

# Moving Forward

## with Differently Challenged People in Palestine

Courtesy of Palestinian Consultative Staff

Disabled people in Palestine have placed their feet on yet another rung of the ladder that leads to ultimate attainment of economic, social, and psychological independence, development, and well-being. This has happened through Palestinian Consultative Staff (PCS) funding for projects, programs, and development activities, with assistance from various local and international organizations, targeting marginalized people and people with special needs. The projects developed by PCS aim to provide honest employment for disabled persons thus enabling them first to earn a living for themselves and their families, and second, to make a tangible contribution to the society as a whole. The PCS mission is to support and enhance the role of NGOs operating in Palestine, especially in Jenin.

Omar Odeh, from the eastern plain in Jenin, walks among the tomato beds in the greenhouses, holding his little daughter and looking with pride and admiration at the tomatoes. Now Omar owns an agricultural project that provides

him with the basic necessities of a decent life. Omar suffers from a hearing impairment, and he has three brothers who have the same disability. After receiving financial aid from PCS, he has turned to farming. Like many other physically challenged people, Omar's life has changed thanks to PCS support. Omar speaks of two main stages in his life. One relates to his life before the realization of the project when he met with tremendous social and economic difficulties, and the other concerns his life after the implementation of the project. Economic empowerment has contributed to opening new horizons for Omar. He married, built a house, and formed a family. He now lives happily with his small family on his farm. As part of its economic empowerment program launched in 2010, the PCS has provided over 85 financial grants to finance small projects in cities and rural areas targeting young male



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and female Palestinians with various physical handicaps.

However, the economic empowerment program is only a small portion of many other programs that PCS organizes in support of the rights of differently

*Omar Odeh from the Eastern Plain near Jenin is running a vegetable farm to provide for his family. Photo courtesy of PCS.*



challenged persons. A program of note at the PCS pertains to monitoring and documenting violations committed against persons with special needs. The program operates in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and is the only such program in Palestine and the Arab region. The Unit for Monitoring and Documenting Violations against Handicapped Persons at the PCS comprises three field researchers and legal consultants who receive complaints about violations and follow them up with the relevant ministries. The unit has proven to be instrumental in ensuring that physically handicapped persons have their rights guaranteed pursuant to the Palestinian Disability Law No. 4 (1999) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The unit's legal consultant, Salah Mousa, explains, "During the past three years the unit has received more than 600 complaints and has achieved a major breakthrough in the manner in which government institutions deal with the cases of handicapped persons." According to Samer Zayoud, a young Palestinian with physical disability, the PCS unit responsible for monitoring and documenting violations against persons with special needs is very efficient and plays a key role in safeguarding the social and economic rights of physically handicapped persons. He notes, "As a result of efforts made by the unit, I was able to get a job as an engineering supervisor at the Ministry of Public Works."

The PCS believes that the question of physical disabilities has to be institutionalized and become part and parcel of the policies of the various ministries and institutions. In this respect, PCS has worked in close partnership with the ILO to integrate people with physical disabilities into the policies of the Palestinian Ministry of Labor, which also involved the review and amendment of the Palestinian Labor Law, its regulations and employment policy. Furthermore, the PCS cooperated with the Ministry

of Local Government to launch a paper calling for the integration of people with physical disabilities into the ministry's policy due to the role and effect the local government sector and municipalities have on people's lives. In fact, persons with physical disabilities have been employed in various institutions of 16 municipalities.

The PCS also targets children and has therefore supported the rehabilitation and development of 40 kindergartens in the northern districts of Palestine to accommodate children with physical disabilities. Kindergarten facilities and curricula have been revised and upgraded, and teachers were trained in order to meet the needs of handicapped children.

Public awareness campaigns have been organized through lobbying, advocacy, and the media to canvass support for the cases of the physically handicapped. In partnership with the General Palestinian Union for the Handicapped and Social Rehabilitation Programs, the PCS has contributed to reaching out to the largest segment of handicapped persons in cities, villages, and refugee camps. The assistance and support given over the past few years by the European Union, Diakonia, the French Consulate, the German Representative Office, the ILO, and DROSSOS Foundation have helped PCS implement its programs, ensure its sustainability, and reach out to the largest segment of Palestinian society.

Project of Enhancing and Protecting the Rights of people with disabilities in Palestinian Territories

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*The views represented in the article do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.*