecure.<sup>26</sup> Unemployment reached 47% in 2019, with unemployment amongst people disabilities recorded as high as 90%.<sup>27</sup>

Limited electricity supply and frequent power cuts impede the rights of Palestinians with disability in Gaza, for instance preventing those with physical disabilities from using lifts to exit their homes and charging electrical wheelchairs. Those with hearing impairments also find it difficult to charge their hearing aids, limiting their ability to communicate with family and friends. Limits on the entry of fuel are often increased during times of conflict, further restricting electricity supply.

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened conditions for Palestinians in Gaza, disproportionately affecting those with disabilities, with further restrictions on movement and Israel's failure to meet its obligations under international law to provide rapid, equitable and comprehensive access to vaccines.<sup>28</sup>

### Violations of the right to safety and protection during situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies

Israel's military assaults on Gaza are characterised by excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure. Since 2008, 5,241 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza. According to OCHA, 3,804 Palestinians were killed in the three major assaults on Gaza in 2008, 2012 and 2014.<sup>29</sup> Almost 10% of those injured in 2014 suffered permanent disabilities.<sup>30</sup>

During the May 2021 military offensive on Gaza, OCHA recorded 256 Palestinians killed,<sup>31</sup> including six people with disabilities according to the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS) and the National Society for Rehabilitation (NSR). Among them was a 35-year-old man with a physical disability who was killed alongside his pregnant wife and two-year old daughter in an Israeli airstrike on his home in Deir Al Balah.<sup>32</sup> The bombardment also affected several health and rehabilitation facilities, including 24 organizations working with people with disabilities recorded by the PMRS and NSR.

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<sup>24</sup> UNCT (2012), <https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/publications/gaza/Gaza%20in%202020.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Gisha (2020), <https://gisha.org/en-blog/2020/01/01/the-un-predicted-gaza-would-be-unlivable-by-2020-they-were-right/>

<sup>26</sup> OCHA (January 2020), [https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hrp\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hrp_2020.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> UK Aid (2019), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818130/query-12-Gaza-mapping.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818130/query-12-Gaza-mapping.pdf). UNRWA also cited in 2016 that in Gaza, only 3,127 (11%) people with disabilities over 18 years of age were in the labour force, <https://www.unrwa.org/resources/about-unrwa/supporting-persons-disabilities>

<sup>28</sup> MAP (2021), <https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1191-equal-access-to-covid-19-vaccines-who-is-responsible-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory>

<sup>29</sup> OCHA oPt (2021), <https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties>

<sup>30</sup> OCHA oPt (2015), <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/key-figures-2014-hostilities>

<sup>31</sup> OCHA oPt (2021), <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/response-escalation-opt-situation-report-no-2-28-may-3-june-2021>

<sup>32</sup> OCHA oPt (2021), <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/escalation-gaza-strip-west-bank-and-israel-flash-update-10-covering-1200-19-may-1200-20-may>

Over the course of the hostilities, 113,000 people were internally displaced with 8,500 still remaining with host families.<sup>33</sup> The PMRS and NSR recorded that 3,000 people with disabilities were displaced, and the houses of 10 people with disabilities were damaged. The father of Ramzi Abu Faris, a visually impaired person whose four siblings were killed in an airstrike on their home, spoke to MAP about their displacement:

*“We settled down in one of the UNRWA schools. Many people moved to live in the UNRWA schools as well. Ramzi and I slept in the schoolyard because rooms were filled with women. During these times, Ramzi was distressed and challenged at the new place which was not suitable or adaptable for persons with visual disabilities, and I was not by his side most of the time due to my frequent visits to the hospital to check on other members of our family. After the assault and our stay at the UNRWA, Ramzi became very reliant and dependent on me and others because of the unfamiliarity and the inaccessibility of the new place.”*

MAP has previously submitted input on the need for the protection of persons with disabilities who are displaced by military operations in Gaza to the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internationally displaced persons.<sup>34</sup>

The latest assault reflects a pattern of attacks on Palestinians with disabilities during Israel’s military offensives. According to the Disability Representative Bodies Network (DRBN), during the 2014 military offensive Israeli forces killed 23 people with disabilities and injured approximately 50, and 2,204 Palestinians with disabilities were forcibly displaced.<sup>35</sup>

During the 2014 hostilities, Palestinians with disabilities - including those with mobility restrictions, hearing and visual impairments - had severe difficulty evacuating civilian buildings under attack, increasing their risk of injury and death. When preliminary warnings were given by Israel, these were not effective or advanced enough for individuals with disabilities to evacuate safely. In some circumstances people with disabilities had to be left in their homes, as family members were unable to evacuate them. One of MAP’s beneficiaries, a 17-year-old girl with a physical disability, died from smoke inhalation after being unable to be safely evacuated from her family house during an Israeli military attack on Gaza’s Middle Area on 13 August 2014. She died in hospital four days after the attack.

The DRBN also reported that five centres for people with disabilities were damaged or destroyed by Israeli forces in 2014.<sup>36</sup> Among them was the Al Wafa Hospital, Gaza’s only specialist rehabilitation hospital, which was completely destroyed by Israeli airstrikes. Despite the need for a thorough and independent investigation, Israeli authorities chose not to open a criminal investigation into the case.<sup>37</sup> The Mebarrat Palestine Centre for People with Disabilities, a residential care centre supporting people with complex cognitive and intellectual impairments, was damaged in Israeli bombing and two women

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<sup>33</sup> OCHA oPt (2021), <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/response-escalation-opt-situation-report-no-2-28-may-3-june-2021>

<sup>34</sup> MAP (2020), [https://www.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/Issues/IDPersons/Call/MedicalAidPalestine.docx&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1](https://www.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/Issues/IDPersons/Call/MedicalAidPalestine.docx&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1)

<sup>35</sup> Disability Representative Bodies Network (2015), <https://www.map.org.uk/downloads/thesuf1.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> DRBN (2015), <https://www.map.org.uk/downloads/thesuf1.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> MAP, Al Mezan and LPHR (2020) <https://www.map.org.uk/downloads/chronic-impunity-gazas-health-sector-under-repeated-attack.pdf>

with disabilities were killed and three residents with disabilities and a care support worker were severely injured. One of the women killed, Suha Abu Saada, had lost a leg when as a child her room had been hit by Israeli shelling.<sup>38</sup> Again, Israeli authorities chose not to open a criminal investigation into the case. These cases reflect a chronic failure to ensure accountability for attacks on healthcare facilities and personnel, including those providing support to persons with disabilities.

Exposure to violence, compounded by the effects of the occupation and blockade, have long-term implications for mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. Depressive and anxiety disorders are respectively the second and seventh highest causes of disability in the oPt.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> MAP (2015), <https://www.map.org.uk/downloads/no-more-impunity--gaza-health-sector-under-attack.pdf> p15

## Section 2

QUESTIONNAIRE TO INFORM THE THEMATIC REPORT OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ON ARMED CONFLICT, 76<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY – 2021

**1. Please provide information on whether and how your organization engages on the protection of persons with disabilities under international humanitarian law.**

MAP's submission to UN Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 protests in Gaza and written submission to the 40<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council included data on limb injuries in Gaza, including the large number of Palestinians with lifelong disabling injuries. This was shared with the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the oPt and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

MAP's submission to Israel's Third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) detailed barriers to the rights of Palestinians with disabilities.<sup>40</sup> Ahead of the submission, July 2017, MAP's Inclusive and Accessible Society project team met with 12 Palestinians with disabilities in Gaza. The group discussed the barriers they face in seeking to obtain full and equal participation in society and played an active role in raising the issues and recommendations in MAP's submission.

In 2020, MAP submitted evidence to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ahead of its review of Israel.<sup>41</sup> We also arranged a virtual briefing for Committee members with three disability rights advocates in Gaza.

**2. Please provide information on the engagement of your organization with the government and/or military authorities relating to the protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflict.**

- a. Who initiated the engagement?
- b. What was the motivation, purpose, and outcome of these engagements?
- c. Was Article 11 of the CRPD and/or UN Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019) discussed in these engagements?

**AND 5. Please provide information on how civil society, specifically OPDs, are involved in the process to identify and address discrimination and marginalization of persons with disabilities in situations of armed conflict, conflict prevention, humanitarian action, and peacebuilding operations.**

MAP supports community-based rehabilitation activities and partners with local organisations to promote an inclusive and accessible society for people with disabilities by activating their full participation in their local communities. Our programs focus on empowerment for persons with disabilities, including educating around their rights enshrined in the CRPD; providing economic opportunity through short-term contracts or small-business grants; and providing education and advocacy around accessibility for local decision-makers such as municipal authorities.

An important part of our partners' training is equipping people with the skills to influence decision-makers to help bring about change. When COVID-19 first broke out in Gaza, there was a lack of accessible

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<sup>40</sup> MAP (2017), <https://www.map.org.uk/downloads/lphr-map-letter-to-lord-ahmad---16-november-2017.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> MAP (2020), <https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1159-gaza-disability-rights-advocates-speak-to-un-experts-ahead-of-israel-review>



information about the virus. One person, Naji, joined several youths in our project to campaign for this, successfully getting a sign language interpreter included in the Ministry of Health's daily updates.<sup>42</sup>

Through our partnership with the Social Developmental Forum (SDF), a digital advocacy organisation focused on sustainable development, we work across Gaza to promote empowerment and awareness for people with disabilities. The SDF provides inclusionary trainings for people with and without disabilities, preparing local communities to become disability advocates in their own right, as well as providing tools for advocacy with local authorities, including offering field visits to local authorities and ministries.

MAP recognises, however, that the ability of local authorities within the oPt to remove barriers to the rights of persons with disabilities is limited by the policies, practices, and effective control of the occupying power, Israel. This is particularly true of the lack of adequate protection for persons with disabilities from excessive use of force by Israeli security forces, during its military offensives, and from the collective punishment of its closure of Gaza. The separation of Palestinians in West Bank from those in Gaza and in East Jerusalem has resulted in a web of restrictions on Palestinian movement and access, preventing access to health and humanitarian assistance, as well as the long-term de-development of Palestinian infrastructure necessary to support Palestinians. MAP therefore supports Palestinian disability rights advocates to engage with third states and UN bodies and mechanisms to seek accountability for violations and promote protection for persons with disabilities.

For example, in 2019, MAP ran a participatory photography project with Palestinians with disabilities in Gaza.<sup>43</sup> The project supported the group to tell their own stories through photography, raising awareness locally and internationally of disability rights and the barriers to them in Gaza. Their pictures shine a light on multiple challenges they face in their daily lives, including high unemployment, the impact of Israeli military offensives, inaccessible spaces, the unavailability of assistive devices, discrimination and sexual violence and limited access to sports and entertainment. The issues raised by the photographers helped to inform MAP's submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see above). Two individuals involved with the photography project directly briefed Committee members in September 2020.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> MAP (2020), <https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1180-leading-by-example-advancing-disability-rights-in-gaza>

<sup>43</sup> MAP (2019), <https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1069-joint-palestine-uk-photo-exhibition-highlights-barriers-to-rights-of-people-with-disabilities-in-gaza>

<sup>44</sup> MAP (2020), <https://www.map.org.uk/news/archive/post/1159-gaza-disability-rights-advocates-speak-to-un-experts-ahead-of-israel-review>