

Lara, a disabled child in war

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OUR WORK IN
OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN
TERRITORIES

Lara at a recreational activity organised by HI in a camp for displaced persons. | © HI

Lara, 8, has cerebral palsy. She is living the terrifying experience of war as a child with disabilities.

Since October 7 and the escalation of violence between Israel and Hamas, at least 38,000 Palestinians have been killed – including at least 10,000 children - and over 87,000 injured in the incessant bombing of Gaza by Israeli forces. This deadly offensive comes in the wake of a massive attack launched on Israel by Hamas, in which 1,200 Israelis were killed and 240 Israelis and foreign nationals were taken hostage.

Israeli bombardment from the air, land, and sea continues across much of the Gaza Strip, resulting in further civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of houses and other civilian infrastructure, particularly in the Ash Shuja'iyyeh area of Gaza City and the Al Mawasi area of Rafah. 60% of homes in Gaza have now been destroyed. 9 out of ten people are displaced. The entire population in Gaza needs humanitarian aid (OCHA).

Displaced several times

Lara has a cerebral palsy. She has nine siblings. Her parents, in their forties, are from Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza. The family was forced to flee several times the bombing and shelling, leaving everything behind. Her father, Zuhair, carried Lara on his shoulders each time.



Following the Rafah offensive last May, the family had to evacuate again. They are now living at Al-Aqsa University, in Gaza City, which has been transformed into a collective shelter.

When they first arrived, they struggled to find a private space for the family. Zuhair had to go out looking for tents and blankets, which proved a terrifying and exhausting experience.

“We finally found shelter but had to sleep outside until we managed to get a space inside. I still have to carry Lara on my shoulders whenever she needs to go to the toilet, for example,” says her father Zuhair.

Alleviating children’s anxiety

Lara used to go to school. She was in third grade. She misses their home:

“I wish I could go back to school because I like to read. My dream is to become a doctor one day”, she says.

When HI came to the shelter to organise recreational activities, Lara was excited and wanted to take part like all the other children.

“She sleeps next to me. That day she woke me up early, asking me to take her to the activities. We need more recreational activities. When children have nothing to do, they can become depressed. It’s crucial to keep their spirits high,” adds her father Zuhair.

Lara wants to learn how to play the different games and have fun just like any other child.

HI's actions in figures

Since October 2023, HI and partners have conducted sessions on risk education and protection against bombing for 84,000 children and 65,000 adults, including 1,400 people with disabilities. HI and its partners have also provided 11,000 wound dressings and nursing care sessions, 11,000 rehabilitation sessions, and more than 4,000 psychological first aid sessions. HI’s teams have organised recreational activities for 83,000 children and 10,000 adults, including 900 adults with disabilities, and distributed 2,500 assistive devices in 10 months.

People with disabilities in war

War situations are particularly terrifying for people with disabilities, and notably for children with disabilities. In Gaza, the conflict has severely affected them, causing increased rates of abandonment, injury, and death. Aid blockages restrict their access to essential resources, such as food, water, shelter, and medicine, heightening their vulnerability.

Disabled people, particularly those who have been internally displaced and separated from their support networks, often lose their assistive devices, making it nearly impossible to evacuate or flee violence. The inaccessibility of informal shelters worsens their living conditions still further, while those with psychosocial disabilities face exclusion from both shelters and health services. Consequently, the crisis in Gaza has created an extremely perilous situation for people with disabilities.

Call for an immediate ceasefire

HI is alarmed by the very high number of civilian casualties, the lack of safe humanitarian access and the limited number of trucks able to enter the Gaza strip daily. Along with more than 800 other organisations, HI is calling for an immediate ceasefire to put an end to the carnage and ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance to the affected population.