



مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان
AL MEZAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Al Mezan Calls for Urgent Action to Protect Persons with Disabilities in Gaza Amid Israel's Genocide

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Gaza, 3 December 2024 — Today, in marking the [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#), Al Mezan highlights the severe challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Gaza. For each of Gaza's two million Palestinians, the past fourteen months have been a relentless struggle for survival. Israel's genocidal policies have intentionally created an environment where the very act of living has become an immense challenge, with basic rights and access to essential needs systematically denied. Some groups, however, have been disproportionately affected by these policies, including persons with disabilities. The barriers to survival are even greater for them, as they face compounded challenges in accessing healthcare, mobility aids, and basic services, leaving them in an especially precarious situation.

Before October 2023, Gaza was home to an estimated [55,000](#) persons with disabilities who were already grappling with severe challenges that deeply affected their dignity and quality of life. These challenges mostly stemmed from 17 years of Israel's blockade and closure of Gaza, which have systematically deprived residents of their basic rights and access to essential services, particularly healthcare. Mobility impairments were the most prevalent type of disability, comprising 53% of all persons with disabilities, followed by visual impairments, which accounted for 17%.

Since October 2023, Israel's genocidal military campaign against Palestinians in Gaza has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of persons with disabilities, particularly amputees. It is estimated that in the past 14 months, Israeli attacks have left 20,000 Palestinians with disabilities—including 5,000 cases of permanent disabilities—with children making up 15% of those affected. During a [press conference](#) in Cairo on 2 December 2024, the UN Secretary-General reminded that "Gaza now has the highest number of child amputees per capita anywhere in the world—many losing limbs and undergoing surgeries without even anesthesia. What we are seeing may well amount to the gravest international crimes."

Of these 20,000 Palestinians with disabilities, 15,000 require urgent rehabilitation and medical care to prevent their conditions from becoming permanent. However, Israel's deliberate and systematic destruction of Gaza's healthcare system has made it almost impossible to deliver the necessary care to those in need. Israeli forces have deliberately targeted vital civilian infrastructure essential for the survival of persons with disabilities, including hospitals, healthcare centers, and rehabilitation centers. Israeli attacks have, for example, destroyed the Sheikh Hamad Hospital for Rehabilitation and Prosthetics in northern Gaza, Al-Wafa Hospital for Medical Rehabilitation and Specialized Surgery (both its main Gaza City building and its branch in the Al-Zahra area), the Assistive Devices Center of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society, and the General Union of Persons with Disabilities in the North Gaza Governorate. Other vital institutions, such as Deaf Associations and the Al-Amal Hospital run by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society in Khan Younis, which provided rehabilitation services, have also been destroyed. Furthermore, the only beachside facility adapted for persons with disabilities in northern Gaza has been completely obliterated.

The prolonged forced displacement impacting approximately 1.9 million Palestinians in Gaza has also disproportionately affected persons with disabilities. This impact extends beyond those with mobility disabilities,

affecting individuals with sensory, cognitive, and other disabilities, who face additional barriers in accessing essential services, including shelter, and support systems during displacement. Israel's relentless bombing and widespread destruction across Gaza have further restricted access and mobility for persons with disabilities: destroyed roads and infrastructure have rendered mobility aids, like wheelchairs, nearly useless, leaving many stranded in sandy, uneven areas.

Osama Abu Sefr, a 42-year-old married man with three children from the Middle Area Governorate, lives with a mobility impairment caused by the amputation of both his legs. Relying on a wheelchair, he has faced displacement more than four times since the war began. He recounts:

"Since the war began, my suffering with displacement has worsened due to my reliance on a wheelchair while being the sole provider for my family. On 12 October 2023, the area where I lived was targeted, and I was forced to flee for the first time to a UNRWA school. Less than two weeks later, a nearby residential block was bombed, and we had to move once again. **The challenges during these displacements were immense, as I had to carry my children and our belongings each time, making it extremely difficult to move from one place to another. The situation became even more dire when we had to live in a tent without a bathroom, and accessing public restrooms meant traveling long distances through the sand.**"

On top of all the challenges described above, all Gaza residents are also enduring the devastating effects of Israel's starvation policies. These policies have systematically deprived the population of access to sufficient food and clean water, creating widespread malnutrition and hunger. For persons with disabilities, these conditions are even more catastrophic, as their heightened vulnerabilities make it nearly impossible to meet their basic survival needs.

A. M., a 52-year-old man with quadriplegia, and his visually impaired wife asked their daughters to move south after Israel issued displacement orders to northern Gaza. However, A. and his wife chose to remain, fearing that their displacement would place an even greater burden on their daughters. Speaking to Al Mezan, he shared:

"On 10 October 2023, I had no choice but to leave my home and seek refuge at the Jabalia Rehabilitation Society —where I work—believing it would be safer since it is a UNRWA facility. Little did I know that no place was safe in Gaza. I moved within Jabaliya over five times due to repeated Israeli military ground invasions into the camp. For

over a year, I've had to sleep in my wheelchair. My suffering worsened during the recent Israeli military campaign on the Jabaliya refugee camp that started on 5 October 2024. The journey was unbearable. **Had I known what I would endure, I would have stayed in Jabaliya and awaited death rather than face the hardship and humiliation of displacement.**

I had to travel more than 1 km with my visually impaired wife along a perilous road, where Israeli drones were firing indiscriminately. The route was filled with holes, making it extremely painful to navigate in my wheelchair. It was an incredibly challenging experience. Upon arriving in western Gaza City, I ran into a relative who helped me find shelter, as I had nothing and no place to go. I reached out to another relative for blankets and canned food, as no organizations are assisting displaced people or persons with disabilities. I also lost my medications, which are unavailable in pharmacies. Currently, I'm staying with a relative, struggling to cope with my situation while suffering from numerous physical and psychological health issues."

The conditions highlighted above underscore the urgent need for immediate, targeted action to protect and promote the basic human rights of persons with disabilities in Gaza. The widespread destruction, prolonged forced displacement, starvation, and collapse of essential services have left persons with disabilities among the most vulnerable, struggling to survive without access to the resources and care they desperately need.

Addressing their specific challenges requires swift international intervention to provide rehabilitation, mobility aids, medical care, and their most basic necessities, including water, food, and shelter. The first and most critical step to alleviate the suffering of persons with disabilities in Gaza is to end Israel's genocide. This can be achieved through an immediate arms embargo on Israel to halt the attacks and by flooding Gaza with humanitarian aid to meet the urgent needs of the population. Without decisive action, the suffering of persons with disabilities in Gaza—and the population as a whole—will only deepen, further stripping them of their dignity and their right to life.