



**15 September 2015, RAMALLAH/AL BIREH, West Bank:** The World Health Organization (WHO) Right to Health unit, along with the mayor of Ramallah and al Bireh municipalities, Ministry of Local Governments (MoLG), the Engineers Association and the Higher Committee for Disability, participated in the unveiling of a Disability Access award posted at municipal building entrances to recognize the municipalities for making public buildings more accessible for people with disabilities. The idea of the award is to increase community awareness about the rights of people of disability, and to highlight and promote good practices.

Nine buildings in three West Bank districts have been given the award following an assessment of public buildings for accessibility (physical environment, communication, information) by a selection committee composed of representatives from the Ministry of Local Government, the Engineers Association, and municipalities.

WHO had supported a review of legislation and practices of the MoLG to promote disability friendly infrastructure, as part of its work with the UN Program for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) to mainstream disability rights. Five UN agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory ---WHO and ILO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, with UNSCO as coordinator --- and Palestinian line ministries are involved in the joint project.

Ramallah Mayor Mousa Haddadeen mentioned, “The municipality does not grant a license to any new building design that does not consider the needs of persons with disabilities. The municipality also began to apply this system to all projects carried out by the municipality, especially streets and sidewalks, schools, and traffic signals.” The municipal buildings now feature elevators for stairways that were previously inaccessible, ramps and modified bathrooms. Municipal business cards have also been modified for Braille readers.

According to the WHO Right to Health representative, Anita Vitullo, “The city of Ramallah is a model of how people’s lives can be improved and disability awareness can be promoted.” She

encouraged the municipality to disseminate their experience to other municipalities and towns and said that WHO was committed to supporting future efforts.

WHO disability consultant Bashir Barghouthi called the awarded buildings “a real example of disability-friendly facilities” and praised the actual steps implemented by the Ramallah and Al Bireh municipalities in the area of disability. Ramallah municipal engineer Mohannad al Shafei added, “Ramallah municipality continues to develop and improve its services to all people, including people with disability.” Ziad Amro, a long-time disability activist who works closely with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Higher Committee for Disability, thanked the municipalities for their efforts and added that there was a long road ahead for work with private buildings, especially banks, ministries and other companies which requires municipal support to adapt buildings to meet the needs of people with disability.

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