

Position Paper (3)

A War without Human Rights

Humanitarian Interventions and International Aid:
Do They Respond to Palestinian Priorities?

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The Oslo Accord and the Paris Economic Protocol constituted a major transformation not only in the structure of the Palestinian society and the power relations within it but also in the volume and intensity of the interventions of the international community, led by the United States and the European Union, within the Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which appeared in the intensity of the increase in funding and aid to establish the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, to pass what was then called the "Peace Treaty," which was supposed to lead to a two-state solution. With the outbreak of the Second Intifada and the assassination of Yasser Arafat, the volume of international aid doubled within the vision of "state institutions-building," and reached high average compared to the population.

The "state institutions-building" phase carried the seeds of its demise, as presidential elections were held in 2005, which led to the appointment of Mahmoud Abbas as President of the Palestinian Authority, the elections that were never repeated after that. One year later, specifically in the year 2006, elections from the Legislative Council took place, which resulted in the winning of Hamas movement of the majority of the council's seats, which escalated the political tensions between Fatah and Hamas, leading to a "military solution" in the Gaza Strip by Hamas in 2007.

During the post-"institutionalization" phase, the Palestinian Authority eliminated attempts to promote national economic development derived from the priorities of the Palestinian people, during which it liberated the Palestinian private sector from any restrictions, by adopting a neoliberal economic model, in which the Authority's economy played the role of comprador, and Western financing had a prominent role in liberalizing the Authority's development policies in general, by subjecting them to the dictates and conditions that accompanied the financing process and adopting the Western development model, which was reflected in the work and projects of most civil society organizations as well.

The role of the west world witnessed a new phase represented by its intensive interventions through political, security, and financial channels, specifically in promoting a "prosperous" economic model in the West Bank

for its benefits in “maximizing the importance of the peace project” in exchange for a total and violent punishment of a resistant model that is inconsistent with the desires of the West in the Gaza Strip.

We can shed light on the Israeli occupation's stifling siege of the Gaza Strip since 2007 in the context of understanding Western complicity in suffocating the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. This siege intensified when Egyptian President Al Sisi became the president of Egypt, and he worked to create a buffer zone next to the Gaza Strip to prevent trade exchange and smuggling of goods and merchandise to the Strip. In addition to this, five destructive wars were launched against the Gaza Strip, destroying all the corroded infrastructure, and destroying huge numbers of residential buildings and public headquarters.

In light of the aforementioned preview, this paper seeks to establish a discussion related to the role of international aid and humanitarian interventions by United Nations organizations and international institutions in robbing Palestinians, including persons with disabilities, of their voice and their ability to formulate a developmental vision for the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, with a focus on the ethnic cleansing war that began on the 7th of October. The paper will mainly discuss the extent to which the efforts of UN organizations and international institutions coincide with efforts to end the occupation, lift the siege, and address the basic problems within the Gaza Strip, which include empowering marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, and improving their reality.

Two Decades of “Obvious” Political Conditionality!

After the military solution in the Gaza Strip, the US Administration ceased the programs that it funded in the Gaza Strip, and imposed a large set of political conditions, aiming in essence to isolate and punish the Palestinian parties that adopted the approach of resistance, and that did not adopt the “political program” for the two-state solution. This has led to the development of a collective punishment policy for the residents of the Gaza Strip, and then later worked to restore some American programs through international and American companies implemented directly in the Gaza Strip without any contact or cooperation with the de facto government, and the Europeans also adopted the same approach while their funding continued to flow into the Gaza Strip through the ministries of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah.

United Nations organizations, including UNRWA, continued to work within the Strip, although some of their programs were ceased, specifically the American, Canadian, Australian, and Japanese programs, and they as a whole followed the American position step by step. The European Union tried to compensate for the decrease in funding to maintain a “soft power” controlling the political borders for Palestinians in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, however, with the constraints imposed by the Occupation on everything that enters the Strip, this support and funding were limited to merely keeping Palestinians alive. The case of Mohamed Halabi, the Director of the World Vision office in the Gaza Strip, who was accused of transferring money to a political party, without any proof, but the occupation kept him under detention and sentenced him to a long period of imprisonment (12 years) without any proof or evidence, and the worse is that his organization was involved in the “cooperation” with the Occupation’s intelligence investigation against its Office Director, despite the lack of evidence, according to a statement issued by its CEO in which he stated: “The Organization was not aware of these accusations before Thursday, the 4th of August, when the charges were officially presented for the first time, and due to the seriousness of these allegations, World Vision suspended the implementation of its programs in Gaza. We are conducting a full review, including an external audit, and will remain fully engaged with the ongoing investigation.”¹

On its part, Arab support took an upward trend at times, and a downward trend at other times, and those trends were connected to the increase in the amount of aid and funding granted after each war that was waged on the Gaza Strip, specifically to rebuild what was destroyed by the 2014 war, as well as in the rest of the wars. After the war of 2014, a conference was held for the funding countries to study how to reconstruct Gaza. The conference was led by the United States and the European Union with the participation of international and regional organizations. At the end of the conference, the funding countries pledged to provide 5.4 billion US Dollars, half of which were dedicated to rebuilding Gaza and the other for the support of the budget of the Palestinian Government and the development in the West Bank. The conference leader stressed that providing this aid will be subject to three conditions, which are: the government of national unity should peruse its work in the Gaza Strip and impose its control there, especially on borders and customs, and that the funds are not used for purposes other than those for which they are dedicated, and to

¹ “A statement issued by the CEO of the World Vision upon the detainment of its employee” *World Vision* (9 August 2016). Website: <https://n9.cl/525h0>.

work on opening the border crossings between “Israel” and Gaza. Qatar made the largest contribution to the reconstruction of Gaza at the time in the amount of one billion US Dollars, while Saudi Arabia did not make a donation and announced a previously provided aid in the value of \$500 million.²

Trump came up with a new vision for financing the costs of the United States’ “protection” of some countries, which increases the burden of financing Arab countries, specifically the Gulf states, for the costs of conflicts and wars in the region. Furthermore, the United States made a massive reduction in funding for UNRWA. On January 16, 2018, the Trump administration indicated that it would transfer 60 million US Dollars to the UNRWA, while the UNRWA was expecting a donation of 350 million US Dollars, meaning that it was donating about 17% of the value of its previous donations³. Arab Countries compensated for this financing deficit at that time.

The meeting of the advisory committee of the UNRWA was held in Jordan in 2018, it was attended by the host governments and the largest funders. The meeting was conveyed upon the United States’ reduction of its support to the UNRWA. The Commissioner-General of UNRWA at the time announced that the agency's deficit had been reduced from 446 million US Dollars to 21 million US Dollars. The Commissioner also stressed that four Arab countries significantly increased their support during 2018, namely the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates⁴. UNRWA stressed that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a major supporter of UNRWA and that it donated more than 160 million US Dollars, making it one of the largest Donors during the year 2018⁵, while UNRWA confirmed that it received unprecedented support from Qatar worth 50 million US Dollars during the same year.⁶

The Trump Administration was not content with reducing support for UNRWA but also led the normalization agreements between “Israel” and Arab countries, including the United Arab Emirates, which before signing

² Khaled Mahmoud, *The Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip: Contexts and Challenges* (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2014). Website: <https://n9.cl/g2ful>

³ Alice Ramsay and Amaya Al-Orzza. "Understanding the Political Underpinnings of UNRWA's Chronic Funding Crisis." Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, Bulletin No. 27 (June 2018): 9, Website: <https://n9.cl/5t4kd>.

⁴ "The Commissioner-General of UNRWA thanks partners for the excellent response in the face of unprecedented financial challenges and announces a reduction in the financial deficit to \$21 million during the Advisory Committee meeting" *UNRWA* (20 November 2018). Website: <https://n9.cl/rbf3v>.

⁵ "Saudi Arabia transfers the promised amount of \$50 million to the UNRWA" *Khabar News Agency* (20 December 2018). Website: <https://n9.cl/ys06j>

⁶ "Qatar provides unprecedented support to UNRWA. *UNRWA* (16 March 2018). Website: <https://n9.cl/bd2u3>.

the normalization agreement was among the largest donors to the UNRWA, as the volume of its funding in 2019 amounted to about 51.8 million US Dollars, which was equal to funding in 2018, meaning that it was ranked fifth on the list of the agency's largest donors⁷, while reports indicate that the support was fifty times less in 2020, that is, after concluding the normalization agreement with "Israel" in 2019⁸. In the period between the year 2018 and June of 2023, the UAE donated 521 million US Dollars to Palestine, including 119.3 million US Dollars to the UNRWA⁹. If you exclude the amounts provided during the years 2018 and 2019, which amount to approximately 100 million US Dollars, the remaining amount for the remaining years does not exceed 20 million US Dollars.

The shift in the UAE's cooperation with the UNRWA constitutes a small example of attempts to gradually end the issue of refugees and dissolve the UNRWA by cutting off its funding outlets. It is noteworthy that most of the funding that later came from the UAE was targeted, meaning that most of it was directed as aid with a specific scope of disbursement, and does not support the sustainable work of the UNRWA and its operational capabilities. This is evident by the volume of aid provided in general to Palestine compared to the support provided to the UNRWA. It also recently provided support in the value of 20 million US Dollars to the UNRWA in the Gaza Strip during the war, which will be mostly spent on food aid, and provided 10 million US Dollars through the UNRWA for the reconstruction of Jenin.¹⁰

In June of this year, a meeting of the General Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee was held to announce the donations that will be granted to the UNRWA. During this meeting, it was warned that the UNRWA was on the verge of collapsing. Moreover, the Secretary-General of the UN indicated during the meeting that many major donors announced a reduction in their contributions, that the agency was operating with a deficit of 75 million US Dollars, and that the lack of funding constitutes a major obstacle to the continued provision of its services. Further, the UNRWA's media advisor confirmed that some important countries informed the agency of the possibility of reducing their aid this year, in addition to the decline in Arab support by 90%. He pointed

⁷ The Liquidation of the UNRWA: The Most Prominent Goal that Israel Seeks to Achieve through Normalization Agreements" *Badeel* (2021). Website: <https://n9.cl/3lmmq>.

⁸ "The UAE Reduced its Support Granted to the UNRWA Last Year by Fifty Times" *Arab 48* (6 February 2021). Website: <https://n9.cl/vi64h>.

⁹ "The UAE Contributes \$20 Million to The UNRWA" *Sky News Arabia* (3 June 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/j7lbs>.

¹⁰ "The UAE Responds Generously to the UNRWA's Call for Urgent Support: \$20 Million for Humanitarian Response for Gaza" *UNRWA* (15 October 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/2w0i3o>.

out that the Arab countries provided 3% of the agency's budget for the year 2021. After the Arab countries provided approximately 200 million US Dollars in 2018, the amount declined to reach 20 million US Dollars from January 2021 to June 2023.¹¹

The UNRWA provides education services through 700 schools and 140 clinics affiliated with it, where hundreds of thousands of male and female Palestinian refugees obtain educational and medical services. Ceasing any of the services provided due to the Agency's ongoing budget deficit will negatively affect 70% of the refugees in the areas in which it operates in providing education, health, and other services¹². The reduction in funding did not target the UNRWA alone, as the World Food Program suspended humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank due to budget shortages as well.

The suspension of the programs provided by international organizations in general, and in the Gaza Strip in particular, is accompanied by growing indicators of poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity in the Strip, where 53% of the residents of Gaza suffer from poverty, and according to the poverty indicators adopted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, families headed by women are the poorest, and 54% of these families are in the Gaza Strip¹³, while 64.4% of the residents of the Strip are below the line of food insecurity. Unemployment rates reached around 45%, while 80% of them rely on the aid provided by international institutions. After stopping the World Food Programme, food aid provided to over 200 thousand Palestinians in the Strip stopped¹⁴, this includes women, persons with disability, and women with disability in particular, as they are subject to double marginalization since they are women and are with disabilities, not to mention that women with disabilities in these programs are exposed to marginalization and exclusion, as their dependence on aid programs and their actual access to this aid is greatly affected by the double bias against women and disability.

¹¹ Thaier Saleh. "What if the Services of the UNRWA Stop" *Aljazeera* (13 June 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/klxii>.

¹² Previous resource.

¹³ "Ola Awad Presents the Conditions of Palestinian Women on the Eve of International Women's Day" *The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* (8 March 2019). Website: <https://n9.cl/0kz5y>.

¹⁴ "Hunger Haunts the Residents of Gaza after Stopping the Food Program and Reducing UNRWA Services" *Palestinian Return Centre* (7 June 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/aijwp>.

The percentage of persons with disabilities increases rapidly in the Gaza Strip due to the recurring wars, as persons with disabilities in the Gaza Strip account for 52% of the percentage of disability in Palestine¹⁵, and persons with disabilities are among the poorest segments in the society, as unemployment rates among persons with disabilities in the Strip accounts to 54% of the unemployment rate in Palestine. This leads to increase the dependence on international aid and aid programs that target the marginalized and poorest segments. The West's transition from funding a political project that would result in a two-state solution, to less funding aimed at maintaining the performance of the Palestinian Authority, and funding the minimum requirements of life within the Strip so that the Palestinians do not die of hunger as a result of the Occupation's siege, went through many transformations, and in their entirety, they focused on punishing and dismantling any resistance of the Occupation and the Western colonialism in its various forms. This funding decreased significantly even for the Palestinian Authority after Trump came to the White House, and after the USA and Saudi Arabia were the biggest funders of the Palestinian Authority until 2016, the USA continued to gradually decrease its grants until they were almost entirely cut after Trump became president. Data from the Palestinian Ministry of Finance shows that the Palestinian Authority did not receive any support from the US Administration during the period from 2016 until 2020 at minimum¹⁶, and this support became marginal to the Palestinian government's budget, while the de facto government attempted to finance the costs of the salary and services bill by imposing additional taxes, receiving funding through informal means from countries and movements in the region and across the world, and to some extent facilitating the smuggling activities until it was almost eliminated.

The matter did not stop at reducing grants to the Palestinian Authority. The United States Agency for Development (USAID) forced all institutions that would receive funding from it to sign a document "renouncing terrorism," which explicitly considers the Palestinian resistance as terrorism. This also led to more funders imposing similar requirements, and the European Union forced the organizations that benefit from its funding to sign new clauses similar to those imposed by the USAID¹⁷, which means that these

¹⁵ "The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics Issues a Press Release on the International Day for Persons with Disability" *The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* (3 December 2019). Website: <https://n9.cl/go3ps>.

¹⁶ "Donors are Gradually Withdrawing from the Support of the Budget of Palestine" *Anatolia* (21 October 2020). Website: <https://n9.cl/q6nyk>.

¹⁷ Ahmad ALTanani, "Towards effective policies to confront politically conditional funding for Palestinian NGOs" *The Palestinian Center for Policy Research and Strategic Study – MASARAT* (24 April 2022). Website: <https://n9.cl/jbd9m>.

institutions are unable to deal with any individuals who can be classified as “terrorists,” including prisoners, families of martyrs, and many who belong to Palestinian political factions.

These transformations resulted in creating an understanding and an engagement with the declared and undeclared conditions of the donors by the United Nations, governmental and non-governmental international organizations, and, to an extent, Palestinian organizations forcing them to greatly adapt to the conditions and limitations, with resistance shown by some organizations. This development is reflected in what is permitted to be implemented or prohibited from being implemented, with whom we work, with whom we do not work, who is permitted to be employed, who is prohibited from being employed, and even which areas and refugee camps to targeted by these programs and projects.

*“Lajee Centre is a civil society organization with its HQ located in Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem, it is surrounded by six military towers and the apartheid wall, its identity is derived from its national identity, struggle for justice. In its financing, the Centre relies on the donor countries, and just like other community-based organizations, it found itself subject to the demands of the international donors (aside from the new conditions related to combating terrorism), new demands that crawled into the organizational environment of the Center and intervened with its organizational structure in project proposals, according to the demands of the donors, which usually require a politically clear content”.*¹⁸

International Organizations: Got Used to the Scene of Destruction!

The Declaration on the Right to Development issued in 1986 states: “Considering that the elimination of the massive and flagrant violations of the human rights of the peoples and individuals affected by situations such as those resulting from colonialism, neocolonialism, apartheid, all forms of racism and racial discrimination, foreign domination and occupation, aggression and threats against national sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity and threats of war would contribute to the establishment of circumstances propitious to the development of a great part of mankind”¹⁹. It may seem that this important paragraph of the declaration was drafted specifically for Palestine, which has been subject to settler

¹⁸ Shatha AlAzza, “The Opium of Conditional Financing: Grassroots Institutions are the Weakest Link” *Badeel*. Website: <https://n9.cl/8g7ij>.

¹⁹ United Nations, “The Declaration on the Right to Development. Website: <https://n9.cl/s3n2ew>.

colonialism for more than seven decades. Despite its enormous importance, it is ignored, and with it, the right of the Palestinian people to development and sovereignty over their resources is ignored, not only by the Occupation, but by many international organizations as well.

The agencies of the United Nations work with the funding dedicated to each agency in the UN's budget. Furthermore, it works through governmental funding that is (mostly) Western for its regional or country programs. It receives funding from European countries (for example) to implement a specific program in Palestine related to infrastructure, human rights, childhood, or other causes. On the other hand, international non-governmental organizations (INGO) work by receiving direct funding from EU or European countries, and sometimes by receiving funding from a United Nations agency. These organizations were the quick bypass by the Europeans specifically to avoid working with the de facto government and its ministries in the Gaza Strip, and to ensure that none of the aid goes into the "hands" of the resistance, as they claim!

Palestinian NGOs come at the bottom of this ranking in terms of access, ability to influence, and importance in prioritizing programs and projects, as they are usually subject to competition for projects within larger programs implemented by United Nations agencies, international organizations, or both. This means that these programs are already designed, and their scope of influence has been greatly limited.

United Nations agencies and international organizations are accustomed to playing large and specific roles in reconstruction since it has become a familiar feature of the Strip which witnesses destruction by the Occupation every few years, specifically the UNRWA, which started - after every war and aggression against the Strip - launching an appeal for hundreds of millions of dollars for emergency interventions, relief, and humanitarian interventions, not to mention the reconstruction of destroyed schools, clinics, and homes inside the Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip.

There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the role of the UN, its agencies, Western governments and their developmental arms, and governmental and non-governmental organizations especially in terms of their bias towards the Occupation's narrative of the events that occurred on October 7th. Additionally, most Western countries, including the United States and the European Union, support and finance the war of ethnic cleansing practiced by the Occupation against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and fully adopt the narrative and political terminology issued by the Occupation that do not correspond to the facts of what

happened on the one hand, nor are they compatible with International Humanitarian Law, which prompted a large number of European countries and the European Union to take several decisions related to funding and humanitarian aid in terms of cutting, freezing, reviewing it. EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Affairs Oliver Varhelyi also stated that the European Union had frozen its aid amounting to 691 million Euros following the events of October 7th, before the European Union retracted these statements²⁰. In addition, the EU imposed political conditions that contradict the Palestinian law, and asked institutions to condemn what happened on October 7th!

There is major and sharp criticism on the role of UNRWA, the Red Cross, and other organizations in protecting civilians, hospitals, the sick and wounded inside hospitals, and providing safe shelters during the Occupation war on the Gaza Strip, specifically concerning their withdrawal from providing protection in the northern areas of the Gaza Strip, and leaving defenseless civilians in the face of the "Israeli" machine of war and destruction, without any necessities of life such as food, medicine and water. This was evident through the UNRWA's abandonment of its responsibilities towards the shelters in the north, which contained an estimated number of approximately 160 thousand displaced persons as of October 12th. This means that these people are exposed to extremely difficult conditions in terms of access to treatment, food and water, including persons with disabilities, because many of these shelters are compatible, and were a good option for many persons with disabilities at the beginning of the war. Failure to update the numbers of displaced people in these shelters indicates the shortcomings and failure of UNRWA to protect Palestinian civilians in light of the war launched against them by the Occupation.²¹

The Quick Transformation from Regular Programs to Relief Programs:

All agencies of the UN and International governmental and non-governmental organizations work from their headquarters located in Western capitals, as well as regional offices, many of these organizations have offices

²⁰ "An Emergency European Meeting to Review the Provision of Aid to the Palestinians" *Aljazeera* (10 October 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/jzov4>.

²¹ Position Paper: A War without Human Rights: Protecting Persons with Disabilities in Light of the Ethnic Cleansing War on the Gaza Strip (Ramallah: The Social and Economic Policies Monitor (AlMarsad) and the Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women with Disabilities, 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/hp6bw>.

inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and have foreign and local team members. Usually, the top management is fully or mostly occupied by foreigners. Thus, decisions come from within foreign capitals and are taken by senior foreign officials. Many of their programs are based on human rights and development, and community-oriented work philosophies, but they are not necessarily, nor always, based on the priorities of the Palestinian community that reflect the challenges it faces, nor do they necessarily reflect participatory approach and true partnership with the local community and Palestinian institutions on the priorities of assistance and funding, whether in the era of war or an era less than war, "normal conditions" for the Palestinians!

This can be demonstrated by discussing the interventions of these organizations during the war of ethnic cleansing against the Gaza Strip, as most of these organizations worked to launch humanitarian appeals to fund relief and humanitarian programs within the Gaza Strip and even the West Bank, the largest and most prominent of which was by the UNRWA on November 9th, 2023. UNRWA launched an appeal worth 481 million US Dollars to meet the critical humanitarian needs of affected people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.²²

The UNRWA continues to launch many appeals and calls in many areas each year since its funding was decreased. Currently, these appeals only seek to provide for the basic needs to the extent that enables it to perform its basic tasks. These appeals are usually related to specific goals, such as aid for the Gaza Strip in light of the ongoing aggression. Thus, the scope of work during wars and crises focuses on relief work, instead of having sustainable programs and long-term development goals, this also means that there are no prior preparation or management plans for crises before they occur, including the sizes of shelters, the distribution of their locations, and the extent of their suitability for people with disabilities.

Working within non-sustainable relief programs makes the ability of these organizations to provide a comprehensive environment and care for the reality of persons with disabilities far from their top priorities, which deprives persons with disabilities of obtaining services comprehensively and sustainably without discrimination. As previously indicated, persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, and marginalized groups in general, are the ones who benefit the most from the services of these organizations,

²² "The UNRWA Launches a \$481 million Appeal for the Occupied Palestinian Territory" *UNRWA* (9 November 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/lcpj3>.

since they fall under poverty cycles more than others, and in the Gaza Strip specifically, due to the conditions of the Strip and the siege, 63% of the population of the Strip, according to UNRWA, suffer from food insecurity. They rely on international aid and international organizations, including the UNRWA, and this includes persons with disabilities. In the Gaza Strip, there are 1.7 million refugees registered with the UNRWA, which is approximately more than half of the population of the Gaza Strip.

The UNRWA estimates that the number of registered refugees is around 5 million refugees, 15% of whom are refugees with disabilities.²³ The UNRWA adopted a policy ensuring its commitment to Palestinian refugees with disabilities in 2010, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and UNRWA was authorized by the General Assembly to implement it. The policy included addressing the issues of refugee persons with disabilities and including them in the Agency's programs. Furthermore, the UNRWA approved the Charter for the Integration of Disability in Humanitarian Action at the World Humanitarian Summit, held in 2016.²⁴

The UNRWA indicates that it has worked on integration of disability in all its programs, and all regions in which the UNRWA operates have disability programs. In 2015, the disability program was implemented in many countries including the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and over 40,000 refugees with disability benefited from these programs,²⁵ while 26,802 persons with disability benefited from the program.²⁶ Despite that, many facilities of the UNRWA are still not accessible. One woman with disability who is displaced during this war on the Gaza Strip pointed out that the UNRWA schools are not accessible for women with disability: *"We has to leave the UNRWA school because it did not contain accessible restrooms, and we moved to a public school which has an accessible restroom, and this school had a large number of persons with disabilities who resorted to it because of the availability of an accessible restroom."*²⁷ Furthermore, Iyad Al-

²³ "Supporting Persons with Disabilities", *UNRWA*. Website: <https://n9.cl/t5db2>

²⁴ "Disability" *UNRWA* (March 2018). Website: <https://n9.cl/hwri1>.

²⁵ "Supporting Persons with Disabilities".

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ An Interview with a Displaced Women with Disability, conducted on 22/10/2023.

Krunz, Gaza branch manager of the Stars of Hope Society pointed out that there are 50 UNRWA schools that are accessible, most of which are located in the northern areas of the Strip”.²⁸

During the many years of war against the Gaza Strip, we have not seen any agency submit any file to the International Criminal Court in terms of holding the Occupation accountable for its crimes against civilian refugees and for causing massive destruction inside the refugee camps and UNRWA facilities, as well as causing the increase in the numbers of persons with disabilities by deliberately causing disabilities, specifically since the UNRWA is charged and mandated to protect Palestinian refugees.

A large emergency appeal was launched by a large group (38 organizations) of international and Palestinian organizations working in the field of education²⁹ in the value of 114.5 million US Dollars, which targets approximately 500 thousand individuals. Off the amount, 22 million US Dollars were allocated to rebuild, restore and rehabilitate destroyed and damaged schools in the Gaza Strip. This leaves a total of 92 million US Dollars for debriefing activities, extracurricular activities, alternative education, and educational equipment and tools, i.e. 80.7% of this appeal will go to urgent and unsustainable activities, although some are important. These numbers and percentages raise a big question: If this amount is collected, will there be any donors/funders left for the reconstruction of destroyed schools, specifically if funding for these activities is exhausted? and in other words, we ask the question of sustainability versus relief? We ask the question of the reasonableness of the appeal's amounts and activities and the extent of its response to the sustainable, including developmental, needs of the Gaza Strip. We also raise the question of the extent of the participation of the local community and its institutions in formulating the activities and allocations of this appeal in light of their interruption from work and communication due to the war of ethnic cleansing.

We make another methodical criticism of this appeal, and any similar appeals, which is that they did not deal with the requirements and needs of the Palestinian institutions working inside the Gaza Strip specifically as their ability to work is interrupted due to the war waged by the Occupation, which means the absence of their participation, contribution, and role in implementing these projects and activities, and even their ability to

²⁸ An interview with Iyad Al-Kurunz, Director of the Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women with Disabilities, conducted on 05 November 2023.

²⁹ Occupied Palestinian Territory Education Cluster Flash Appeal (23 October 2023). Appeal Link: <https://n9.cl/rslqq>.

rehabilitate their institutions, as the call goes beyond them, as well as, of course, their general assemblies and the beneficiaries of their programs, because the nature of the targeting is large and not specific, and the Palestinian institutions in the Gaza Strip may have different ideas and mechanisms about funding priorities and priorities for intervention and targeting. We have documented, through special monitoring, cases of communication that are only made to cover some needs, without addressing subsequent programs of Palestinian institutions!

This criticism is integrated with the great ability of international institutions and United Nations agencies to work comfortably due to the presence of their offices and headquarters and most of their employees outside the area of war, and the fact that they are widely known for their humanitarian roles, which facilitates their movement and access to areas amid war as well. This is in addition to their ability to access governments and funding resources quickly due to their professional relationships within the same country, and this makes them better able to mobilize financial resources for their organization and their employees despite the disruption of the work of Palestinian institutions.

The disruption of the work of Palestinian institutions not only hinders their ability to access resources, as we mentioned previously, but also hinders the implementation of their visions and programs, the ability to reach the beneficiary groups they have worked with for many years, including persons with disabilities, and meeting their requirements in an appeal that targets education as it a portfolio of enormous importance to students with disabilities and their families, and it does not necessarily have the deep understanding of these institutions for the local community.

We call for the respect of all the political, economic, social, and cultural rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, as well as respect of the principles of the Declaration of the Right to Development in all the work of international governmental and non-governmental organizations so that this respect is translated through full recognition of undiminished political rights, without any political conditions, and with full respect of the right of the Palestinians, as people and as institutions, to choose paths of humanitarian and development work without derogation or infringement by such organizations.