

Position Paper (8)

A War Without Human Rights

**Cutting off All Means of Survival: Organizations
Working in the Field of Disability in Light of the Genocide**

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With the genocidal war against the Gaza Strip entering its sixth month, since October of 2023, the number of martyrs has reached 32,080 and the number of wounded has reached at least 78,376, while over 90% of the residents of the Gaza Strip were displaced¹. It is expected that the large number of wounded will lead to a large increase in the number of new disabilities. Initial results of a survey conducted by the Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women with Disabilities (SHS) and the Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad) regarding children with disabilities and wounded children indicate that 87% of surveyed children have been injured during the war, and that 36% of the injuries of the surveyed children have resulted in new disabilities due to the war.²

From the first moment, the occupation has deliberately worked to exterminate all forms of life in the Gaza Strip, including the most vital sectors, such as hospitals, displacement centers, educational institutions, and all types of service institutions. With the continuation of war, the means of survival for the Palestinians in the Strip are decreasing by the day, and these means become almost non existing for marginalized segments in light of the absence of the basic necessities of life, including food, water, and medicine³, especially for persons with disabilities, whose numbers are expected to increase significantly due to the war. The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics indicated that 12 thousand new disabilities were recorded with the continuation of the war on the Gaza Strip, as of the end of last year only.⁴

Persons with disabilities are exposed to restrictions that hinder their movement due to the lack of inclusion methods, the weak social protection systems, and the scarce opportunities for sustainable empowerment in Palestine in general. These restrictions have increased significantly after the start of the war against the Gaza Strip. With the huge destruction of all aspects of life, many persons with disabilities lost the components of adaptation with the surrounded environment, which were available before the war. This dramatically multiplied their chances of being killed, directly or indirectly through starvation, the lack of medicine, and the scarcity of the requirements of occupational therapy and rehabilitation services, which have become almost non-existing in the Strip. Moreover, a large number of persons with

¹ The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, last update 26 march 2024: <https://n9.cl/0flao>.

² An unpublished report: "The Preliminary Results of the Monitoring for the Needs of Disabled and Injured Children in the Gaza Strip during the War of 2023-2024" *Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women and the Social and Economic Policies Monitor (AlMarsad)*. (18 March 2024).

³ Please see Position Paper 7 by visiting the following link: <https://n9.cl/nmtqj>

⁴ Scars that will never heal... 12 thousand new disabilities due to the aggression" *AlArabi* (4 December 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/s4plu>

disabilities have lost their assistive devices, which also made it difficult for them to move, access any services, or even survive the indiscriminate bombing.

According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip is among the highest rates in the world, as it reaches 44%, and this rate increases among persons with disabilities to reach 90% in the Gaza Strip. This means that most persons with disabilities depend on the different forms of humanitarian aid⁵. In a previous position paper, we explained the large dependence of the population of the Gaza Strip on aid in general as a result of the imposed siege. Poverty rates have reached very high rates of 60% in 2020, which increased the population's dependency on aid, as the percentage of families that received humanitarian aid during the six months that preceded the war reached 73% of the total families, while 50.5% of families in the Gaza Strip depend mainly on non-governmental aid and charity⁶, and due to the high unemployment rates among persons with disabilities, the rate of their dependency of aid is the highest among the citizens.

According to the latest update issued by the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, the number of buildings destroyed by the occupation has reached 360,000 buildings⁷. The UNRWA indicates that as of mid-February, about 70% of the civil infrastructure was subject to destruction or gross damage⁸, and according to the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, the number of housing units that were demolished as of the beginning of March has reached 106,000 housing units, and 250,900 units have also been damaged.⁹

The huge number of residential units damaged by the occupation has caused many organizations and service providers to lose their work headquarters and most of their operational capacity, and many other organizations went out of service. Moreover, the interruption of electricity and fuel supply, as well as the interruption in transportation and the strict siege on the Strip, the lack of resources, and the martyrdom of some of their staff members has caused an interruption in the work of the remaining organizations who survived the destruction. The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics mentioned that the Gaza Strip works with a production capacity estimated at 14% only in the first two months of the aggression, and the value of production for these two months of the war for the services sector reached 34433.1 USD compared to

⁵ "Inclusion, Independence, and Dignity: Supporting People with Disabilities to Attain their Rights in Gaza" *MAP* (19 December 2022). Website: <https://n9.cl/0zt8f>.

⁶ "The Gaza War: The Expected Social and Economic Consequences on the State of Palestine," *ESCWA* (5 November 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/ktioo>.

⁷ The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, latest update: 26 March 2024. Website: <https://n9.cl/0flao>.

⁸ "The UNRWA: 84% of Health Facilities Were Destroyed due to the Israeli Aggression on the Gaza Strip" *Wafa* (12 February 2024). Website: <https://n9.cl/s1p140>.

⁹ "Statistics on the Israeli Genocide in the Gaza Strip," *Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor* (March 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/eh6zl>.

140315.2 USD, meaning that the losses in this sector are estimated at 105882.1 USD.¹⁰ Recent estimations issued by the International Labour Organization and the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics have revealed that about 507,000 jobs were lost in all areas of the occupied Palestinian land as of the end of January 2024. Estimations also reveal that unemployment rates will increase to 57% in the Gaza Strip by the end of this month, March. This portends a doubling of poverty rates to catastrophic levels and a massive increase in the proportion of groups dependent on aid.¹¹

Poverty and unemployment affect marginalized groups more than any other groups, one of these marginalized groups is persons with disabilities. Poverty and unemployment increase their dependency on services provided by community organizations and institutions, especially since these institutions provide specialized rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities, as well as assistive devices, free of charge or for reduced prices. The cessation of these services means their inability to obtain assistive devices or receive the necessary periodic rehabilitation services, especially with the great pressure on the centers that are still operating and the high prices for providing services.

This paper presents the reality of Palestinian institutions working in the disability sector in the Gaza Strip in light of the genocidal war waged by the occupation against the Palestinian presence, in an attempt to clarify the impact of the genocidal war on the ability of these institutions to continue their work, as well as the effects of targeting these institutions on the beneficiaries of persons with disabilities who receive their services, especially with the increasing number of injuries, increasing rates of disability, and the strict siege imposed on the Strip.

On Fighting Civil Society Institutions:

The Palestinian National Movement, represented by the Palestinian Liberation Organization, has adopted a policy that is based on mobilizing broad sectors of the public, specifically youth, women, workers, and students, and its purpose was forming a base that is capable of confronting the occupation policies, and seek to mobilize and organize the masses and meet their practical and strategic needs related to national priorities. At that time, landowners were replaced by a new leadership that included secular and educated middle-class activists, which encouraged the emergence of a new wave of grassroots popular

¹⁰ "The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics issues a press release regarding the losses incurred by the private sector in Palestine as result of the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip" *The Palestinian Bureau of Statistics* (27 December 2023). Website: <https://n9.cl/ojrlws>.

¹¹ "Over Half-a-million Jobs Lost in the Palestinian Territories Due to Gaza War" *The United Nations* (19 March 2024). Website: <https://n9.cl/0z9j6>.

organizations that were initially linked to Palestinian political factions and later formed a broad social movement led by women's grassroots committees, student movements, and unions.¹²

These organizations reached broad geographic areas and contributed to the involvement of many sectors of Palestinian civil society in political life, the promotion of resistance thought, and the production of extensive knowledge on social and development issues, and rearranged local priorities and needs within them. Furthermore, these organizations formed an organic bond with the masses and represented an alternative authority in the absence of an official government. After the emergence of their role in mass mobilization concerning resistance work, colonial violations against them multiplied. The signing of the Oslo Accords also had a role in the decline of their role, as the Palestinian Authority besieged non-governmental organizations in terms of political legitimacy and financial and international support.¹³

With the Palestinian Authority's work towards the "liberation" of the Palestinian economy, and opening the door for Western funding that increased after the Oslo Accords, the reliance on external networks increased, which made the Palestinian national priorities hostage to Western factors and requirements related to financing, and weakened the Palestinian economy and increased its reliance on the economy of the occupation, especially after signing the Protocol on Economic Relations (Paris Protocol). These requirements have increased significantly in the recent period with the continued restrictions imposed by the occupation towards Palestinian civil society institutions. All the above led to the distancing of the Palestinian civil society from its popular base and Palestinian resistance action. Recently, the occupation has worked to increase the pace of restrictions through political conditions that have become a companion to international support¹⁴. Despite this, these institutions remain a pivotal tool in Palestinian development and social work and play an essential role in providing basic services to marginalized groups, especially with the limited role of the government in this aspect.

Civil society organizations are considered an extension of the Palestinian people and their efforts to achieve their rights, and the occupation seeks to destroy these organizations in order to destroy any efforts for real Palestinian development¹⁵. The occupation has targeted Palestinian civil organizations and has worked to narrow their work since the beginning of their existence. The past years have witnessed severe restrictions on the work of Palestinian organizations through imposing new financing requirements that strengthen the occupation's control over the Palestinian people, restrict resistance

¹² Eileen Kuttub, "How Civil Society Organizations Respond to The Current Situation." Website: <https://n9.cl/gahtgo>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

work, and promote the fact that Palestinian organizations are “terrorist” organizations. Furthermore, the occupation also attacked many Palestinian organizations and their workplaces and confiscated their equipment, while some of their workers were arrested. The occupation also closed 6 Palestinian organizations under the pretext of fighting “terrorism”, and repeatedly attacked their headquarters and confiscated their property.¹⁶

The role that these organizations play in community work impacted the escalation of the severity of the attacks that the occupation practices against them, as these organizations operate under difficult conditions where they witness attempts of distorting them, directly attacking them, and shutting them down. These organizations also work on promoting the empowerment of marginalized groups, and they reach a wide base of these groups, providing diverse developmental and relief services. Persons with disabilities rely greatly on organizations that work in the field of disability, especially concerning rehabilitation services. Organizations working in the field of disability are considered the most specialized and capable of providing disability-related services according to the priorities and requirements of persons with disabilities. Rehabilitation and disability organizations are also among the oldest Palestinian civil organizations.

The primary driver behind the establishment of disability organizations in the early days was the charitable approach, which started with a group of organizations working in specific areas, which worked towards attracting several persons with disabilities and providing charitable services to them. However, the qualitative shift in disability organizations occurred with the outbreak of the Palestinian popular uprising (Intifada), as the number of organizations operating in Palestine increased in various geographical regions. With philosophies that go beyond the charitable dimension of work, the General Union of People with Disability was established in 1991, and the programs offered by these organizations began to stem from the needs and requirements of persons with disabilities themselves. After the arrival of the Palestinian Authority, the Ministry of Social Development established a special department to follow up on the issues of persons with disabilities and provide the needed services. However, the services provided by the Palestinian Authority to persons with disabilities did not exceed 20%, while Palestinian NGOs provide no less than 80% of services related to persons with disabilities.¹⁷

During the First Intifada, the Israeli Occupation increased the frequency of attacks on citizens, on various sectors, on infrastructure, and on Palestinian civil organizations. The number of injured people during the

¹⁶ “Why does Israel close Palestinian civil organizations in the West Bank?” *Anadolu Agency* (7 October 2021). Website: <https://n9.cl/pcyew>.

¹⁷ Ziyad Amro, *The Rights of People with Special Needs in the Legislations in Force in Palestine* (Ramallah: The Independent Commission for Human Rights, 2001). Website: <https://n9.cl/lao1a>.

Intifada reached more than 80,000, which resulted in approximately 15,000 permanent disabilities, while national health organizations did not have sufficient capacity to deal with the large numbers of injuries and disabilities, which led to health complications for a large number of the wounded.¹⁸

During the current war against the Gaza Strip, the occupation is systematically destroying all forms of life in the Strip, deliberately killing and creating intentional injuries and disabilities. The occupation is bringing back the conditions that were prominent during and following the Intifada, but this time more severely and widely making it a genocide. To this day, the occupation has left more than 70 thousand wounded Palestinians, and many of them will develop new disabilities. With its targeting of hospitals and different organizations operating in the Strip, the occupation is causing an increase in the rates of disabilities and complications affecting the wounded due to the absence of the needed medical and rehabilitation services.

The War Against Disability Organizations: Seeking to Cut off All Chances of Survival

With the start of the genocidal war, the continuous attacks on Palestinian civil organizations turned from a campaign of restrictions to the complete demolition of these organizations and their workers, which caused most of them to go out of service, in light of the conditions of famine and the applied siege that caused an acute shortage in food and medicine, and the cessation of the services provided by these organizations doubles the impact of the war on persons with disabilities, reduces their chances of survival, and exposes them to developing new disabilities or worsening their health conditions due to their need for specific foods, physical and occupational therapy services, and medications, which they used to receive through disability organizations, either directly or indirectly.

In light of the absence of an effective governmental role related to social protection and empowerment of persons with disabilities in the Gaza Strip, the high rates of poverty and unemployment among them, and the failure of the Ministry of Social Development to assume its role in protecting marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities with the outbreak of war¹⁹, disability organizations in the Gaza Strip play an important role in providing services to persons with disabilities, as they have accumulated great experience and a wide base of beneficiaries from persons with disabilities. These organizations are

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ For more information, please refer to the previous position paper issued by the Social and Economic Policies Monitor (AlMarsad) and the Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women with Disabilities by visiting the following link: <https://n9.cl/8yo8f>

considered the most capable of reaching persons with disabilities, knowing their needs and requirements, and communicating with them.

The number of organizations operating in this field in the Gaza Strip is estimated to be 55 organizations, the majority of which are located in Gaza City. These organizations provide a diverse group of services, including early intervention services, awareness and guidance, rehabilitation services, occupational therapy, assistive devices, empowerment, and protection. These organizations consist of unions, union networks, rehabilitation institutions, and others²⁰. Furthermore, persons with disabilities form an essential part of the general assemblies and the boards of directors of these organizations.

Since the beginning of the war, and with the massive destruction of infrastructure and buildings, a large number of disability organizations went out of service, while others work under very difficult conditions: Latifa Al-Jabari, from Stars of Hope Society, says: *"There is no electricity or internet, which delays our work. Devices are charged in far locations and we have to wait long hours to charge them... In the past, we used to reach the targeted areas quickly, but now, we cannot use transportation as it is not available, and we transport on animals, which are very slow... We feel helpless due to our inability to provide the simplest capabilities to our beneficiaries due to their lack of availability"*²¹. Many organizations work in the offices of other organizations, and through partnerships with organizations that are still able to provide services. Services are being provided at the minimum level available and a large amount of work is done in the field by following up with the beneficiaries. *Baituna Association for Development and Community Development provides its services in the north of the Strip. It provides physical and occupational therapy services, as well as psychosocial support services. The Association provides its services to around 30,000 beneficiaries each year, more than 70% of its headquarters has been destroyed, while the Association works in Rafah and the north in the field in cooperation with Juzoor Association*²².

Organizations that still operate have their staff working under extremely difficult conditions and under very high risk, this applies particularly to field staff²³. Workers in organizations are exposed to constant danger, especially those working in the field, *"We are of course exposed to danger in the field. During the last bombing of the Emirati Hospital, only 3 meters separated me from the bombing, which means that I*

²⁰ Mostafa Abed, "Rehabilitation Institutions in Gaza between Relief and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities" *Palestine Online* (12 July 2019). Website: <https://n9.cl/rzl7so>.

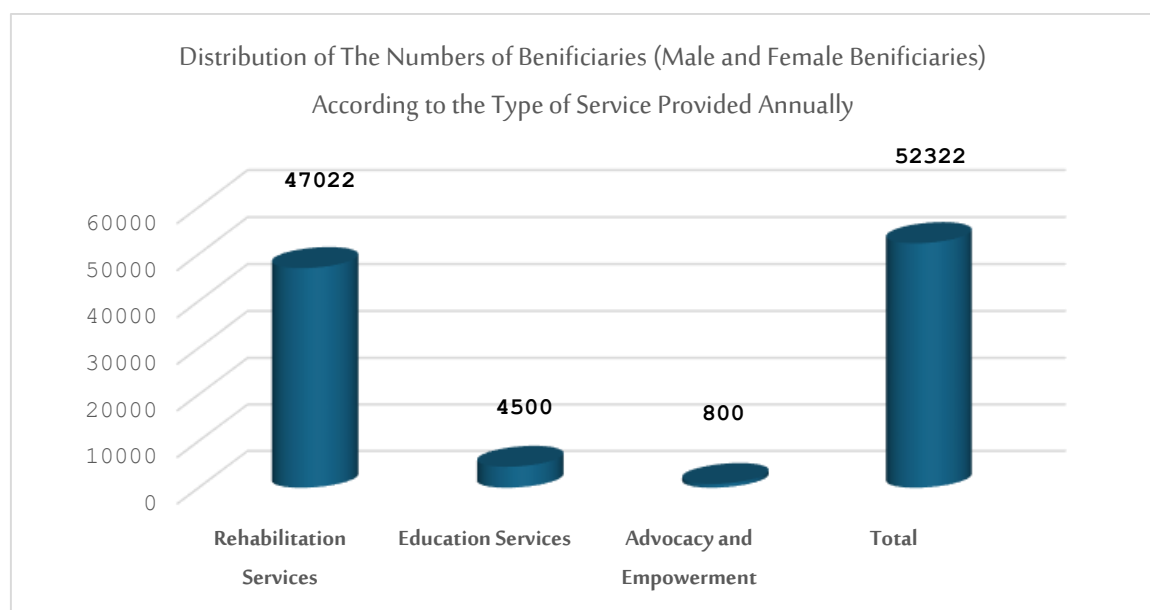
²¹ An interview with Latifa Al-Jabari — A Field Social Researcher at the Stars of Hope Society, conducted on: 17 March 2024.

²² Abdulrahman AlMuzanin — Executive Director of Baituna Association for Development and Community Development, on 20 March 2024.

²³ Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women with Disabilities and the Social and Economic Policies Monitor (AlMarsad) are currently preparing a position paper on the reality of field social worker and researchers, and social specialists.

*was very exposed to danger, in many areas, the danger is greater than in other areas and we are sometimes forced to reach them for work necessities.”*²⁴

Through quick research into the status of organizations operating in the disability sector, which the two partners worked on²⁵, we found that there were at least 52,322 people with disabilities who were receiving services from disability organizations in the Gaza Strip, either fully or partially. Additionally, there are at least 47,022 persons with disabilities who used to receive occupational therapy services, rehabilitation services, and support services, either fully or partially from these organizations. The following figure illustrates the distribution of the number of beneficiaries according to the type of service provided annually by a group of organizations working in the field of disability. The figure shows a large number of beneficiaries who used to receive rehabilitation services, including occupational and physical therapy, which some persons with disabilities need periodically to prevent the deterioration of their health condition. The cessation of these services constitutes a threat to their health condition, in addition to the war and its never-ending dangers.

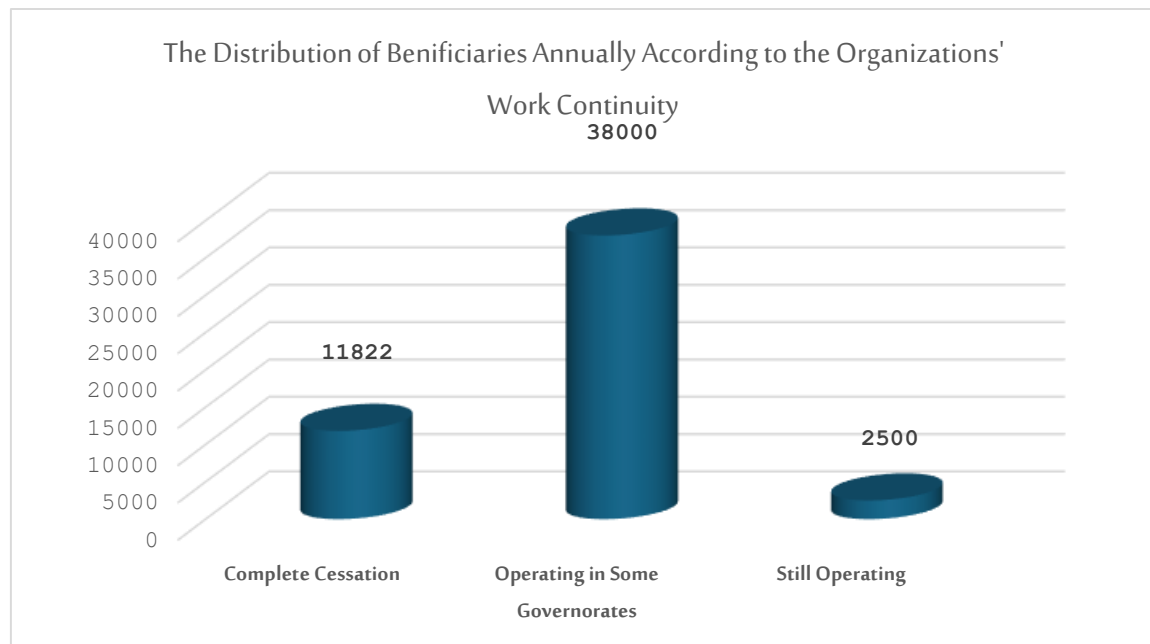


With a number of organizations ceasing to operate either completely or partially, a large number of persons with disabilities have lost the ability to receive services. The following figure shows that at least 11,822 persons with disabilities have completely lost their ability to receive services, while about 38,000 persons with disabilities have partially lost their ability to receive services in specific governorates. The

²⁴ An interview with Latifa Al-Jabari – A Field Social Researcher at the Stars of Hope Society, conducted on: 17 March 2024.

²⁵ Tables and data were provided based on a quick survey of the conditions of major organizations working in the field of disability.

number of beneficiaries receiving services in organizations that are still operating reached only 2,500 beneficiaries, or 4.1% of the total beneficiaries. This may indicate that the occupation is targeting larger organizations that reach broader segments of groups.



The headquarters of the Stars of Hope Society in the Gaza Strip was partially destroyed as a result of the bombing of the neighborhood in which it is located. The bombing destroyed most doors and windows, in addition to a large portion of the assets and equipment inside the headquarters. Iyad Krunz, Gaza Office Manager of the Stars of Hope Society, explains what happened to the Society's HQ as a result of the bombing: *"As a result of the bombing of a 7-story building next to the headquarters of the Stars of Hope Society, approximately 40% of the building in which SHS's office was located was destroyed. This resulted in the complete destruction of most of the SHS's property, including electronic devices, printers, and cameras, in addition to furniture, the solar energy network, the Internet network, and the water and electricity networks in the building"*²⁶. SHS also lost its archive related to financial and administrative documents and the lists of beneficiaries, and all their information. *"This would harm tens and thousands of beneficiaries of persons with disabilities and their families who benefit from SHS's services."*²⁷ Nariman AlNabaheen points out that Al-Hanan Centre for Special Education has ceased to work, saying: *"We provide occupational therapy services and a set of other rehabilitation services for children. Our Centre*

²⁶ An interview with Iyad Krunz, Gaza Office Manager of the Stars of Hope Society, conducted on: 21 March 2024.

²⁷ Previous interview.

was fully burned down, along with all of its contents. Currently, the Centre stopped operating completely.”²⁸

Abdulraziz Khudair, from Palestine Avenir for Childhood Foundation, says: *“Palestine Avenir for Childhood Foundation provides educational services through Palestine Avenir School, in addition to a wide range of rehabilitation services such as physical and occupational therapy. We have over 2,000 male and female beneficiaries. The Foundation's Cerebral Palsy Center was partially damaged in terms of the building and completely in terms of tools, devices, furniture, and other facilities belonging to the Foundation. Currently, the Foundation has stopped working completely.”²⁹*

Jamal AlRuzzy, the Executive Director of the National Society for Rehabilitation, talks about the effect that the war has on the work of the Society saying: *“The National Society for Rehabilitation was affected in different ways, we were unable to reach the headquarters or our staff. We were unable to find a location to meet in. Our staff were dispersed in more than one governorate, and with the absence of a telecommunication network, reaching them was very difficult.”³⁰* These difficulties were among the most prominent obstacles to continuing to work, and thus poor access to persons with disabilities and the provision of services to persons with disabilities: *“Among the challenges faced by the team working in the field and all organizations working in the field of rehabilitation, is movement and the ability to reach people, there was a continuous displacement and movement of beneficiaries. This hindered our ability to reach them. There was also a major problem with resources. Emergency warehouses were currently distributed among the five governorates. Currently, there is a large gathering of people in one or two governorates, and this has led to great pressure on the demand on assistive devices.”³¹* Many persons with disabilities depend on receiving services related to rehabilitation and empowerment from organizations working in the field of disability, especially with the decline in knowledge of disability issues in general at the official level, as well as in Palestinian NGOs in general. Organizations working in the field of disability provide a large number of services to persons with disabilities at the level of protection, empowerment, and in-kind and relief assistance, and the disruption of their work causes persons with disabilities to lose their chances of resilience. AlRuzzy says: *“persons with disabilities rely heavily on disability organizations because they are among the most fragile and poorest groups, and because of the absence of government services and services provided by the Ministry of Social Development and the absence of the legislative system that protects them and stipulates their rights. With*

²⁸ An interview with Nariman AlNabaheen – Director of Al-Hanan Centre for Special Education, conducted on: 20 March 2024.

²⁹ An interview with Abdulraziz Khudair – Head of Programs at Palestine Avenir for Childhood Foundation, conducted on 20 March 2024.

³⁰ An interview with Jamal AlRuzzy - the Executive Director of the National Society for Rehabilitation, conducted on 21 March 2024.

³¹ Previous interview.

*the large cases of displacement and continuous bombing, the work of many organizations working in the field of disability has stopped. Due to the absence of communication networks and displacement, they became unable to reach beneficiaries, and thus persons with disabilities lost many health, education, and other services that were provided by organizations working in the field of disability.*³² “The occupation also claimed that there were tunnels near Hamad Hospital for Rehabilitation and Artificial Limbs, which caused major damage to the hospital and stopped it from working. Mousa AlKharty, Head of the Speech and Communications Department, says: “The hospital provides medical rehabilitation, psychological and social support, and other services. The hospital provides its services to approximately 8,000 beneficiaries from persons with disabilities. The hospital partial but severe damage, including burning, which caused it to be out of service.”³³

In light of what persons with disabilities are exposed to during the war, which threatens their ability to maintain life, and the cessation of the services of organizations working in the field of disability reduces their chances of survival and weakens their resilience, causing more suffering for persons with disabilities in light of the war. After the end of the war, destroyed organizations will have to make huge efforts to restore their ability to work and provide their services in light of their loss of the institution’s building, property, and employees, in addition to a great loss of all the efforts made to provide a more comprehensive and compatible environment for persons with disabilities.

We call on official and international bodies to assume their responsibilities in protecting civilians in the Gaza Strip, including persons with disabilities, providing food, water, and medicine to them, and lifting the siege imposed on the Strip. In light of the declining chances of their survival with the interruption of the work of most organizations working in the disability sector, which were responsible for providing various services to persons with disability, all policies, programs, or assistance must include the provision of services, including rehabilitation services, assistive tools, etc., provided that any services or assistance take into account the needs and the requirements of persons with disabilities, within comprehensive distribution policies.

Attached are some pictures showing the effect of the “Israeli” destruction of organizations working in the field of disability in the Gaza Strip.

³² Previous interview.

³³ An interview with Musa AlKharty - Head of the Speech and Communications Department at Hamad Hospital for Rehabilitation and Artificial Limbs, conducted on: 20 March 2024.





