

21 July 2014

## **International organisations call on all parties to ensure protection and humanitarian assistance for people with disabilities in the Gaza Strip**

A previous statement issued by 41 concerned organisations (*"41 organizations warn of Palestinian health sector emergency as violence and confrontations escalate"*, 15/07/14) has already raised the alarm about the need for all parties to respect international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of civilians affected by continued military operations in Gaza. Considering this situation, the undersigned international agencies working in disability in occupied Palestine are concerned about the impact that the ongoing escalation in violence is having on people with disabilities in the Gaza Strip.

Since 8 July, the people of Gaza have lived under the threat of death and injury due to the escalation of cross-border violence. Of the 1.8 million people living in the Gaza Strip, the World Health Organisation estimates that around 15% are people with disabilities<sup>1</sup>. As of 20 July, at least 375 people have been killed and over 3,000 more have been injured. At least 4 people with disabilities are confirmed to have been killed in this latest round of violence. A number of facilities for people with disabilities have also been destroyed or damaged by air missiles and artillery including Al-Mabarra Centre for People with Disabilities, where two people with disabilities were killed and four were injured, Al-Bassma Club, and Al-Wafa Rehabilitation Hospital.

Although warnings are occasionally issued shortly before military strikes are conducted on areas where civilians are located, people with disabilities are likely to face difficulties evacuating before the strikes are carried out. Equally, while many Palestinians in high-risk areas are taking refuge in the homes of family members and in UN shelters, it is probable that people with disabilities will have experienced trouble relocating. In addition, the continuing violence has severely disrupted medical supplies and support services, which seriously affects the delivery of assistance to people with disabilities.

We are particularly concerned to ensure that displaced and injured people with disabilities are identified and provided with needed assistance through an inclusive emergency response that they can fully participate in. We are also concerned about preventing long-term impairments from injuries caused by airstrikes, artillery, unexploded ordnance and other hazards. For this reason, it is vital to ensure that injured people have access to medical and rehabilitation services in a secure environment.

### **Call for Action**

The following agencies working in the field of disability are ready to support international and national relief and development workers, the donor community and decision makers to ensure the equal rights, dignity and non discrimination of people with disabilities and their families. In recognition of these principles:

- I. We call upon state actors to fully respect international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of people with disabilities, as also required in Article 11 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which declares that "States Parties shall take (...) all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters."
- II. We call upon all actors to ensure that people with disabilities have immediate access to all humanitarian interventions in the Gaza Strip, in particular those within: (1) Health and Nutrition, (2) Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; (3) Protection; (4) Shelter; (5) Psychosocial support.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure is based on global statistics for disability <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs352/en/>

