



Selected Recent Events and Projects

Iraq/Kurdish Region

August – Exhibition of photographs, paintings and a drama performance were held at Bade PS in a village north-east of Duhok.

September – Children from Zewa and Rawshan classes participated in photo- and poetry courses.

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Egypt

July – Hundreds of women, men and youth participated in a march aimed at abolishing female genital mutilation.



March held in the Minnia governorate, Egypt, July 2007

Lebanon

September – Emergency project conducted together with its partner Community Based Rehabilitation Association (providing non-food items to the displaced from the Nahr El-Bared) was finalized.

Working for Change in the Middle East



The Middle East region, marked by its turbulent and conflict ridden situation, has kept both national and international politicians busy trying to solve its complex problems. The occupation in Palestine, the violence in Iraq, the conflict in Lebanon are only but a few examples. Successful political negotiations and emerging solutions might truly resolve major conflicts and bring about new structures to life to start the nation building processes. Civil society, of which our partners and we are important players, bears a major responsibility to complement such efforts. Together, we perceive our role as important to see to it that the content of evolving structures meets the needs of all citizens and is especially inclusive of the rights of the weak, vulnerable and marginalized segments of society. We can influence that processes are democratized, that justice is attained and that human rights are respected. It is through our programs and networks that we can lobby and advocate politicians to provide equal attention to content when they negotiate the form. This is the ultimate purpose of our work. Our dream is independent regimes based on respect for human rights, democratic practice, rule of law and social and economic justice.

Ghada Harami, Deputy Regional Director

Egypt – Abolishing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

This summer the Egyptian public was shocked after 12 year old Bedour Ahmed Shaker and 13 year old Karima Rahim Mansoud died while undergoing genital cutting operations.

Hours before her death, Bedour went to buy sweets in her hometown just south of Cairo in order to share them with her family and friends for successfully completing her primary school with remarkable grades. Her mother Zainab thought that her daughter's thrill would be even greater if she gets circumcised the same day. The 12 year old died during the procedure, apparently from an overdose of anesthetics that the doctor gave her to numb the pain. Karima's death was discovered when her father came to get a burial license from the coroner's office. The doctor there demanded to know the cause of death and her father claimed the girl died from natural causes. After doctor's insistence on seeing the body, Karima's father broke down and admitted that she died of heavy hemorrhaging caused by the cutting. When asked why they are cutting their daughters, parents tend to give reasons such as religion, curbing girls' promiscuity, men's refusal to marry an uncut woman, etc.

Egypt's grand mufti Ali Gomaa immediately issued a fatwa stating that Islam forbade "harmful tradition of circumcising girls". Female genital mutilation was officially banned in 1997, but following these tragic deaths Egypt's Ministry of Health reformulated the regulation to say that any female circumcision "will be viewed as violation of law and all contraventions will be punished". The doctors who operated on

Bedour and Karima were withdrawn their medical licenses and their private clinics were closed. The investigation on the medics and the girls' parents is still ongoing.

Egypt's National Demographic Statistics from 2005 unveiled that 96% of women in Egypt are mutilated. Diakonia's stance is that this enormously high number can only be reduced by raising awareness and educating young girls, their parents, midwives, young men, religious leaders, etc. about the



Can they avoid the awful practice? Girls from Minnia, Egypt, July 2007.

dreadful harms of FGM. Since 2004 Diakonia has been supporting Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development to educate people living in Minia governorate about the dangers of FGM. The encouraging fact is that 88% of 1500 targeted girls remain uncut. The practice of FGM must altogether be abolished not only in Minia, but also in the rest of Egypt.

For more information please contact us:

September – A new partnership with Association Najdeh was initiated in order to start a campaign advocating for Palestinian refugees' right to work.

Israel/Palestine

July – Four organizations of disabled persons won grants from RP for their proposed projects that aim to raise awareness about the law on disability.

August – Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) organized 26 inclusive summer camps in the West Bank and Gaza. About 4000 children took part, 29% of which were children with disabilities.



Dance performance, one of the activities during the summer camp, Hebron, Palestine, July 2007

27th August – Diakonia gave a basic training about IHL for international NGOs.

September – The Palestinian National Concept Paper for CL has been adopted by all sectors involved in CL on national level.

25th Sep 2007 – Dr. Haidar Abdel Shafi, the chairman of the national disability committee in Gaza passed away. His chairmanship to the committee has greatly improved the status of disability.

Palestine – Rehabilitation Program

Bearing in mind the unstable political situation, the occupation and lack of peace in Palestine, it is not difficult to grasp the negligence of the Palestinian Government to implement the law of Disability eight years after it has been endorsed. Inclusion of disabled persons into the society is still an urgent priority. Civil society and disabled people's organizations (DPOs) are therefore key players in the rehabilitation sector. The start of Diakonia and The Norwegian Association of Disabled (NAD)'s rehabilitation program dates back to the beginning of 1990s when support was provided to institutional medical rehabilitation service. Since then, the program has developed to comprise four main components: the Community Based Rehabilitation Program (CBRP), the referral service provision component, the empowerment of self organized groups of disabled people organizations and the

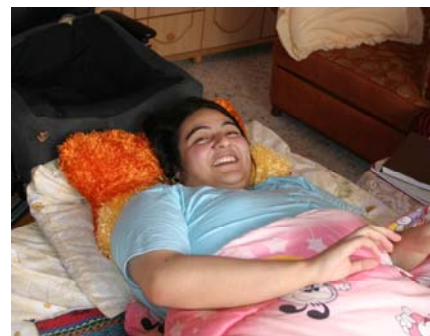
regional cooperation. The aim of the CBRP is to empower the disabled people, challenge factors that exclude their participation in the society, and to advocate for change towards the government. Referral service provision offers a resource for supporting CBR as well as educating community workers from CBR organizations, who are in direct contact with disabled persons and their families. Empowering the disabled to fight for their own rights, to advocate towards and influence decision and policy makers to benefit and help themselves is the key idea behind the self-organized groups of disabled people component. Finally, sharing our experience with other organizations in the region is of high priority, as the success of the Palestine CBR model will help changing stereotypes about disability and setting up structures that will improve the life quality of the disabled.

Palestine – Challenging Stereotypes

Disability is in Palestine often viewed with prejudice of being "contagious" and exceptionally shameful for the family of the disabled. Being held closed up in their homes, the disabled were given no other option but to think similarly. Only in the past ten years the disabled themselves have started challenging stereotypes that had been created about them.

The 18 year old Alaa' Ghneimat from Beit Jalla lost a half of her body when she was five. Her best friend and she were on their way home from school when a truck driver lost control over his vehicle and run over the two girls. Her friend died instantly and the struggle for Alaa's life continued for seven months after the accident. "I cannot remember what happened that day and really

do not want to remember. I rather want to concentrate on what is ahead of me" says Alaa'. Today, 13 years after the accident, she is a charming young woman beaming with self-confidence and bursting with life. She is the best student in her class and desperately wants to study psychology: "I want to understand the meaning of people's behavior towards me and towards each other". Alaa' says that she considers herself lucky because her family is very caring and supportive. "Every morning my (three) brothers carry me and my wheelchair from our flat on the second floor to the car to bring me to school. Later they also pick me up from school, bring me back home and make sure that I have everything I need". With help of our partner Community Based Rehabilitation, Alaa's parents will prepare an apartment for her in the ground floor of the house, so that she can be more independent and go out to see her friends more often, something she does every day. Her greatest wish is to study abroad, but, she says, "It seems impossible for this wish to be fulfilled, because my family simply cannot afford it".



Alaa' resting after school at her home in Beit Jalla



Ola in her office in Ramallah

Unlike Alaa', Ola Abu Al-Ghaib's family had a different stance towards her disability. Ola got a spinal cord cancer when she was 14. Its extraction was very risky as the cancer encircled the nerve controlling her movement, but the doctors considered the operation to be crucial. The cancer was removed, but Ola lost her ability to walk and the control over her right hand. "I was kept at home for three years after the surgery because at that time my parents couldn't afford to adjust our apartment to my new needs. They also felt ashamed to let me out because I was disabled", says Ola. After three years, she decided that it is up to her to change her situation. "I made a decision to move from Ramallah to Bethlehem and go back to school. My parents were strongly opposing this because they thought I will never manage to live alone", she remembers. Today Ola is a happy 34 years old woman whose private life concentrates on her husband and their four year old boy. Diakonia supports Stars of Hope Society (SHS), an organization run by Ola, that has a mission "to improve the lives and life chances of women with disabilities". Ola's wish is to make a difference, so that disabled women get a chance to gain confidence to improve their life quality and therewith fulfill the motto of SHS: "Why be followers, when we can be leaders".

For more information please contact us: