



Introduction

The general scene in Palestine continues to provoke feelings of distress and ambiguousness at the level of the locals who still dream of a better day to come. In 2019, persons with physical disabilities (PWDs) still experience stigmatization, obstacles to social and economic participation, and their rights are overlooked. While children and youth live in constant fear and under oppression due to the political conflict and the ensuing violent acts of the occupation and the systematic child detention policy.

According to OCHA oPt, during the first half of the year 2019, around 354 structures were demolished and 477 people were displaced in the West Bank. While Palestinian fatalities were 74 and injuries amounted to 9907 of whom 19 and 1896 respectively were in the West Bank¹.

At the governmental level, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has not yet figured a solution to its financial crisis and has announced that it would pay its employees only 60 per cent of their June salaries². The crisis has escalated further following Israel's deduction of the funds that the PA pays to the families of prisoners and those who lost their lives in the conflict. To add to the national political dilemma, the dispute between the governments of Fatah and Hamas who are controlling the Gaza Strip and the scattered areas in the West Bank continues with no vision of approaching a solution.

In his most recent briefing³ in June on the Middle East to the Security Council, the UN Special Coordinator, Nickolay Mladenov, expressed serious concerns over a number of issues at the level of Palestinians that could be summarized as follows:

The further expansion of Israeli settlements;

- The persistent threat of demolitions and displacement of Palestinians in Area C, East Jerusalem and Hebron's H2 area and the effect on women and girls in particular;
- Israel's declaration of some 18 per cent of the West Bank as firing zones for military training, where civilian presence is prohibited by military order during training exercises;
- The perilous situation in Gaza, and the persistent threat of another major escalation and the

1 <https://www.ochaopt.org/>

2 <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1794226/pa-pays-60-employees'-salaries>

3 <https://unsco.unmissions.org/security-council-briefing-situation-middle-east-reporting-unscr-2334-delivered-un-special-2>



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continued suffering of the population;

- The situation of the Palestinian population and human rights defenders in the H2 area of Hebron following the withdrawal of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) and the daily intimidation they face on the hands of the military;
- The very serious financial crisis facing the PA which, unless resolved, risks triggering a series of dangerous developments that will be difficult to mitigate and contain, including the potential collapse of the PA.

The situation of the Palestinian population remains worrying with nearly no serious transformation at the national or international levels. Amidst this instability, a number of stakeholders continue to devote huge efforts to contribute to protecting the local communities during this protracted humanitarian crisis. The YMCA being a leader in protection sector at the national level, has been investing efforts and resources to maintain the resilience of the Palestinian communities and restore their coping mechanisms by enhancing their physical and psychological wellbeing. The YMCA through its Rehabilitation Program targets the marginalized groups of PWDs and the survivors of political violence to foster hope in a better tomorrow.

This report presents the work of the YMCA during the first six months of 2019 to fulfill its mission to integrate PWDs and traumatized survivors of political violence through a number of quality rehabilitative and psychosocial services.

Objective 1: Traumatized people and persons with disabilities as well as their families and community members have better access to psychosocial support and counseling services.

Facts:

1. 3845 individual and group counseling sessions were provided to persons with disability and traumatized.
2. 622 individual and group counseling sessions were provided to the needy immediate family members of the participants.
3. 409 direct participants were reached; 24.7% were persons with disabilities, 73.8% were survivors of the political violence, and 1.5% having both situations, 91.3% were youth (12-25 years old), 80.2% came from villages, refugee camps and remote areas where several locations cannot be reached by vehicles and where services are limited or non-existent, 10% were females.



Impact:

1. 94.6% of children and adults with disabilities and traumatized who received psychosocial support and counseling services have an increased ability to cope with their disability or trauma.
2. 96.6% of the target groups parents and other community members are more aware of the rights and needs towards persons with disability and traumatized and have a more positive attitude toward them.

Objective 2: The targeted groups physical economic independency and rehabilitation is enhanced.

Facts:

1. 27 medical urgent assistive aids were provided to needy persons with disabilities.
2. 5 adaptations to add disabled access facilities in residential units.
3. 182 participants received 369 sessions of academic and career counselling, while 98 participants received vocational assessment, of whom 73 were reached through the mobile unit.
4. 72 academic rehabilitation services were rendered to support participants.
5. 60 vocational training programs for participants above 15 years old were supported.



6. 2 self-employment projects were supported.
7. Facilitation of employment of 18 persons with disabilities.

Impact:

1. Approx. 32 persons with disabilities have enhanced their mobility and physical conditions through medications and renovation measures.
2. Approx. 250 persons of the target group are re-integrated in the educational or vocational fields.

Objective 3: The capacities of qualified personnel working in the field of trauma and disabilities (social workers and counsellors) are upgraded.

Facts:

1. 69 professionals of social workers and counsellors, of YMCA and other organizations, received training through the YMCA.
2. 2 administrative staff of the YMCA received training.
3. 15 University students completed their internships at the YMCA.

Impact:

92% of the 69 trained social workers and counselors are using their new skills.



Objective 4: Advocacy activities in line with the rights-based approach contribute towards better rights of people with disabilities and traumatized in Palestine.

Facts:

1. 1593 persons were targeted by advocacy and awareness activities.
2. 70 coordination meetings were held with the different organizations working in the spheres of psychosocial rehabilitation, mental health, emergency interventions, and vocational rehabilitation on the local level.
3. 20 workshops, lectures and meetings were held to affect societal understanding and attitude towards persons with disability and survivors of political violence
4. 5 activities were organized with either schools or universities within the different districts of the West Bank.
5. 18 recreational / ventilation activities were organized in all West Bank districts including East Jerusalem, which targeted marginalized groups of survivors of political violence and PWDs, children and their caregivers.
6. 1 celebratory event was implemented in the West Bank.
7. Forming 3 friendship committees in schools to support PWDs.
8. 9 Memorandum of understandings were signed with different companies and job places in the private sector in the process of making job places inclusive of PWDs.
9. 60 coordination meetings were held at the professional stakeholders' level as part of the advocacy efforts made by the YMCA and its partners.
10. The YMCA participated in 3 regional and 1 national events to support the rights of PWDs.
11. The YMCA actively participated with other stakeholders in the process of drafting the alternative report on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, led by Defence for Children International (DCI).



Impact:

With regards to the legislative proposals which EJ-YMCA-RP is committed to develop, in partnership with the Palestinian Disability Coalition, EJ-YMCA-RP participated in drafting and reviewing four policy papers (the right to employment for persons with disability; the right to access health services; the right to access to justice; access to public places and information) which should serve as a basis for the drafting of those proposals. Thus, an action plan was designed on how to use those policy papers. In addition, huge efforts were invested in the process of drafting the new law on the rights of PWDs.

Making a difference to live 'a better life'

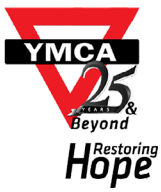
The south of the Bethlehem district has been a very tense area witnessing clashes with the military on a constant basis due to land confiscation operations for the erection of a number of Israeli settlements and using a by-pass road for settlers to get through the area. School children and youth are a main target for the military who would provoke, attack, and arrest them either on the streets or from their houses. It is very hard to find a family whose children have never been attacked or arrested by the military.

The young M.U., was born in a village to the south of Bethlehem in a family of seven. He got detained twice as a child and had already dropped out of school for different reasons especially that most clashes with the military in the village happen near schools, during which young students are mostly provoked and engaged into this setting whether aware of the consequences or not. M.U. at the age of 17 years old, was arrested from his own house late at night of the week of the holy feast of Al-Adha of 2018 in an aggressive raid where shooting, tear gas bombs, and sound cannons were used extensively. The soldiers threatened the family members, adults and children, with guns. They attacked M.U. with a gun in the head, blind-folded and shackled him, and dragged him out of the house into a military car during which he kept hearing his mother crying and screaming begging for them to leave him. During the drive, and while M.U. was blindfolded and shackled, the soldiers continued to abuse him physically and psychologically. When he recounts the incident, he describes their enjoyment in torturing him during the ride to the Gush Etzion interrogation center.

M.U. came out of prison after a few months of tremendous violations to his rights as a child, with serious psychological symptoms that required professional support. The YMCA team visited him at his house following release and explained to him the YMCA's mission and services. He underwent a psychological assessment upon which the counselor and himself were able to agree on an intervention plan to enable him to recover from the traumatizing detention experience and plan for the future.

M.U. received counseling sessions to help him cope with the traumatic event, regain his self-esteem, and be able to communicate and socialize with his family and peers. M.U. also needed support to enable him to plan for his future especially that he had already dropped out of school. He received career guidance sessions to enable him to set a vocational goal, and was referred to the Vocational Assessment Department at the YMCA where his physical and mental capacities were examined as well as his inclinations and the relevance to the job market. Based on the results, he was referred to local workshop to get training on car mechanics. The workshop owner and upon seeing the commitment and enthusiasm of M.U. in learning and the good results he had been achieving during training, promised to offer him a job opportunity upon finishing the training period.

M.U. was also part of the capacity building program that the YMCA is offering for youth survivors of political violence focusing on developing concepts of peace, tolerance, democracy, human rights, conflict transformation, communication and advocacy among many others for youth. He will be a member as a change agent in the peacemaker groups at the YMCA that will be in the near future launching community initiatives at the local level to increase awareness and affect societal change.



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M.U. described his experience with the YMCA by saying that 'After all I went through, I never imagined I would ever overcome that terrible period of my life, and I never dreamt of turning out to become the strong person I am today. I can't think of how different I would have been without the YMCA's interference.' M.U.'s mother who received psychological counseling through group support by the YMCA also expressed her gratitude by saying 'I was worried after what had happened to my son.... thank you for returning him back to me.'