



Interview with His Royal Highness Prince Mired bin Raad Zeid Al-Hussein of Jordan*

Born in Amman on 11 June 1965, His Royal Highness Prince Mired Raad Zeid Al-Hussein earned his BA degree from Tufts University in 1987 and his MA degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1995, with a specialization in international relations/strategic studies. He continued his education at Cambridge University, England, where he received an MPhil in historical studies in 1998. In addition, Prince Mired attended the British Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 1990 and served for several years in the Jordanian Armed Forces, reaching the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Upon leaving the military, Prince Mired decided to continue serving his country by other means, dedicating his life to humanitarian and social causes. He has been the Chairman of the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation since 2004, and from November 2007 to November 2008 he was President of the Eighth Meeting of States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. He has also served as the Special Envoy of the Convention since 2009 and has had the honour and privilege of travelling the world advocating for further accession by countries that have not yet acceded to the Convention, as well as calling for the implementation of the Convention's articles by the States that have done so.

Prince Mired is also President of the Hashemite Commission for Disabled Soldiers, a position he has held since 2000. Over the course of the last two decades, the Commission has been able to provide a wide variety of different services, acting as

* Interview conducted by Bruno Demeyere, Editor-in-Chief of the *Review*.

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a support network to all servicemen and servicewomen with disabilities in the Kingdom.

In addition, from 2008 through to 2013, Prince Mired served as Vice-President of the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, and in 2014 he was appointed by Royal Decree to serve as its President, succeeding his father, HRH Prince Raad Bin Zeid. In 2017, with the passing of groundbreaking new legislation calling for the rights of persons with disabilities, the Council was renamed as the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Prince Mired also served a short stint as President of the Jordanian Paralympic Committee from 2017 to 2018.

On 28 February 2021, in addition to all his aforementioned responsibilities, Prince Mired was appointed by Royal Decree as Chief Chamberlain to His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al-Hussein of Jordan.

Prince Mired is married to HRH Princess Dina Mired. They have three children, Shirin, Rakan and Jafar.

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Jordan was one of the first States to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD] in 2008. How does Your Royal Highness, President of the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as of 2014, engage in favour of the rights of persons with disabilities?¹

The Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a government entity. It is led by a board of trustees and can include up to twenty-five members. It currently includes twenty-one members: nine of them are persons with disabilities, three of them are relatives of persons with disabilities, eight are experts in various aspects of disability, and then there is myself.

The Council engages with all entities, mostly government, ministries and public entities, to advocate for the right of persons with disabilities, and to raise the capacities of various government entities. The Council also encourages these entities to respect the rights of persons with disabilities, to increase employment among such persons and to make government offices accessible, among other issues.

We work on education, accessibility, deinstitutionalization, employment, inclusive tourism, access to justice, political participation and many other issues. We look at disability from a strategic perspective, which has been a big change, especially since 2017. For many years in Jordan, we were not looking at issues

1 International Disability Alliance, “All Commitments Made by Jordan[’s] Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”, available at: www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/commitments/stakeholder/jordan-higher-council-rights-persons-disabilities (all internet references were accessed in November 2022).

from a macro and/or strategic perspective. Since 2017, however, we have continuously looked at the big issues and have tried to devise plans and strategies to tackle the issues faced by persons with disabilities.

The Council is also a watchdog, and it is our responsibility to prepare an annual report on the progress – or lack thereof – that has been made. Of course, things are not perfect: we have numerous challenges to deal with and the results can sometimes be mixed. On some issues we are doing well and on others we can do much better. Overall, it's a work in progress and we keep on moving forwards and upwards, which is what is important.

We also engage with the private sector with respect to the rights of persons with disabilities in terms of employment, accessibility etc. This is also a great challenge and there is always room for improvement, but again, we are doing better than before.

Our readers are also interested to know how States incorporate, at the domestic level, treaty commitments undertaken at the international level. Jordan provides a unique example with its Law No. 20 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,² adopted in 2017. What did this law intend to achieve, according to you, Your Royal Highness? What was the initial ambition and drive behind this law, and has it accomplished all of its aims?

In 2012/13, a legal committee was created to analyze the law we had for persons with disabilities, as it was considered outdated and not fully compliant with the CRPD.³ The committee was hence mandated to draft a new, progressive law for the rights of persons with disabilities.

This committee did a tremendous job and consulted with all sectors of society such as children, university students, practitioners, academics, experts in disability and NGOs, as well as the public and private sectors. It took about four years to come up with the final draft of the law. During its development, there was a big debate on how ambitious the law should be. My view on the matter was that the law should be ambitious, challenging and progressive. The law was finally legislated in 2017.

Law No. 20 is an ambitious law not only because it provides line ministries and authorities with time-bound specific commitments, but also because it is the first piece of anti-discrimination legislation in the Arab world, whereby violence is defined as a denial or a restriction of a certain right or freedom. So, any discriminatory act made on the grounds of disability – for example, preventing a child from enrolling in a school because he or she is a person with a disability – is rendered an act of violence, per Article 30 of said law. The law also introduces a number of new concepts and definitions that are rights-based.

2 Law No. 20 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2017, available at: <http://hcd.gov.jo/en/content/law-rights-persons-disabilities-no-20-year-2017>.

3 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNGA Res. 61/106, 24 January 2007 (entered into force 3 May 2008).

As it is in most countries, the drafting was the easy part. Of course, the implementation is what really matters. Now we are in the implementation phase of the law. We are doing relatively well on most topics such as inclusive education, deinstitutionalization and employment, although it has not been without its challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am happy and content with the results so far, but of course, I want us to achieve much more. There are many new fields that we have to look at. For example, we are presently investing more and more time and energy in inclusive tourism. Hopefully, in the future we will hit many birds with one stone, as tourism as a whole is our “bread and butter”. It will have a positive impact in terms of visibility, accessibility and employment.

Your Royal Highness is involved as Chairman of the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation and President of the Hashemite Commission for Disabled Soldiers. How does Your Royal Highness’ work on anti-personnel mines and disabilities interconnect?⁴

This was my starting point and the area I have been working on for the past twenty-two years. The common denominator between the three entities that I chair⁵ has been disability, and it has been my biggest honour and privilege to serve our civilians and soldiers with disabilities.

Regarding the clearing of landmines and minefields, that has been a resounding success in Jordan. We are considered as one of the success stories in the Ottawa Treaty,⁶ and I am very proud of that. Of course, we do have victims and survivors of landmines, with 55% of them being soldiers and the remaining 45% civilians. It is our responsibility to make sure that they are looked after to the greatest extent possible. We try to have a parallel approach; we work on the structural issues but we also work on providing personalized assistance for civilians and helping to make sure that their rights are respected.

For soldiers with disabilities, the Hashemite Commission makes sure to provide soldiers with disabilities with the best possible assistance and to ensure that they live a dignified life in which they can fulfil their interests and livelihoods.

For me, it is so important that we provide the right assistance to soldiers and civilians, and for them to live a dignified life so that they can fulfil their dreams. That is ultimately what we are aiming for.

Regarding disability amongst displaced populations – Syrian migrants and refugees, and Jordan’s Zaatari Refugee Camp – the statistics that we have from

4 HRH Prince Mired R. Z. Al-Hussein, “Editorial: The Challenge of Managing Mine Action in Jordan”, *Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2019, available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2864&context=cisr-journal>.

5 The National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation, the Hashemite Commission for Disabled Soldiers and the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

6 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, UNGA Res. 52/38, 3 December 1997 (entered into force 1 March 1999).

the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] show that “out of around 664,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan registered with the UNHCR, approximately 26,000 people, or 3.5%, have disabilities”.⁷ In your experience, what are the challenges and the ways to increase opportunities for these individuals?

Regarding the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it is our responsibility to ensure that any individual on Jordanian territory is afforded his or her rights within the law. These include the right to education, employment, access to justice, health care and accessibility, among many others.

The question of the delivery of services is more complicated when it comes to Syrian refugees, particularly ensuring that these refugees are afforded these rights, because, especially when it comes to areas such as this, service delivery does not only rest or depend on the quality of the service that is provided, but rather on whether it is accessible to refugees with disabilities or not, and if so, how. In this case, UNHCR has taken the lead in the provision of services, but we do also have several Jordanian development organizations and foundations that provide support. There are a multitude of international NGOs that help fill in the gap as well.

For Palestinian refugees, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East plays a very important role and handles many of the rights relating to education and health care.

Whatever we do in Jordan, and as the Higher Council, it's important to us to ensure that all persons with disabilities enjoy the rights afforded to them as per the CRPD and the laws of the country.

Our next question has to do with access to services specifically geared towards addressing the needs of persons with disabilities, in particular aid and rehabilitation services.⁸ What are the biggest challenges, and ways to overcome them, to ensuring the dissemination of information regarding these services? Are persons with disabilities effectively claiming access to these aid and rehabilitation services?

We are a developing country. As such, the services we provide in Jordan are “patchy”, if I may say so, as it all depends on where one resides and the type of disability one may have. In some parts of the country there are more and better services than in others.

This is of course one of the issues we are trying to work on, so that wherever one lives in Jordan, they will receive the necessary assistance and services. But it is difficult and costly, and I wish I had a magic wand in my hand and could

7 Hadeel Al Rawabdeh, “Disabled Syrian Children in Jordan: Exclusion from Education Exacerbates the Difficulties of Asylum”, *Syria Direct*, 13 April 2021, available at: <https://syriadirect.org/disabled-syrian-children-in-jordan-exclusion-from-education-exacerbate-the-difficulties-of-asylum/>.

8 Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, “A Memorandum to Facilitate the Access of Persons with Disabilities to Rehabilitation Services in Health Centres”, 24 August 2021, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/mx5ja8x7>.

immediately change for the better the services that we have in the country. My feeling is that of course things will get better gradually as we work more comprehensively and at a strategic level.

We are also examining the different types of disability, and what services are available for each – the quality of care and the quantity. How do we address the shortfalls and the gaps? For example, when it comes to persons with autism, we need to take a look at the whole sector and how to improve it by ensuring that capacities are continually enhanced and that efforts are sustained and maintained in the long run. The same is true for all the other types of disability. It is a work in progress.

One of the things we are doing is to redo the diagnostic testing of persons with disabilities in Jordan. We have roughly 1.2 million persons with disabilities in Jordan, and we must redo the diagnostic testing of all of them. Then the data collected will be entered into the national database. The reason we are undertaking this huge enterprise is because we came to the conclusion that the diagnostic testing that was previously undertaken was not done to a high enough standard; today our standards and knowledge of diagnostic testing are much more thorough and robust. It is going to take a long time and is a costly venture, but it is important to have the most accurate data available to ensure that all our planning for the future is spot-on and relevant.

Your Royal Highness has worked towards inclusive education; how do you think education can shape and influence the perception of disability among future generations?⁹

Education, in my humble view, is the most important issue. If we don't work on education correctly, we won't get anything right in the future.

It saddens me to say that on this issue, like in most developing countries, only a small percentage of children with disabilities are getting a proper formal education in Jordan. Most children with disabilities are either at home or in day-care centres. It is a big problem for us in Jordan, and it is a situation that is considered unacceptable. We are trying our best to turn it around. We have, in our Law No. 20 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, clear and concise articles on inclusive education. In 2020 we launched a national strategy on inclusive education, and we are now in the preparatory phase of the implementation plan. We have been extremely fortunate to receive very generous support from the German government, through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [German Agency for International Cooperation], for inclusive education.

Even though we are well on our way, it will still take some time to increase the number of children with disabilities receiving an inclusive education. In Jordan, as in most other developing States, there is stigma and persons with disabilities are

9 “Prince Mired Meets UNESCO Jordan Representative”, *Jordan Times*, 10 August 2021, available at: www.jordantimes.com/news/local/prince-mired-meets-unesco-jordan-representative.

often discriminated against, and as a result there aren't many examples of persons with disabilities with education and skills in the workforce. With more educated persons with disabilities, there will be increased visibility and this will in turn increase their inclusion within society at large.

We want persons with disabilities to be productive taxpayers, and education is key to ensuring that. What worries me is that we, as a world community, are failing children with disabilities in the developing world. How will children with disabilities, who have not received a proper education, be able to compete with others? The gap between those who have and those who have not is getting ever wider and bigger. This is a great concern. I think there needs to be a huge investment and focus on education.

Donor countries and international donor organizations that fund education *must* make their large-scale grants disability-sensitive, in the same way that they are always gender-sensitive. Such incentives will ensure that inclusive education and other rights of persons with disabilities happen at the pace that they ought to. It's not a lost opportunity, and it is something that donor countries and agencies need to look at.

Why is it important to work on changing cultural attitudes and perceptions towards accepting and supporting people with disabilities, and how does Your Highness work towards this?

Primarily, and as I said before, the main concern is education. We need more examples of persons with disabilities who are doing well, are successful, and are flourishing in their lives. This will break all the taboos and many of the barriers that they presently face. Media can also do a lot to shine a light on persons with disabilities and show that they can do anything they wish to, when provided with the opportunity and the right accommodations.

I also think that we need to be more gentle, understanding and empathetic. In Jordan, in the Arabic language, there are many terms that are politically incorrect and which have negative connotations. These terms are often used in the public discourse. We are doing our best to turn this around and educate the public so that these terms are no longer used, for example by having suppressed the use of the expression “not fit for work”.¹⁰

One major development is the amendment that we recently made to the Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The language used in two particular articles of the Constitution was deemed “politically incorrect”, as persons with disabilities were referred to in pejorative terms. We worked hard to ensure that the articles were amended. Now, the terminology in our Constitution is compliant with the CRPD. All the other legislations now need to change and

10 Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, “The Supreme Council and the Ministry of Health: Repeal the Phrase ‘Unfit to Work’ for Persons with Disabilities”, 2 May 2021, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/5hd5fjyt>.

adapt the language and terminology to be compliant with what we have in the Constitution.

Do you see any region-specific dynamics, in the Middle East or Arabic-speaking world, both in terms of challenges and opportunities for cooperation – for example, the visit of the Iraqi delegation in August 2021?¹¹

We do have contacts with our neighbouring countries, and we exchange ideas. But as for big initiatives, we haven't had many working relations until now. However, we are very much looking forward to working on this together with them.

We want to work with and consult our neighbours on what we consider to be the major issue, which is the deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities. In Jordan we have many residential centres and orphanages that house persons with intellectual disabilities, and many of them come from neighbouring countries. We have an article in our Law No. 20 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹² stating that all institutions need to be closed within a period of ten years or be changed to inclusive day-care centres. This is probably going to be the main issue that we will work on with our neighbours.

What has been your experience of advocacy and cooperation on the question of disabilities and inclusion with international organizations and representatives of different countries?

In general, I think that we all need to do a lot more. Persons who have experienced conflict and trauma live extremely difficult lives, no matter where they are. It is hard enough to leave your home and live in another country due to conflict and violence, but with a disability, it is that much harder. As an international community, we need to pay more attention to persons with disabilities fleeing from or living in conflict and violent settings and try to better their lives.

My opinion is that we are not doing enough and there is a lot more that can be done, especially on the psychosocial aspect. Concerning mental health, there is a tremendous need at the moment and there is a big void that needs to be addressed. The international community could be focusing more on that particular area by designing grants and programmes specifically targeting persons with psychosocial disabilities, so that more expertise can be brought into the Kingdom – not only to generate more awareness, but to better organize the sector, providing greater attention through creating a system of care that is equipped with resources, structures and personnel who are fully equipped to serve those with psychosocial disabilities.

11 Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "Iraqi Delegation Briefed on the Kingdom's Experience in the Field of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities", 1 August 2021, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/54wsm5we>.

12 Law No. 20, above note 2, Art. 27.

Regarding funding and donors, funding should be earmarked to disability just as it is made gender-sensitive. Jordan and many other developing countries receive a handsome amount of support and money from donors, but rarely, if ever, is disability mentioned. If disability is made a component for funding, then the bureaucrats in the developing world will wake up and everyone will talk about this, and this will make a huge, huge difference. In Jordan, I am always in contact with our ministers and those who have been sensitized to disability. Once they have been sensitized to disability, they work on it and push towards the direction of inclusivity and ensuring that the rights of persons with disabilities are respected.

The governments of Germany and Jordan will co-host the third Global Disability Summit in 2025. What will be the priorities for the upcoming summit? Do you have any insights on the priorities that you need to place on the table? Will there be a specific focus on the intersectionality of armed conflict and disability?

I can't say for certain now that there will be a specific emphasis on the intersectionality of armed conflict and disability. Disability is such a broad topic with a variety of specific issues that need to be addressed, so I can't say for now which topics will be highlighted. But the year 2025 will be an important opportunity to highlight the importance of the rights of persons with disabilities: it will be the first time that heads of State and world leaders will come together particularly and only to discuss the issues and rights of persons with disabilities. Therefore, it will be an extremely important avenue for highlighting these issues and if every head of State goes home with even one or two ideas on how to better the lives of persons with disabilities, it will be a tremendous achievement.

I believe that up until now, we have lacked seriousness on this issue. We need to come up with serious and implementable plans. People are waiting, and they are fed up. Many persons with disabilities feel like they are second-class citizens in their own countries; there is no education at the standard they want and deserve, and there is not enough accessibility. Employment, health care and political participation – with a lack of accessible polling stations – are all a problem, not only in Jordan but in many other developing countries.

The Global Disability Summit 2025 will be a great opportunity for Jordan to highlight all the challenges it faces in pushing the disability rights agenda forward within the Kingdom. This is noteworthy because these persistent challenges that exist in Jordan – such as affording children with disabilities an inclusive education, deinstitutionalizing orphanages and residential services, and providing accessibility, employment, political participation and rehabilitation services – are all matters that are relevant and vexing in the vast majority of developing countries.

The central issues are, how can we bridge the gap in the years to come, and how can we allot greater sums of money to make sure that persons with disabilities are afforded their rights?

In terms of building on the work towards the sensitization of the general population, do you see an opportunity in the lead-up to the summit? What do you think it would take for society to make that switch towards including persons with disabilities?

Education is the most important thing. There need to be more children with disabilities in schools and in universities. There need to be more persons with disabilities employed. The increase in visibility of persons with disabilities will normalize disability issues instead of stigmatizing them, and will ultimately increase inclusion. Diversity is part of life, we are all different, and the population will be sensitized to the issue more if we increase the education and visibility of persons with disabilities.

In the lead-up to 2025, it will be important to have champions and to highlight persons with disabilities who are doing tremendously well in their work and lives. But there is also this expectation that persons with disabilities are superheroes and that they should always do exceptionally well despite the challenges they face. Most persons with disabilities are human beings who are doing well or average in their lives, just as are all persons without disabilities. That should be appreciated and respected as well.

The summit will go a long way towards shining a positive light on this, but of course, it's not just the summit that is important, but the follow-ups to make sure that countries do as they promise. One of the issues that is upsetting is the mere talk without concrete changes. When I meet with decision-makers, I hear language that is wonderful, but sometimes nothing happens, or it takes a long time for things to change on the ground. And this is where we need to be more serious. It shouldn't be just idle words – there need to be concrete actions. And this is not just in the developing world, but in the developed world as well.

We need to ensure that we close the gap between the haves and have-nots in the developing world. We need to plan seriously and implement strategies to ensure that persons with disabilities are not stigmatized or discriminated against, and that they receive all their rights.

Do you have a final message that you would like to share with our readers?

I think that when it comes to disability at large, often in the developing world, the excuse is always that there is no money. In my humble view, it's not a question of money but rather a question of priority. Where is disability on the priority ladder? Is it on the ladder at all, and if so, is it at the bottom or the top of the ladder? If disability is on the ladder of national priorities, the availability of funds for persons with disabilities will also be higher.

If it's not a national priority, then we need to work on that. According to the World Health Organization, 15% of the population are persons with disabilities, and in some countries, it is much higher. Family members are indirectly affected and are not included in the 15%, but their needs must also be considered and respected as they are an integral part of the equation.

Therefore, the rights and issues of persons with disabilities need to be made a national priority.