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International Day of Persons with Disabilities

“Equal Rights for Palestinians with Disabilities”

Press release



As the world celebrates the special occasion of International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the World Health Organization in the occupied Palestinian territory is using this opportunity to promote the rights of persons with disabilities to equal treatment as a step towards a more equitable community.

According to the Palestinian disability survey carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs in 2011, using a narrow definition of what is a disability, at least 110,000 Palestinians are living in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza with a disability. “The main challenge that faces persons with disability is not their disability,” pointed out Dr. Mahmoud Daher, acting head of the WHO office in Jerusalem. “The problem is the way that people interact

and respond to the person who has a disability.”

The Palestinian Authority issued the Palestinian Disability Law in 1999 with the goal of promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. Article II provides: “the disabled have the right to enjoy a free life, dignified living, and various services in a manner equal to that of other citizens and he/she have the same rights and obligations that are within his/her capabilities. It is not permissible to prevent any disabled from enjoying these rights because of his/her disability.” Yet persons with disabilities have not witnessed noticeable changes in their treatment. Many persons with disabilities find they are excluded from education, jobs and social life by society’s attitudes, and find physical accessibility to even public buildings and transportation a constant challenge. Integrating persons with disabilities into the community is the responsibility of not just government but also society as a whole and individuals. All Palestinians should respect the rights of persons with disabilities to the same treatment and opportunities as others in the Palestinian community. Civil society organizations, led by organizations of persons with disabilities, see the implementation of the Palestinian Disabilities law as an important milestone toward this end.

The World Health Organization stresses that institutions and people need to be pro-active in integrating persons with disabilities into educational facilities, the job market and in social activities, and to ensure that services can be accessed by those with a visual, hearing, mobility or mental disability. Persons with disabilities are a highly vulnerable group especially in the Palestinian community, and strengthening their role in the community will achieve a healthier equal environment for everyone.

This month the World Health Organization will launch a programme within government and UN agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory that aims to raise awareness and to mainstream respect for disability rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, as guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The programme will involve WHO and five UN agencies; ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNSCO and counterpart ministries in practical methods of ensuring protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in education, health, employment and social sectors.

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