To commemorate the nineteenth anniversary of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, announced by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1992, and to stress the need to respect, promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and dedicate all efforts to achieve full equality among all human beings, Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation deemed it necessary to issue this statement, reviewing the current situation of people with disabilities in the Palestinian territories and the obstacles that prevent them from fully enjoying their rights and from effectively participating in society.

This International Day is not merely a celebratory event; but a day for seriously reviewing and responsibly evaluating the harsh reality experienced by people with disabilities as well as the measures and plans to be worked on in order to find sustainable solutions to improve their conditions and promote their inclusion and active participation in their communities.

About 113 thousand people with disabilities, representing 2.7% of the total population of the Palestinian territories (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, PCBS, disability survey 2011) face the most difficult realities compared to their counterparts living in neighboring countries. As the rest of the Palestinian population, people with disabilities suffer from constant violations of their human rights under the Israeli occupation. Since the beginning of the second intifada, the Israeli occupation forces killed 89 persons with disabilities and injured more than 105 persons. Another 45 persons with disabilities are languishing in the Israeli jails, experiencing unhealthy and harsh conditions in light of the medical neglect policy of detention in Israeli prisons (Palestinian Center of human rights, 2011).

The deterioration of the socio-economic conditions and the increase to unprecedented levels of poverty and unemployment, now as high as 45.2% of the population, caused by the strained political situation in the Palestinian territories, has contributed to the worsening of the living conditions of people with disabilities, as they suffer from lack of access to health care, rehabilitation, education and livelihood opportunities.

At the level of the Palestinian society, people with disabilities extremely suffer from the slowdown and procrastination in the implementation of the provisions of the Palestinian law concerning the rights of people with disabilities No. 4 of 1999, which addresses their right to health, rehabilitation, social protection, education and employment. As indicated by the PCBS disability survey 2011, 37% of people with disabilities in the Palestinian territories did not have access to education; and a large part of those who were enrolled in educational institutions dropped out and were unable to pursue their education due to lack of accessibility and readiness of the educational institutions. 84% of people with disabilities were unable to find decent jobs and another 76.4% of them cannot use public transportation given its inaccessibility.

People with disabilities not only constantly face physical barriers, but also attitudinal barriers caused by negative societal attitudes which directly prevent their inclusion and active participation in various community activities. Statistics reported by PCBS 2011 show that 8.7% of people with disabilities in the Palestinian territories avoid participating in community activities.
because of the negative attitudes of others.

BASR calls upon all concerned ministries and institutions to expedite the implementation of the provisions of the Palestinian law on the rights of people with disabilities No. 4 of 1999, and consolidate efforts to develop national plans and programs to ensure the full realization of the rights of people with disabilities.