Not for publication

Call for inputs - report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on armed conflict

AKIM ISRAEL

AKIM Israel is the national organization for people with intellectual disabilities and their families, operating as a person-oriented organization. It represents 35,000 individuals with intellectual disabilities and their relatives while upholding human rights and freedoms.  Since its founding in 1951, the association acted to realize the rights, promote a better quality of living, and improve people with intellectual disabilities and their relatives' welfare, using legal advocacy and advocacy within the community.

AKIM works towards the inclusion of people with IDD in the community, empowering people for self-advocacy and integration into society. Based on its vision, the association promotes positive attitudes towards the people through AKIM's headquarters, 65 branches, and activity centers deployed in 88 towns and communities in Israel, both Jewish and Arab sectors, managed by parents and volunteers.

Alongside its advocacy work, AKIM, in partnership with the Welfare Ministry and local authorities, operates some 100 frameworks throughout the country that address education, community housing, employment, recreation and culture, and military enlistment.

**AKIM's vision**

To make the Israeli society a better place for people with intellectual disabilities and their families: a respecting, warm, and accepting community that facilitates self-realization, acknowledgment of difference, and commitment to equal opportunities.

**Protection of persons with disabilities under international humanitarian law**

The missiles and rockets attacks on Israel put civilians, including people with disabilities, in danger. So, in full cooperation with the Home Front Command, the Ministry of Welfare, and local authorities, we are working for the safety of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in high-risk areas (residents of the south who have been hit by hundreds of rockets each day). Unfortunately, given the nature of the ongoing conflict, this cooperation was created years ago. The Home Front Command established a special forum, together with organizations designed to locate people with disabilities who need assistance.

Our goal is to promote the well-being of people with disabilities that are at risk regardless of their religion, gender, or race. People with intellectual disabilities, Jews, and Arabs, who are at risk due to rockets' attack, receive all the support and assistance they need. We can provide financial aid, evacuation to a safe area when needed, emotional support, and legal aid.

1. Akim operates branches throughout the country in the Arab and Jewish sectors. There is excellent cooperation between all branches. Akim aims to bring hearts together between all sectors of the nation, including the Arab and Jewish, regarding people with IDD. For example, in the last rockets attack on Israel (May 2021), the Akim community's branches of Arabs in the north of the country opened their homes and hosted people with intellectual disabilities from the south.

2. Akim operates community housing for people with Intellectual disabilities from all sectors while respecting the tradition and culture of each person. Some of the frameworks are mixed (Jews and Arabs).

3. Akim is a partner at the National Unity Day initiative and organizes meetings and activities for people with intellectual disabilities and their families from all sectors.

4. During periods of rockets attack, Akim and the Home Front Command are working to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities and their families receive all the assistance they need.

5. In addition, Akim operates the Digital Community Center—digital employment and leisure services in "Zoom" for activities and distractions for people who are forced to stay in shelters and secure places all day and night.

6. Akim also works to exercise the rights of refugees with intellectual disabilities in Israel, for example, in the education system.

7. Akim collaborated with the Israeli Army to recognize the ineligibility to stand a trial due to a disability (intellectual, mental, or autism) in the Palestinian territories following a case of conviction in a military court of a young Palestinian with intellectual disability who threw stones at Israeli soldiers.

**Article 11 of the CRPD and/or UN Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019)**

The State of Israel ratified the CRPD in 2012 out of a commitment to all its sections, including Article 11. Akim promotes the ratification and the implementation of the CRPD. AKIM is also part of the Civil Society Forum for implementing the Convention, which handover a shadow report to the CRPD committee. As for UN Council Resolution no. 2,475, we are in the process of learning the resolution and determining courses of action to advance its implementation.

In this context, in 2020, following the tragic incident - the death of Iyad al-Halak, a young Arab man with autism was shot in the middle of the day by a mop border guard in East Jerusalem for no wrongdoing and without posing any risk, Akim turned to various governing agencies regarding the lack of training of police officers and security officials in dealing with people with disabilities, especially people with 'invisible' disabilities. Following this appeal and inquiries from many other organizations representing people with disabilities in Israel, The President of Israel, Mr. Reuven Rivlin, has announced the formation of an Inter-Ministerial Committee to Change conduct of Security and Enforcement Forces towards People with Disabilities. Akim's CEO, Mrs. Sigal Peretz Yahalomi, chaired a subcommittee that dealt with improving the interfaces between the enforcement and security forces and people with disabilities. The committee's report, with the recommendations, was published at the end of 2020. We intend to monitor the implementation of the report's recommendations.

**Criminal acts that specifically target persons with disabilities.**

Akim condemns acts and criminal offenses against civil society, including, and in particular, toward people with disabilities. Thus, Akim strongly condemns the use of people with disabilities as human shields in combat zones.

**People with Intellectual disabilities in the army – "Equal in Uniforms"**

In general, in Israel, every person over 18 is required to serve in the IDF (the Israeli Army). People with intellectual disabilities are exempt from this compulsory service. Ten years ago, Akim worked with the IDF and the Ministry of Welfare to enable people with intellectual disabilities to serve in the IDF. Today, hundreds of people with intellectual disabilities, autism, and other developmental disabilities undergo a process of enlistment (full or partial) or volunteer in the IDF. They serve in IDF bases around the country as part of the unique program "Equals in Uniform." The program includes training courses and ongoing guidance of the people as needed. Beyond the positive effects this program has on the people themselves, who feel an integral part of Israeli society, the program also has positive effects on the attitudes of military personnel towards people with disabilities.

**Policies or programs exist that allow persons serving in the armed forces to continue serving in cases where they acquire a disability**

Since intellectual disability is a developmental disability (as opposed to head injuries resulting from an accident or combat), Akim does not act on this issue. Many other organizations represent people who were injured during military service.

**Assistance for persons experiencing psychosocial trauma as a consequence of armed conflict (civilian, current military, or former military)**

Akim supports all people with intellectual disabilities and their families living in high-risk areas and who are suffering from psychosocial trauma:

1. Akim operates a parental support line for parents. Hundreds of inquiries are received, including from people and families in risk areas. When there's a military or civil escalation, Akim expands the line's operations time. The people, who apply, receive initial emotional support and are referred to a suitable responsible body (e.g., social workers, local authorities, or psychologists).

2. In addition, Akim operates throughout the country by 65 branches. People with intellectual disabilities and their families consider Akim's local branches as a support address when needed.

3. In various cases, when there is significant mental deterioration exalted due to the rockets attack, Akim helps evacuate people and their families to safe areas. For example, people with intellectual disabilities and challenging behavior might react harshly to the need to stay in bomb shelters or safe zones.

4. In Akim's supportive housing, people with IDD receiving support through group conversations, personal conversations, information, and mental help if needed.

5. The Akim Training Center and the Akim Institute for Cognitive Accessibility provide information in linguistic simplification, which is distributed to the people and their families.

**Services granted to veterans with disabilities on the one hand and civilians with disabilities on the other**

There is a difference in the provision of services granted to veterans with disabilities and the services provided to people with disabilities. There is currently separate legislation for veterans. There is also separate legislation and different services for different groups of people with disabilities.

Together with other organizations, Akim strives to bring about the regulation of the rights of people with disabilities in a single law that will reflect uniformity and transparency in the rights of people with disabilities. There are organizations of veterans groups with disabilities in Israel. We collaborate with these organizations mainly on promoting employment in the free market, the duty of employers to employ people with disabilities, and the like.