

Ms Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame  
Chairperson  
Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
Geneva, Switzerland

September 6, 2024

Dear Ms Oforiwa Fefoame

**Petition requesting urgent action regarding the critical human rights situation of persons with disabilities in Palestine and more intensively in Gaza**

The Palestinian Disability Coalition and Disability Justice for Palestine write to request the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to take urgent and immediate action to appeal to bring a halt to ongoing crimes and human rights violations against persons with disabilities in Palestine by Israel, the Occupying power.

The past eleven months have been especially dire for persons with disabilities in Gaza. They have suffered from persistent attacks and from the overwhelming lack of attention from the international disability community. They are being killed, tortured, and starved, with little action taken to support them. In addition, nine days ago the Israeli Occupation Forces launched a large military campaign targeting several districts in the West Bank as well.

We appeal to members of the Committee not only as a human rights body but as individuals of conscience, each with influence in various spaces—whether through their country’s missions or in the areas where they work or advocate. All existing mechanisms and measures to address these humanitarian situations are failing, and Palestinians with disabilities are being left behind.

The Committee has historically shown leadership and innovation in protecting persons with disabilities in conflict situations, as evidenced recently in the case of Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> We urge that the same level of commitment and action be extended to Palestinians with disabilities.

Section 1 of this letter provides background to our petition. Section 2 reiterates key points and requests from our briefing to the Committee on 16 August 2024. Section 3 outlines our requests for action.

**1. Background to the petition**

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of all actions taken is available at: Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Report of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on its twenty-seventh session (15 August–9 September 2022), CRPD/C/27/2, 13 October 2022.

The Palestinian Disability Coalition comprises 24 members, including organisations of persons with disabilities, self-help groups, and activists with disabilities. The coalition works collectively to improve the enjoyment of rights by persons with disabilities in Palestine through policy advocacy, the promotion of disability inclusion, and awareness raising. For this petition, we have gathered information from various sources, including news agencies, videos shared on social media platforms, and Palestinian Disability Coalition members who work or live in Gaza.

The petitioners note that the Israeli Occupation forces' actions against persons with disabilities contravene its obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law, constituting a violation of the rights to life, health, freedom from discrimination, liberty and security of person, and freedom from torture and ill-treatment. The consistent pattern by the Israeli Occupation army of physically and psychologically disabling Palestinians through military action has led to a rising number of individuals with disabilities and an increasing, urgent need for protection and support for the growing population of persons with disabilities.

International human rights law and international humanitarian law apply with respect to the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. Violations of international humanitarian law by the Israeli army and occupation, such as the unlawful use of force, indiscriminate attacks, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, the prevention of access to food and water, the unprecedented detention campaigns and conditions, and the blockade of humanitarian assistance constitute serious breaches of both international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

### **1.1 Indiscriminate and deliberate killings**

The Israeli Occupation forces siege in Gaza has resulted in a significant death toll among Palestinians with disabilities, primarily civilians, many of whom were killed in cold blood during evacuations or at their own homes.

By 8 August, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported more than 39,677 killed by the Israeli Occupation army, mostly civilians, since 7 October 2023.<sup>2</sup> The death toll could be several times higher than official estimates, possibly above 186,000, or 7.9% of the total population in the Gaza Strip.<sup>3</sup> The current precise number of persons with disabilities in Gaza is unknown, but prior to 7 October 2023, 21% of households in Gaza had at least one member with a disability.<sup>4</sup> This percentage is likely to have increased dramatically in the last eleven months, as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have acquired a disability as a result of the Israeli

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), OPT, <https://www.ochaopt.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Khatib, R., McKee, M., & Yusuf, S. (2024). Counting the dead in Gaza: difficult but essential. *Lancet* 404(10449), 237–238. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(24\)01169-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(24)01169-3).

<sup>4</sup> OCHA & REACH, Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) Key Sectoral Findings – Gaza, July 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/opt-multi-sectoral-needs-assessment-msna-key-sectoral-findings-gaza-july-2022>.

Occupation forces attacks. Save The Children reported that more than 10 children on average per day lost one or both of their legs.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

Given the high percentage of persons with disabilities in Gaza and the high risk they face during attacks, the situation is critical. The lack of accessible information on evacuation orders, an inaccessible environment worsened by infrastructure destruction, scarce assistive technology (such as wheelchairs and crutches, due to the Israeli Occupation forces designating them as “dual use” and restricting access), and the general lack of support (due to the loss of caregivers or supporters), all contribute to this elevated risk. Consequently, it is estimated that a significant number of persons with disabilities have been killed by Israeli Occupation military action.

**Ahmad Saeed Al-Abadla**, a young man with Down Syndrome, was chased and shot at by Israeli Occupation army quadcopters when he was near his home in Al-Qarara, southern Gaza, in July 2024.<sup>8</sup> Only after the withdrawal of the Occupation army, family members were able to recover his body.

**Louay Baraka**, a young deaf man who lived in South Gaza, was killed by the Israeli Occupation army on 23 July 2024.<sup>9</sup> He was shot by a sniper near the Bani Suhaila roundabout, East Khan Younis, South Gaza, and no one was able to rescue him.

**Yasmeen Daghmarsh**, a 28-year-old woman with a physical disability and a wheelchair basketball player. She was killed, as well as three of her family members, on 19 July 2024. Her house was attacked by the Israeli occupation forces in the Al-Sabrah neighbourhood in Gaza City.

**Fayeq Kamel Al-Hiqi**, a 46-year-old man with a physical disability and a father of five children. He was targeted by a quadcopter while he was collecting wood in Tal Al-hawa in Gaza City, on 28 June 2024. His body was found three days after he was killed.

**Mohamed Bhar**, a 24-year-old man with Down syndrome, was brutally attacked by an Israeli Occupation army dog and left to die.<sup>10</sup> The incident occurred on 27 June 2024 at his home in the Tuffah neighbourhood east of Gaza City. The Israeli Occupation military forces raided his family home, and a combat dog attacked him. The family was forced to

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<sup>5</sup> ACAPS, Thematic report - Palestine: Impact of the conflict on people with disabilities in the Gaza Strip, February 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/acaps-thematic-report-palestine-impact-conflict-people-disabilities-gaza-strip-14-february-2024>.

<sup>6</sup> Save the Children, GAZA: More than 10 children a day lose a limb in three months of brutal conflict, 7 January 2024, <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/gaza-more-10-children-day-lose-limb-three-months-brutal-conflict>.

<sup>7</sup> Defense for Children International, Palestine, Israeli genocide targets disabled Palestinian children's futures, "I just want to walk", 5 June 2024, [https://www.dci-palestine.org/i\\_just\\_want\\_to\\_walk\\_israeli\\_genocide\\_targets\\_disabled\\_palestinian\\_children\\_s\\_futures](https://www.dci-palestine.org/i_just_want_to_walk_israeli_genocide_targets_disabled_palestinian_children_s_futures)

<sup>8</sup> Palestine TV, 30 July 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/PalestineTV/posts/pfbid0A2xXmTYwHdWnDZCHACzmNep9osJoovb2GT6tau7r3MsyppRZVVqyxxGz9c82A21xl>.

<sup>9</sup> Basem Alhabel, 23 July 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C9x2WjIMg-s/?locale=id&hl=en>.

<sup>10</sup> BBC, Gaza man with Down's syndrome attacked by IDF dog and left to die, mother tells BBC, 16 July 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz9drj14e0lo>.

leave the premises, and Mohamed succumbed to the injuries inflicted by the dog. His dead body was found by his family a week later. The Israeli Occupation army admitted that he was left on his own by soldiers.

**Hashem Abdullah Hashem Ghazal**, a 58-year-old deaf activist who lived on Yafa Street in Gaza City, was killed along with his wife, Samira Ghabayen, in an Israeli Occupation airstrike on 13 May 2024.<sup>11</sup> Their two-story house was attacked without prior warning. Hashem was a prominent leader of the Palestinian Deaf community and a member of the Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children. Several deaf people have been killed due to the lack of accessible information and warnings, thus being unable to flee from danger.<sup>12</sup>

**Naseem Abu Shidiq**, a deaf teacher, was detained alongside other young individuals by the Israeli Occupation army, subjected to blindfolding and handcuffing, and taken to Kamal Odwan. Upon his release, Naseem returned to search for his 4-year-old child at the school, only to be shot by an Israeli Occupation army sniper on 10 December 2023.<sup>13,14</sup>

**Foa'd Abu Sabha**, a 23-year-old man with intellectual disabilities, was shot in the chest and killed on 30 October 2023 by the Israel Occupation army, following a students' protest in Yatta, Hebron Governorate. Video footage reviewed by OHCHR shows that he did not pose any material threat when he was shot.<sup>15</sup>

These examples illustrate the brutal violence that persons with disabilities endure amidst the ongoing Israeli Occupation forces' genocidal attacks. These actions constitute grave violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the principles of military necessity, distinction, and proportionality.

## 1.2 Arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment

There are numerous reports detailing the arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-treatment of Palestinians by Israeli Occupation authorities since 7 October 2023. Thousands of Palestinians, including minors, older persons, and persons with disabilities, have been detained without due process, their whereabouts unknown to their families. Among those detained, many have been subjected to severe physical and psychological torture and ill-treatment, leading to lasting trauma and disability.

**Azzaddin Al-Banna**, a 40-year-old man with physical disability, was detained by Israeli Occupation forces in November 2023. He was brutally beaten and tortured, resulting in

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<sup>11</sup> The New Arab, Gaza mourns deaf activist Hashem Ghazal killed with his wife in Israeli strike, 14 May 2024, <https://www.newarab.com/news/gaza-mourns-deaf-activist-hashem-ghazal-killed-israel>.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, Signing the war in Gaza: Overcoming deafness and displacement, 26 April 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/04/1149091>.

<sup>13</sup> Mosab Abu Toha, 10 December 2023, <https://x.com/MosabAbuToha/status/1733821338056348047>.

<sup>14</sup> Rakaya Esime Fetuga, 18 January 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/rakayaesime/p/C2PKbXYoVsY/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/rakayaesime/p/C2PKbXYoVsY/?img_index=1).

<sup>15</sup> OHCHR, The human rights situation in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, 27 December 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/palestine/2023-12-27-Flash-Report.pdf>.

injuries, infections, and severe complications that led to his death in February 2024. Detainees reported his deteriorating condition due to untreated wounds. Requests for medical assistance were denied, leading to his death.<sup>16</sup>

**Rami Abu Mustafa**, a Palestinian with a mental health condition, was arrested in Khan Younis and kept in custody for several months. When he was released, he was blind and had bruises, skull fractures, several brain hemorrhages, and evidence of part of his intestines, colon, and spleen removed.<sup>17,18</sup> He died on 4 July 2024.<sup>19</sup>

**Ihab Tanboura**, a deaf man from Beit Lahia, has been held by the Israeli Occupation army since October 2023, with no information on his condition.<sup>20</sup> Israeli Occupation soldiers filmed themselves torturing and abusing him as Ihab lay shirtless and bruised on the ground whilst a booted soldier stepped on his head.<sup>21</sup>

**Nader Khalid Asaliya**, a blind man from Jabalia, was arrested by Israeli occupation forces in North Gaza and later released at Kissufim crossing on 17 July 2024. He has reported severe torture, including beatings, starvation, electric shocks, dog attacks, pepper gas exposure, and humiliation, stating that detainees were treated "like dogs".<sup>22,23</sup>

**Bassam Abu Daqqa**, a deaf man from Khan Younis, has been detained since October 2023. Similarly, Hazem Albughrabi, a deaf man from Northern Gaza, was detained on 7 November and remains in an Israeli Occupation forces prison with no updates on his status. The situation of Deaf people in prison is quite precarious due to the impossibility of communicating with their captors and families.

Many persons with disabilities are also unaccounted for, with no information about their condition or location. **Yahia Basiuni**, a Palestinian with a hearing disability, has been missing since April 2024. Similarly, **Omar Ranitis**, a deaf man who lived in Gaza and later sought refuge in the Rafah camp, has been unaccounted for since April 2024. **Ali Dabo**, another deaf person who moved between Gaza and Rafah for refuge, has also been missing since April 2024. A young deaf man, **Yahya Al-Basiouni**, who went to Gaza on 14 April, has not been heard since. Additionally, **Yasser Saleh Salama Abu Jazar**, a 48-year-old deaf man, went missing at the end of May 2024 in Rafah.

### 1.3 Urgent medical attention

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<sup>16</sup> Qader Foundation, The impact of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip on the rights of persons with disabilities, April 2024, [https://www.qader.org/cached\\_uploads/download/2024/05/23/the-report-on-the-impact-of-the-israeli-aggression-on-people-with-disabilities-en-1716463325.pdf](https://www.qader.org/cached_uploads/download/2024/05/23/the-report-on-the-impact-of-the-israeli-aggression-on-people-with-disabilities-en-1716463325.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> AJ+, 4 July 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=676866664632723>.

<sup>18</sup> Muslim Network TV, 9 July 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C9M1ureNjSi/>.

<sup>19</sup> Eye on Palestine, 4 July 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C9AuGbpKdw/>.

<sup>20</sup> Ryan Al-Natour, What it means to be Deaf and Palestinian in Gaza, Overland, 19 June 2024, <https://overland.org.au/2024/06/what-it-means-to-be-deaf-and-palestinian-in-gaza/>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Al Jazeera, Palestinians released from Israeli detention recount torture, humiliation, 17 July 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/7/17/israels-war-on-gaza-live-48-killed-in-3-air-strikes-in-one-hour-in-gaza?update=3052796>.

<sup>23</sup> Eye on Palestine, 19 July 2024, <https://x.com/EyeonPalestine/status/1814348994643911037>.

Urgent medical attention is desperately needed in Gaza for persons with disabilities who are disproportionately affected by Israeli Occupation forces' siege and genocidal violence. Persons with disabilities generally have more healthcare needs than those without disabilities, and many require greater access to rehabilitation services and specialist healthcare services.<sup>24</sup> These are essential to prevent impairment or exacerbating conditions, as well as for their survival and quality of life.

However, access to healthcare and disability services in Gaza is nearly impossible today due to the destruction of basic infrastructure. Access to health care and life-saving medication is minimal, with severe shortages in diabetes medication, nutritional supplements, cardiovascular drugs, and anti-epileptics.<sup>25,26</sup> Electricity outages further impede the use of essential equipment like respirators. Disability-related services are unable to operate due to the Israeli Occupation forces' siege. Many services have been shelled, such as the Sheikh Hamad Hospital for Rehabilitation, the Assistive Devices Center of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society, and the Baituna Association for Development and Community Development.<sup>27,28</sup> Israeli Occupation forces have also destroyed a warehouse of Humanity & Inclusion in Rafah, which provided essential assistive devices, forcing the organisation to suspend all activities for persons with disabilities across the governorate.<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that disability organisations in the Gaza Strip play a crucial role in supporting persons with disabilities due to the government's ineffective social protection and high poverty and unemployment rates.<sup>30</sup>

The Israeli Occupation blockade of Gaza has worsened the situation, preventing essential humanitarian aid, including food, water, and medicine, from entering Gaza, which disproportionately impacts persons with disabilities. Additionally, physical, informational, and communication barriers for persons with disabilities to access the limited humanitarian aid available have worsened since 7 October 2023. Israeli Occupation forces have further labelled many medical and assistive technologies, such as wheelchairs, prostheses, and hearing aid batteries, as "dual-use items," prohibiting

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<sup>24</sup> WHO, Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities, 2022  
<https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/global-report-on-health-equity-for-persons-with-disabilities>.

<sup>25</sup> Qader Foundation, The impact of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip on the rights of persons with disabilities.

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch, Gaza: Israeli Attacks, Blockade Devastating for People with Disabilities, 1 November 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/01/gaza-israeli-attacks-blockade-devastating-people-disabilities>.

<sup>27</sup> Qader Foundation, The impact of the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip on the rights of persons with disabilities.

<sup>28</sup> Stars of Hope Society for the Empowerment of Women with Disabilities (SHS) and the Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad), A War without Human Rights, Cutting off All Means of Survival: Organizations Working in the Field of Disability in Light of the Genocide, April 2024, <https://www.almarsad.ps/en>.

<sup>29</sup> Humanity & Inclusion, Gaza: Destruction of HI's warehouse in Rafah, 12 June 2024, <https://www.hi-us.org/en/gaza--destruction-of-hi-s-warehouse-in-rafah>.

<sup>30</sup> SHS and Al Marsad, A War without Human Rights.

their entry to Gaza.<sup>31</sup> These items are indispensable for mobility and independence; without them, persons with disabilities are unable to flee from attacks or access humanitarian assistance.

The lack of access to essential medical supplies and assistive technology puts the lives of persons with disabilities at significant risk, aggravating the impact of the Occupying forces' genocidal starvation campaign. For example, **Hamdi Qumaila**, a 12-year-old boy with a disability, died on 19 July as a result of malnutrition and lack of access to medical healthcare.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, **Boshra Al-Kafarna**, a 16-year-old girl with various health conditions, died on 7 July 2024 as a result of malnutrition and lack of access to medical healthcare.<sup>33</sup> Her health conditions were the result of oxygen deprivation from an Israeli Occupation attack with white phosphorus in 2008. **Mustafa Hijazi**, a 10-year-old child with cerebral palsy from North Gaza, died on 14 June 2024 of combined reasons, including malnutrition and dehydration.<sup>34,35</sup> Many children and adults with disabilities are currently facing starvation.<sup>36,37,38</sup> As famine spreads across Gaza, delivering accessible and inclusive humanitarian is indispensable.

Furthermore, the Israeli Occupation forces control of access points has impeded evacuations of people with disabilities in urgent need of care. The Palestinian Disability Coalition has identified more than 50 individuals with disabilities in Gaza who require emergency evacuation. Many of these individuals have various severe health conditions, including cancer, anaemia, osteoporosis, ulcers, and severe infections.

## 2. Briefing to the Committee on Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 16 August 2024

We provided a briefing to the Committee on 16 August 2024. We intended this to be during the session's opening, but we were asked to brief the Committee privately instead. While we appreciate the opportunity, we firmly believe this discussion should not have occurred in a private session. We respectfully request future briefings be in public.

Our briefing had two objectives:

- Share the direct perspectives and experiences of Palestinians with disabilities through a statement by Shatha Abusrour on behalf of the Palestinian Disability Coalition.
- Make specific requests for the Committee act in relation to human rights of people with disabilities in Gaza.

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<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch, Gaza: Israeli Restrictions Harm People with Disabilities, 3 December 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/03/gaza-israeli-restrictions-harm-people-disabilities>.

<sup>32</sup> Nahed Hajjal, 27 July 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C96z4aBtJOG/?hl=en>.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Jarmaq News, 16 July 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C9efYz1gUDx/>.

<sup>34</sup> Euro-Med Monitor, 14 June 2024, <https://x.com/EuroMedHR/status/1801615370026881362>.

<sup>35</sup> Saeed Mohamed, 13 June 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/p/C87E\\_tvNKBx/](https://www.instagram.com/p/C87E_tvNKBx/).

<sup>36</sup> Saeed Mohamed, 2 July 2024, [https://www.instagram.com/p/C87E\\_tvNKBx/](https://www.instagram.com/p/C87E_tvNKBx/).

<sup>37</sup> Saeed Mohamed, 11 July 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C9R--SpNTYH/>.

<sup>38</sup> Saeed Mohamed, 7 August 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-VwttfM-as/>.

Shatha Abusrour's statement delivered on 16 August 2024 is provided in full as an attachment to this letter due to the significance and urgency of issues raised and the necessity to place it on the public record.

In summary, Shatha Abusrour requested the Committee do all in its capacity to guarantee the protection of the rights of Palestinians with disabilities in this genocidal war, to hold the Israeli oppressors accountable, and to make sure that Palestinians with disabilities are effectively included in humanitarian interventions, as well as in liberation and reconstruction efforts. More specifically, she requested the Committee's support to:

- Prevent the genocide, violence, arbitrary detention and other human rights violations against Palestinians with disabilities.
- Facilitate access to medical assistance for urgent health conditions such as cancer, ulcers, severe infections, diabetes, and other illnesses.
- Facilitate evacuation from Gaza for Palestinians with disabilities who need to receive urgent medical interventions abroad.
- Gather disability disaggregated data on killing, injuring and disablement of Palestinians with disability.
- Support the re-establishment of disability organisations that have been destroyed and prevent further destruction of the sector.
- Support equal access to humanitarian aid to Palestinians with disability, including those who are displaced and living in tents or shelter centres. Aid must extend to access to assistive devices, medications, and rehabilitative services.
- Support entry of assistive devices into Gaza.
- Support incorporation of disability-inclusive measures into humanitarian aid and raise awareness of humanitarian actors about inclusion of persons with disabilities and how to incorporate values that respect human dignity in their work.
- Require all humanitarian aid entities—be they states or UN agencies—make all possible efforts to design and implement their humanitarian interventions in an inclusive manner, in compliance with article 32 of the UNCPRD.
- Ensure liberation, rebuilding and reconstruction is inclusive of and in partnership with persons with disabilities and in accordance with articles 4, 9, 19, 29, 32, and 33 of the UNCPRD.
- Support Palestinians, through their liberation movements, to practice their right under international humanitarian law to resist the Israeli Zionist, settler, colonial, and terrorist occupation and fight for self-determination.

### **3. Requests to the Committee**

Against this background, the Palestinian Disability Coalition and the collective Disability Justice for Palestine respectfully request the Committee to take urgent action to protect, promote and respect the right to life, health, and dignity of persons with disabilities in Gaza by:



- Urging the Israeli Occupation forces and their allied states to comply with their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and international humanitarian law,
- Invoking article 36 (1) of the Convention, as done in the case of Ukraine, to request further information from Israel as it relates to paragraphs 24 and 26 of the Concluding Observations (CRPD/C/ISR/CO/1), and paragraph 22 that was identified for urgent measures for follow up (see paragraph 77),
- Invoking article 36 (1) of the Convention to request information from States Parties supplying arms to Israel, including Germany, Italy, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France, Denmark, Australia, on how their actions contravene their obligations under articles 10, 11 and 32 of the Convention,
- Holding meetings with Palestinian organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society organizations, and UN entities- publicly where relevant and requested, in an effort to gather and share information, raise awareness and foster immediate action,
- Holding a public dialogue with all interested States parties, and
- Based on these consultations, issuing concrete recommendations.

We also request the Committee to consider issuing a new press release on the situation of Palestinians with disabilities, given the urgency of the situation and to draw attention of Member States, UN agencies, and humanitarian actors for immediate action.

Above all, we urge the Committee to respond with the same urgency and dedication as it did in the context of Ukraine, recognising the immense suffering experienced by persons with disabilities in Palestine. The situation in Gaza is a humanitarian catastrophe that demands urgent global attention. Double standards in the protection of human rights are not admissible.

Thank you for your attention and your commitment to upholding the rights of all persons with disabilities.

**Palestinian Disability Coalition**  
**Disability Justice for Palestine**

## **Full statement by Shatha Abusrour on behalf of the Palestinian Disability Coalition, 16 August 2024**

CRPD committee members, this is Shatha Abusrour, speaking on behalf of the Palestinian Disability Coalition, which comprises 24 organisations in Palestine, 12 of them from Gaza. The coalition, in partnership with allies and friends abroad, is using its mandate to advocate for the rights of Palestinians with disability, who have been disproportionately struggling like all Palestinians under the Israeli long-term occupation and settler colonisation, which started in 1947 and way more intensively since the last 7<sup>th</sup> of October. This message has been drafted through consultations with Palestinians with disability in the West Bank and Gaza.

Since the first week of this genocidal Israeli war launched on Palestine, and more specifically on Gaza, we have aimed to approach you as well as each and every entity that must play a role in upholding and protecting Palestinians with disabilities rights. Yet, we have to admit what has been happening: waves of killing, the destruction of all that could promise a life, arbitrary detentions, torture, a severe lack of inclusive and accessible humanitarian assistance, an urgent need for medical evacuations, the use of all unimaginable means as genocidal policies and practices, including the assassination of dignity, dreams, tomorrows, hope, etc. This and more placed us as activists in a state of shock, choking, freezing, and debilitation. This state continued to deepen because of the fact that the genocide has been happening right before the world's eyes, ears, hearts and souls, with very few taking action. We thank our friends who extended their hands and supported us to keep trying, even though the UN has proven that it is positioned right where the power of relations and interests in the world exists, at the expense of the oppressed.

Fatalities in Gaza since October 2023, based on the official entities, are around 40,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians. Yet, some scholars suggest it may exceed 186,000. Unfortunately, no disability disaggregated data is available to state how many of those who have been killed are Palestinians with disability. The last Palestinian with disability we knew of who had been killed was Majdi Al-Tatar, a Palestinian with physical disability. He was killed among at least 100 Palestinians in the massacre that took place at Al-tabeen school, one of the shelter centres in Gaza, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August. Majdi lost his house and one of his sons right at the beginning of this war, and he was an athlete representing Palestine in the Paralympics. Another Palestinian who has been killed is Mohammad Bhar, a young man with Down syndrome who was brutally attacked by an army dog in his own home and left to die, and Hashem Abdullah Hashem Ghazal, a well-known deaf activist who was killed along with his wife in an Israeli Occupation airstrike. Injuries among Palestinians exceed 90,000, and we believe at least 12,000 of them have acquired disability, especially when the Israeli occupation forces' policies are to shoot to kill or to cause permanent disability. At the same time, most disability organisations have been demolished by the Israeli attacks, just like most hospitals and the infrastructure in general.

Arbitrary detention practised by the Israeli occupation forces since October 2023 has increased dramatically and unprecedentedly: at least 9500 Palestinians have been

arrested, many of whom were taken to the Sdih Timan internment camp, where physical, psychological, and sexual violations have been taking place. Let alone all other Israeli prisons that became copies of Gaza: hunger; deprivation of all that may make human life possible; all forms of violations; poor trials, if any; no family visits; irregular lawyers' visits; extreme isolation, etc. Palestinians with disability, as an integral part of the Palestinian fabric, also experience such circumstances, and at least three of them were killed or died as a result of the torture practices in those detention centres. Besides, there is no information about many other Palestinians with disability who have been detained.

According to UNRWA, at least 63% of the household units in Gaza are destroyed, and 9 out of 10 Palestinians in Gaza have experienced internal displacement. Many of them experienced displacement ten times throughout the last ten months. For persons with disability, evacuation, not knowing where to go, living in tents or shelter centres, all these situations combined with the absence of assistive devices, medications, rehabilitative services, equal access to humanitarian aid, and the use of starvation as a weapon by the Israeli occupation forces, make life almost impossible. Please note that the Israeli occupation forces are not allowing the entry of the assistive devices into Gaza; most humanitarian actors still don't understand how to make their efforts inclusive of persons with disability and how to incorporate values that respect human dignity in their work; most if not all communities in Gaza are lacking the minimum requirements of cleanness and sanitation, which puts persons with disability at higher risk; and nowhere in Gaza is safe or accessible.

Yet, we also want the world to know that Gaza is a wonderful place, and when the time comes for it to be free and rebuilt, we expect this to happen in accordance with articles 4, 9, 19, 32, and 33 of the UNCPRD. We want the process of liberation and reconstruction to be inclusive of and in partnership with persons with disability.

Many Palestinians with disability are dealing with urgent health conditions such as cancer, ulcers, severe infections, diabetes, and other illnesses. Although many Palestinians don't want to leave Gaza because this is an existential war, many of those with and without disability will die if they stay in Gaza due to the deteriorating healthcare system. If Palestinians with disability will not die from Israeli shelling and bombing, they will die from such circumstances. Thus, evacuation from Gaza is one of the highest priorities for many Palestinians with disability who need to receive urgent medical interventions abroad.

Many Palestinians believe that the fight for rights and freedoms comes with a price. Yet, most entities working in humanitarian aid don't incorporate disability-inclusive measures into their strategies. This places additional burdens on Palestinians with disabilities and requires that all such entities—be they states or UN agencies—make all possible efforts to design and implement their humanitarian interventions in an inclusive manner, in compliance with article 32 of the UNCPRD.

Finally, as you know, what is happening in Palestine, and especially in Gaza, is against several articles in the UNCPRD and the 2475 UN Security Council resolution. Thus, we request that you do all that is in your capacity to guarantee the protection of the rights of

Palestinians with disability in this genocidal war, to hold the Israeli oppressors accountable, and to make sure that Palestinians with disability are effectively included in humanitarian interventions, as well as in liberation and reconstruction efforts.

Palestinians, through their liberation movements, are practising their right to resist the Israeli Zionist, settler, colonial, and terrorist occupation. The right to resist the occupation and fight for self-determination is guaranteed by international humanitarian law. This resistance represents us as members of the Palestinian Disability Coalition. It is absolutely unacceptable for us to witness and experience injustice and despotism, as well as the so many forms of double standards and partnerships taking place against the Palestinian cause, all in the name of the occupier's right to self-defence.