



Women Solidarity Network

شبكة التضامن النسوي



“Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Peace Process and Public Policies in Yemen”

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**Peace Track Initiative, with the participation of the
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Background

The inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Yemen's peace process, public policies, and transitional justice is a critical issue for achieving sustainable peace and building an inclusive society in which all people can participate without exception. This inclusion is not merely a legal or humanitarian obligation; it is a strategic imperative to ensure social justice and balanced development, particularly in light of the exceptional circumstances Yemen continues to face as a result of war and protracted conflict.

Defining “Persons with Disabilities”

Before addressing rights-based advocacy, challenges, and policy responses, it is essential to clarify key concepts to ensure a shared and accurate understanding of the terms used.

Persons with Disabilities (PWDs): This is the internationally recognized term adopted by the United Nations and international conventions. It emphasizes the primacy of the individual, affirming that disability is neither a stigma nor a reduction of dignity or citizenship. Disability is a feature of human diversity, not an exceptional or negative condition.

Impairment: An impairment refers to any loss or abnormality of a physical, sensory, mental, or psychological function, such as the loss of sight, hearing, or mobility. It is primarily a medical or functional description that pertains to the individual.

Disability: Disability is not simply an individual attribute. Rather, it results from the **interaction between impairments and environmental, institutional, and behavioral barriers**, such as inaccessible buildings or societal discrimination. A person may have an impairment, but they are only considered “disabled” when they encounter an environment that is unaccommodating and non-inclusive, thereby limiting their full participation in public life.

Rising Disability Rates and the Impact of War

In recent years, Yemen has witnessed a significant increase in the number of persons with disabilities, with reported cases tripling since the outbreak of the war.

According to the United Nations' estimates for 2023, the number of persons with disabilities reached **approximately 4.5 million—around 15%** of the total population. This increase is directly linked to the effects of war, including injuries from mines and explosions, as well as the physical and psychological harm caused by displacement and the collapse of basic health services. Thousands of people are enduring severe psychological trauma and extremely harsh living conditions.

The Birth of the Disability Rights Movement

Amid widespread suffering, persons with disabilities — together with emerging civil society organizations — began to mobilize, both individually and collectively, to defend their rights and claim their rightful place in society.

This movement arose as a natural reaction to decades of marginalization and lack of representation, exacerbated by the consequences of war, which further deepened isolation and deprived persons with disabilities of opportunities for a dignified life and meaningful participation in their communities.

At first, the mobilization was unorganized, beginning with individual initiatives that gradually evolved into collective action, as efforts came together under shared banners and frameworks. Over time, the movement grew more visible and influential, establishing itself as a civil force challenging prevailing stereotypes that reduced persons with disabilities to “victims” or mere “recipients of aid,” rather than recognizing them as rights-holders and active partners in development and decision-making.

The emergence of this movement was far from easy. It faced considerable challenges in a society still marked by political conflict and division, compounded by weak or absent state institutions. Nevertheless, through persistence and collective effort, the movement succeeded in establishing the National Network for Advocating the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a significant milestone in its overall trajectory.

This network unified diverse initiatives within a structured framework, working to ensure the representation of persons with disabilities in key national matters, including the peace process and transitional justice. It emerged as a strong voice, conveying their demands to decision-makers at both the local and international levels.

Thus, what began as scattered initiatives has evolved into a deliberate and dynamic civil movement that seeks not only to alleviate suffering but also to advance legal and policy reforms and to help build a just society that guarantees dignity and equality for all.

State Weakness and the Voice of Persons with Disabilities

Although Yemen ratified the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** in 2008, the outbreak of war, coupled with political fragmentation and the collapse of effective state institutions, has led to a significant decline in official attention to disability issues.

This institutional vacuum underscored the need for an organized rights-based voice to represent persons with disabilities at the level of national policy and peace planning. The establishment of **the National Network for Advocating the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** marked a pivotal turning point: unifying efforts, bringing together diverse efforts, securing representation in national consultations, including development and recovery plans, and placing inclusion at the heart of transitional justice and sustainable peace agendas. As one war-wounded participant stated:

We no longer want to be seen as burdens or passive recipients of charity. We want to actively participate in decision-making and be recognized as part of the solution

This statement reflects the fundamental shift in how persons with disabilities perceive and assert their rights, moving from being passive recipients of aid to becoming active agents in decision-making and public policy formulation.

Structural and Societal Challenges

Despite the significant growth of the disability rights movement, persons with disabilities in Yemen continue to face a range of complex and interrelated challenges. These can be summarized as follows:

1- Displacement and violence:

Persons with disabilities bear a disproportionate burden during forced displacement. Many are heavily dependent on family members due to the lack of assistive devices, while also lacking adequate shelter and medication, further compounding their suffering in IDP camps.

2-Collapse of basic services:

The deterioration of the health sector and the breakdown of social protection systems have resulted in severe shortages of rehabilitation centers and essential assistive devices, making access to healthcare and rehabilitation nearly impossible.

3-Economic and development barriers:

High levels of poverty and unemployment, combined with the absence of training, vocational preparation, and employment opportunities, have deprived persons with disabilities of meaningful economic participation and prospects for self-reliance.

4-Societal and stereotyping barriers:

Prevailing social attitudes continue to perceive persons with disabilities as a burden. Women and girls with disabilities face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, further isolating them from public life.

5-Infrastructure and accessibility:

The lack of accessible facilities and transportation severely limits persons with disabilities' access to essential services, education, and employment opportunities.

6-Weak legal protection and political representation:

Although laws and international conventions exist, the absence of effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms, along with the harassment and intimidation of activists and the weak enforcement of legislation, has allowed violations to persist.

7-Psychological and social challenges:

The war has caused profound psychological trauma, including depression and chronic anxiety, while access to psychosocial support services remains almost entirely absent.

8-Environmental and climate risks:

Natural disasters, combined with the lack of disaster response plans tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities, have further worsened their vulnerability.

9-Weak local governance:

Local authorities have largely failed to integrate inclusive policies into their planning, often relying on superficial rhetoric about “empowerment” and leaving inclusion at the level of theory rather than practice.

10-Diversity and individual needs:

The needs of persons with disabilities vary widely, necessitating flexible, context-specific solutions that reflect individual diversity.

Political and Legal Challenges

Persons with disabilities in Yemen face persistent political marginalization, evidenced by their lack of meaningful representation within decision-making institutions and the weak enforcement of laws protecting their rights, despite Yemen’s ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They are frequently excluded from peace processes, transitional justice mechanisms, and recovery plans, or included only in tokenistic, symbolic ways that fall short of genuine influence. Moreover, some disability rights activists are subjected to intimidation, pressure, and threats, restricting their ability to participate fully in public life.

Transitional Justice and the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in transitional justice is essential for achieving sustainable peace, particularly since this group includes many direct victims of conflict, such as those injured by landmines or forcibly displaced.

Involving persons with disabilities in transitional justice processes:

- Recognizes and addresses their rights as direct victims.
- Strengthens the societal legitimacy of any peace process.
- Contributes to development and reconstruction efforts.
- Aligns with international obligations, including:
 - **The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**
 - **The Geneva Conventions**
 - **UN Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019)**

For these reasons, it is vital to ensure dedicated representation for persons with disabilities within transitional justice bodies, while also implementing comprehensive programs for reparation and rehabilitation.

Dynamics of Organization and Advocacy

Despite challenges and limited resources, the disability rights movement in Yemen has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for organization and innovation. Its strategies have included:

- Building networks between local and national organizations.
- Utilizing digital advocacy tools to document violations and expand outreach.
- Engaging women and youth with disabilities in leadership roles, thereby strengthening both credibility and representation.

Examples of successful initiatives

- Yemen Association for Landmine/UXO Survivors.
- Disability groups focused on development and peace.
- Establishing wheelchair sports teams and amputee football teams.
- Leveraging digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook for coordination and information sharing.

Role of the National Network on Disability Rights Advocacy

The National Network has played a significant role in building alliances at both the local and international levels. It has helped maintain the independence of the disability rights movement amid political polarization, while strengthening cooperation with the international community and UN organizations.

Risks and threats faced by the movement include:

- **Security and social risks:** Harassment and threats via social media, and the dismissal of some activists from their jobs.
- **Environmental and climate risks:** Lack of accessible shelters and difficulties in mobility under harsh climatic conditions.

- **Legal risks:** Weak institutional frameworks and the absence of effective protection for those engaged in rights-based and political advocacy.

Solutions and Recommendations to Enhance Inclusion

To address these challenges, the session report proposes a set of practical measures:

- ① **Strengthening National Representation and Advocacy:**
 - Support the National Network for Advocating the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as the primary representative body for persons with disabilities.
 - Enhance institutional capacity to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of advocacy efforts.
- ② **Integration into Development and Recovery Plans:**
 - Mainstream disability considerations into all reconstruction and recovery plans.
 - Ensure the provision of inclusive and accessible services.
- ③ **Infrastructure and Services Development:**
 - Allocate dedicated annual budgets to create and maintain accessible environments.
 - Enhance access to schools, health facilities, and other essential public services.
- ④ **Psychosocial support:**
 - Develop programs to address the psychological impacts of war and trauma.
 - Ensure the continuous provision of psychosocial support for persons with disabilities.
- ⑤ **Technology and innovation:**
 - Expand access to assistive technologies.
 - Provide digital tools to enhance access to information and services.
 - Promote local innovation in solutions for persons with disabilities.

⑥ Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms:

- Establish mechanisms to document violations and report them to the United Nations.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

⑦ Partnerships and Alliances:

- Build alliances that engage civil society, government institutions, and donors.
- Shift media discourse from a charitable framing to one centered on full citizenship and equal rights.

⑧ Legal and Political Protection:

- Adopt policies that prohibit discrimination and promote meaningful participation.
- Guarantee mandatory political representation for persons with disabilities within peace and reconciliation bodies.

⑨ Employment and Economic Empowerment:

- Mandate that institutions employ at least 5% of their workforce from among persons with disabilities.
- Establish dedicated funding mechanisms to support disability-led projects.
- Promote entrepreneurship and small business initiatives for persons with disabilities.

⑩ Education and Rehabilitation:

- Train teachers in inclusive education practices.
- Integrate disability perspectives into school curricula.
- Provide accessible digital learning platforms to ensure equal access to education.
- Develop adapted literacy programs for learners with diverse needs.
- Allocate reserved seats and offer exemptions in higher education for persons with disabilities.

Future Scenarios

• Positive scenario

The adoption of the proposed recommendations would empower the disability rights movement to evolve into an influential advocacy force, ensuring the meaningful and effective participation of persons with disabilities in peacebuilding and development efforts.

• Negative Scenario

Continued neglect would lead to deeper marginalization of persons with disabilities and a missed opportunity to build an inclusive and equitable society.

• Likely scenario

The movement maintains its flexibility and political independence, while international support expands, allowing its influence to grow gradually over time.

The Path Towards Comprehensive and Sustainable Inclusion

Including persons with disabilities in the peace process and public policy-making is neither a luxury nor an act of charity, it is a **fundamental pillar for building a just, inclusive, and sustainable society**. Empowering this community unlocks vast human potential that has long been marginalized and directly contributes to Yemen's stability and development.

The National Network for Advocating the Rights of Persons with Disabilities continues to serve as an influential, rights-based voice, bridging the representation gap and ensuring the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in shaping the future of their country, thereby strengthening the prospects for peace, equality, and sustainable development.