



Public reception area of the Palestinian Ministry of Health Referral Abroad Department in Gaza, 2015. © WHO.

Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: RAD 9 (Oct. 20, 2015)

Summary: September 2015

Exit permit approval rate drops to 7 in 10 Gaza patients, lowest rate in 6 years

- **Erez crossing:** Of the 1,883 referral patients who applied for permits to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in September, only 71.59% were approved. 19.28% received no response to their applications (363 patients, including 104 children) and 9.13% were denied permits (172 patients, including 5 children and 10 elderly patient over 60 years old). 4 male patients were requested to attend Israeli security interviews after applying for a permit, 2 were later approved. 92% of permit applications were from MoH referral patients, 5.03% were financed by NGOs and other donors and 2.97% were self-funded. According to the Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza. (Source: Palestinian District Liaison office in Gaza) **One patient was arrested by Israeli security at Erez.** (Story on page 7.)

Rafah: No access for patients

- **Rafah border:** The Rafah terminal was open to Egypt on 5 days during September for pilgrims only. No medical aid and no medical delegations were allowed entry into Gaza during the month. In the first 9 months of 2015, the border was open on 24 days only, allowing 148 patients to cross into Egypt for health care. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah monthly for health-related access.

MoH referrals in September

- **Ministry of Health referrals depend on access:** Of the 1,760 Gaza patients referred by the Ministry of Health, 86% depended on access approvals from Israel (78%) or Egypt (8%). The main referral specialties needed were in oncology, orthopaedic surgery, ophthalmology, paediatrics, and heart catheterization. (Source: Ministry of Health Referral Abroad Department in Gaza)
- **Gender gap:** The gender gap in Gaza referrals remained wide: 54.6% male patients versus 45.4% female patients. 27% of all referrals were for children aged 0-17 years and 19% were for patients aged over 60 years.
- **Estimated cost of referrals for September:** NIS 9,821,335.

REFERRALS

Referrals of Gaza patients

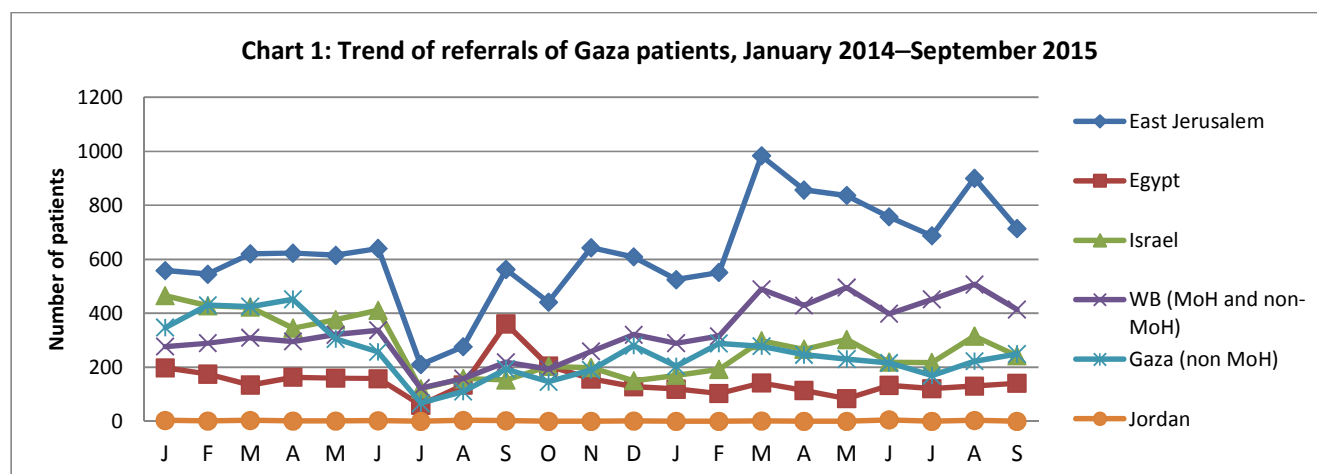
The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 1,760 referrals for Gaza patients in September, according to the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) data in Gaza¹ (Table 1). The total was similar to the monthly average in 2015 of 1,755.

Table 1: Palestinian MoH referrals by destination, January to September 2015

Referral Destination	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	TOTAL
Gaza (non-MoH facilities)	204	288	278	246	230	216	169	222	249	2,102
WB (MoH and non-MoH)	289	315	489	429	495	398	452	507	414	3,788
East Jerusalem	525	551	983	857	836	757	687	900	714	6,810
Jordan	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	4
Israel	170	192	298	267	303	219	218	315	242	2,224
Egypt	119	103	142	114	84	133	121	130	141	1,087
Total	1,307	1,449	2,191	1,913	1,948	1,723	1,647	2,077	1,760	16,015

Source: MoH Referral Abroad Department, Gaza.

In comparison with the monthly average of the first half of the year 2015, referrals to Egypt were slightly higher, although the border remained closed during September. Referrals to other destinations were average for the year (Table 1; Chart 1). The 249 referrals to non-MoH facilities within Gaza were mainly for MRI (94), heart catheterization (73), rehabilitation (32), urology (18) and pediatrics (9), and the remaining (23) were in 11 different specialties.



Of the 1,760 patients issued Ministry of Health referrals in September, 86% depended on access approvals from Israel or Egypt: 78% (1,370 patients) required Israeli permits to exit through Erez crossing and 8% (141 patients) required approval from Egypt to exit through Rafah (and required the Rafah border to be accessible). 27.16% of all patients referred by the MoH were children aged 0-17 years and 19.2% were patients over 60 years. Female referral patients were 45.4% of the total, compared to 54.6% male patients. 91.19% of referrals in September were for hospital admissions and 8.81% for outpatient clinics. The Ministry of Health processed 73.6% of all applications within 7 days, compared to less than 10% in January, before a web-based approval tracking system was installed. Scheduling of appointments in private and NGO hospitals continues to slow the processing, however.

¹ The MoH Referral Abroad Department (RAD) in Gaza data reflects the number of patient applications approved for financial coverage by the central RAD office in Ramallah.

The five top referral destinations were Makassed Hospital (22.27%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (12.16%) in East Jerusalem, An Najah National University Hospital (8.58%) in Nablus, Al-Haia center for heart catheterization in Gaza (4.38%) and Nasser Institute in Cairo (4.09%). The remaining appointments (48.5%) were in 40 other hospitals. Among 13 referring hospitals in the Gaza Strip, Shifa referred 793 patients in September (45.06% of the total), 304 (17.27%) were from the European Gaza Hospital (EGH), 153 (8.69%) from Rantisi pediatric hospital, 122 (6.93%) were from Nasser hospital, and 88 (5%) from the Ophthalmic hospital.

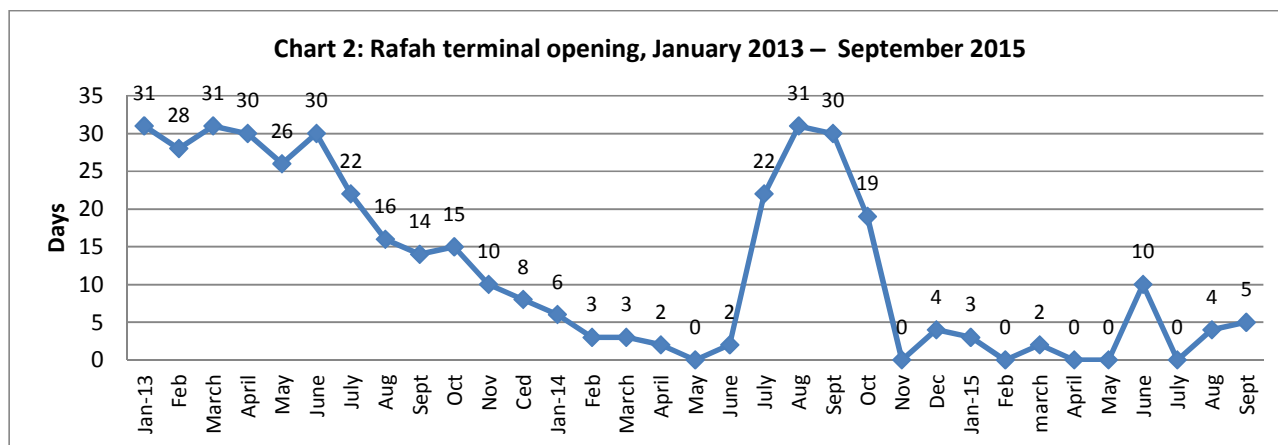
The central Referral Department in Ramallah reported 2,050 referrals² for Gaza patients in September, 290 referrals more than the total from the Gaza office, with an estimated cost of **NIS 9,821,335**.

Medical reasons for referrals: The top ten specialties for Gaza patient referrals in September were: oncology—269 referrals (15.28%), orthopaedic surgery—156 (8.86%), ophthalmology—125 (7.1%), pediatrics—124 (7.05%), heart catheterization—116 (6.59%), nuclear medicine—113 (6.42%), hematology—105 (5.97%), MRI—105 (5.97%), neurosurgery—90 (5.11%), and urology—75 (4.26%); the remaining 482 (27.39%) referrals were in 20 other specialities.

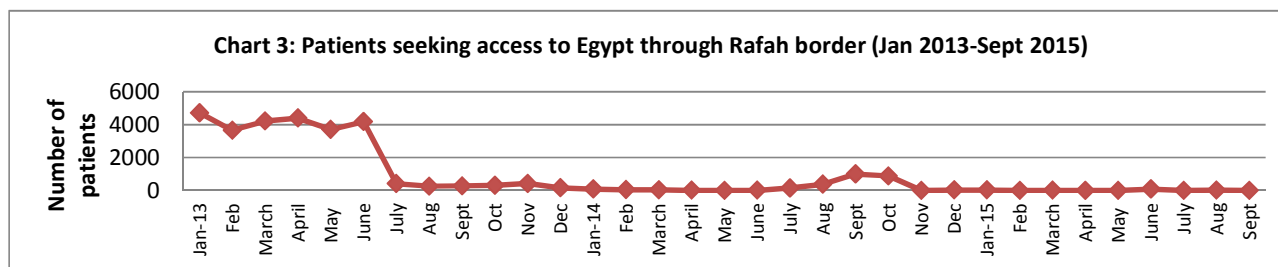
Access through Rafah terminal

Access to Egypt restricted to pilgrims only: According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the terminal was opened on 5 days in September allowing 2,827 pilgrims to travel, of whom 31 were returned by the Egyptian authorities. 484 returning pilgrims crossed into Gaza during the month.

With the exception of pilgrims, only humanitarian cases are permitted travel, including patients, university students studying abroad and individuals holding legal residency in other countries but in September no patients or other travellers for humanitarian reasons were allowed to cross. No medical delegations or medical aid entered Gaza through Rafah during the month. Rafah terminal has been closed by the Egyptian authorities since July 2013 except for the exit of a very limited number of humanitarian cases in a very limited number of days (**Chart 2**). In September the terminal was closed in 25 days out of 30.



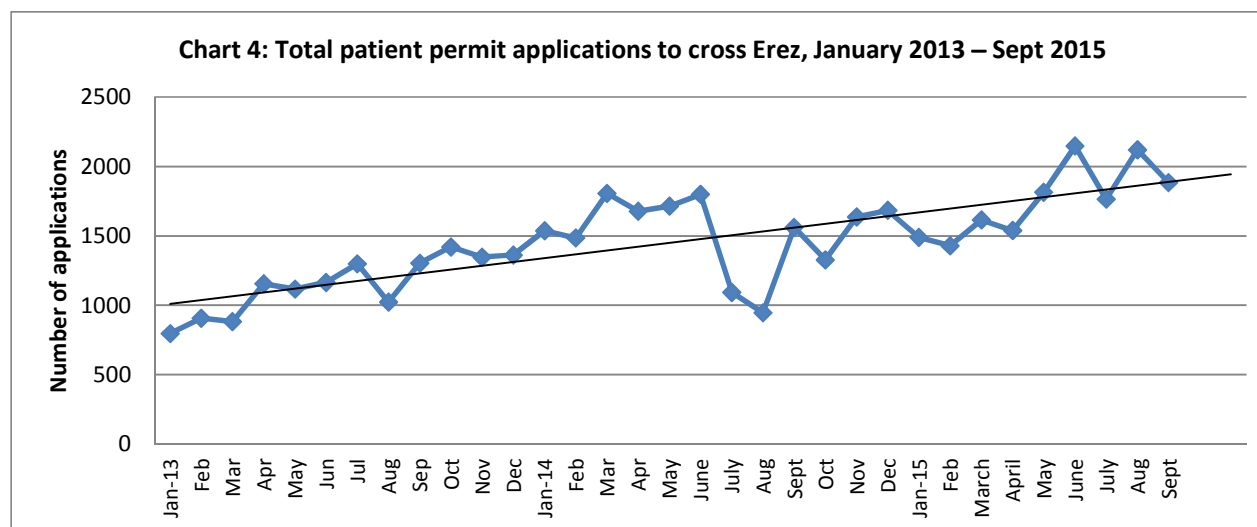
Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah monthly for health-related access. The border has been opened a total of only 24 days so far this year, allowing only 148 Gaza patients to cross into Egypt for health care out of 1087 referrals issued by the MoH (**Chart 3**).



² This figure includes renewals of referrals to Egypt for patients still waiting for access whose original referrals expired and approvals for additional financial coverage for admitted patients.

Access through Erez

In September, the total number of patients' applications for Israeli permits to cross Erez was 1883, 23.7% higher than the average last year, and indicating increasing need (**Chart 4**). Applications to exit through Erez reflect shortages and the lack of specialized services available in the health sector in Gaza as well as blocked access to private medical care in Egypt. Out of the 1,883 permit applications during the month, 914 (48.5%) were for patients destined to hospitals in East Jerusalem, 570 (30.3%) to the West Bank, 388 (20.6%) to Israel, and 11 (0.58%) to Jordan.



In September, the Palestinian District Coordination office reported that 1,348 (71.59%) patient permit applications were approved, the lowest approval rate since October 2009 (with the exception of July 2014 during the war) (**Table 2; Chart 5**). 172 applicants (9.13%) were denied permits, the second highest denial rate since July 2010 (The highest was the previous month's denial rate of 11.08%). 363 patients (19.28%) did not receive an answer to their applications in time for their hospital appointments and therefore suffered delay in health care.

Patients should submit their applications to the district liaison office 7-10 days prior to the appointment date but in September 587 applications (31%) out of the total 1,883 were submitted in less than 7 days, most frequently because of the timing of the appointment given by the referral hospital.

Table 2: Israeli responses to permit requests to cross Erez, by age, sex and GSS interviews, September 2015

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called by GSS*	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	85	105	74	92	0	0	11	13	0	0
4 - 17	171	212	130	168	3	2	38	42	0	0
18- 40	241	301	151	127	27	72	63	102	0	2
41 - 60	243	250	201	170	18	40	24	40	0	2
Over 60	129	146	116	119	6	4	7	23	0	0
Sub-total	869	1014	672	676	54	118	143	220	0	4
Total	1883		1348 (71.59%)		172 (9.13%)		363 (19.28%)		4 (0.21%)	

* GSS = Israeli General Security Services

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH –Gaza

The total number of applications in September 2015 was 20% higher than the corresponding month last year while the approval rate was 12.14% lower and denials were more likely (**Table 3**).

Table 3: Israeli District Liaison Office decisions on permit requests to cross Erez, by response and sex of applicant (2015 compared to 2014)

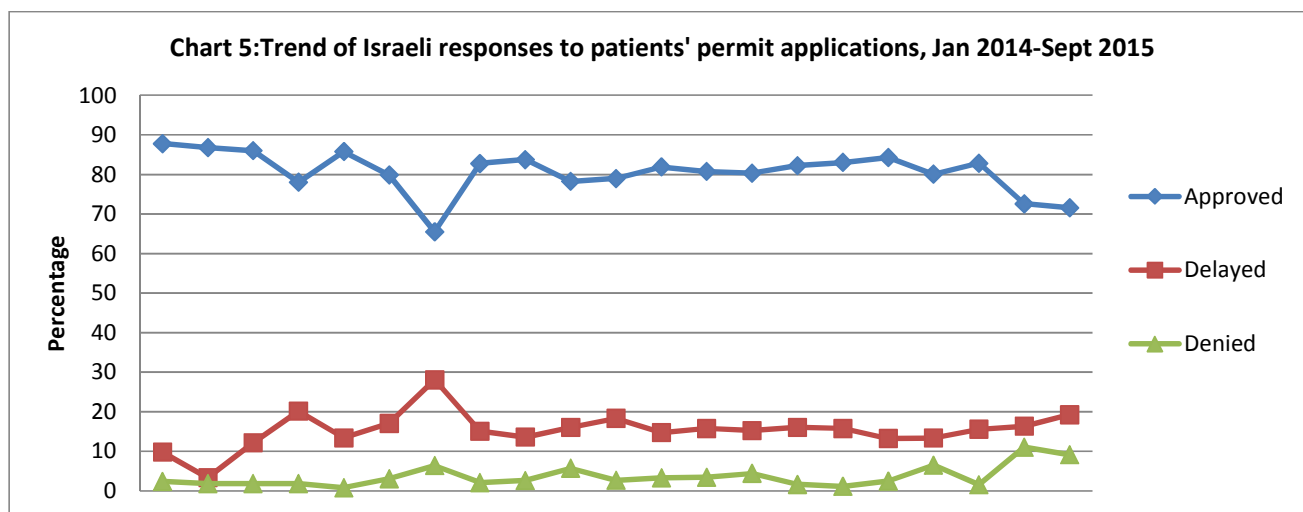
Period	September 2014		September 2015		January-September 2014		January – September 2015	
Total	1561 (F:663; M:898)		1,883 (F:869; M:1014)		13,619 (F:6,186; M:7,433)		15,802 (F:7,364;M:8,438)	
Approved	1307 (F:586; M:721)	83.73%	1,348 (F:672; M:676)	71.59%	11,212 (F:5,352; M:5,860)	82.33%	12,554 (F:6,192;M:6,362)	79.44 %
Denied	41 (F:6; M:35)	2.63%	172 (F:54; M:118)	9.13%	352 (F:110; M:242)	2.58%	780 (F:222;M:558)	4.94%
Delayed	213 (F:71; M:142)	13.64%	363 (F:143; M:220)	19.28%	2,055 (F:724; M:1,331)	15.09%	2,468 (F:950;M:1,518)	15.62 %
<i>-- of which called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)</i>	15 (F:2;M:13)	0.96%	4 (F:0; M:4)	0.21%	127 (F:18; M:109)	0.93%	136 (F:32;M:104)	0.86%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Patient companions: In September, 1,920 applications for immediate family members accompanying patients (including parents of children) were submitted to the Israeli authorities. Only 66.5% were approved, 25.8% were pending and 7.7% were denied. Only one first-degree relative is permitted and permits are subject to age restrictions and security clearance.

Financial coverage: 92.3% of all patients applying for Israeli permits in September were referred by the Palestinian MoH, 2.97% were self-funded, 1.33% by Peres Center for Peace, 1.17% were funded by Nour Al-Alam foundation, 0.69% by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, 0.69% by the Military Medical Services, 0.05% by private insurance companies, 0.05% by the Doctors Without Borders and 0.74% by other organizations.

In August and September 2015 there was a sharp decline in the Israeli approval rate for patients' permit applications and highest rate of denials since 2009, with the exception of July 2014 during the war (**Charts 5**).



Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

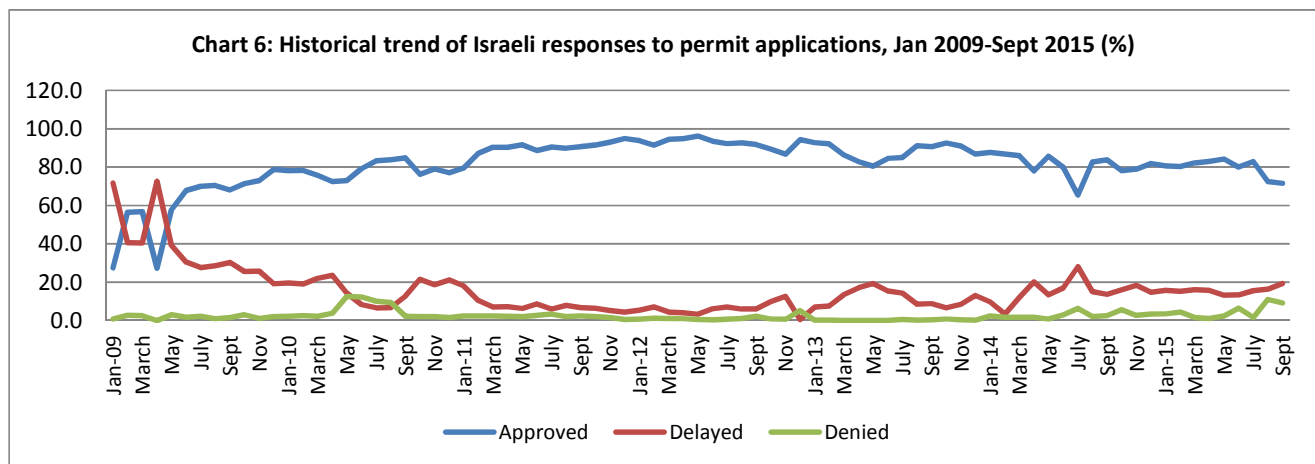
Denied care: 172 patients (118 males; 54 females) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 5 children and 10 patients over 60 years old. Of the denied patients, 157 patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals, 12 in Israel and 3 in Jordan. 160 were financially covered by the Palestinian MoH, and 7 were self-funded, 2 by Peres Center for Peace, 2 by MMS, and 1 by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel. 20.9% (36 patients) of those denied had submitted their applications less than 8 days from the hospital appointment. 46.5% (80) had waited for a response for 8-14 days, 30.8% (53) waited 15-30 days, 3 patients waited more than 30 days before receiving a denial. Of those denied, 43 patients had appointments for orthopedics, 41 for neurosurgery, 16 for ophthalmology, 15 for general surgery, 14 for urology and the remaining 43 patients had appointments in 14 other specialties.

Delayed care: 363 patient applicants (220 males; 143 females), including 104 children and 30 patients over the age of 60, received no response to their applications and consequently lost their hospital appointments. Of the 363 patients delayed, 81% had scheduled appointments in East Jerusalem or West Bank hospitals, 18.5% in Israel, and 0.55% in Jordan. The patients missed their appointments in oncology (57), ophthalmology (40), orthopedics (28), cardiology (28), pediatrics (28), hematology (26), nuclear medicine (25), neurosurgery (25), and the remaining 106 were in 19 other specialties.

Out of 363 delayed patient applicants, 35.54% had submitted their applications 1-7 days prior to the appointment date. However, 37.19% waited 8-14 days, 25.07% waited 15-30 days and 1.93% waited more than 30 days for a response to their permit request. 1 application was not accounted for. 23 patients out of the delayed were eventually approved late, within the first 2 weeks of October, and required rescheduling of their appointment.

Security Interviews: 4 male patients aged 18-60 were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS); 2 were approved after the interview.

Patients and companions crossed Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,233 patients (and 1,197 companions) crossed Erez in September to access hospitals in the West Bank including Jerusalem, Israeli hospitals, or Jordanian hospitals, 60 patients were transferred by ambulance (back-to-back) with 56 companions. Erez crossing was open for 21 days with regular day-time working hours and closed for 9 days (4 Saturdays + 5 Jewish holidays) during the month.



Patient arrested at Erez crossing

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights reported that Fawzi Jawdat Abdel Al, a 23-year-old patient, accompanied by his father Jawdat, for hospitalization in St. John's hospital in Jerusalem, was arrested by the Israeli security forces at Erez crossing on the morning of September 8. According to Al Mezan, Fawzi and his father arrived at Erez around 10 am, and an hour later Fawzi was requested for an interview with an Israeli officer while his father remained waiting. At 3 pm the same officer informed the father that his son Fawzi was under arrest and that he should return to Gaza.

Immediately, the father reported the arrest of his son to Al Mezan. The lawyer assigned to follow the case was prevented from meeting with his client Fawzi. Fawzi suffered an injury from a road accident which resulted in trauma to his eye and the severing of his lacrimal duct. According to the father Fawzi suffers from back pain as well. Twice before Fawzi applied for a permit but did not receive a response to his applications. He then appealed through Al Mezan and Physicians for Human Rights - Israel, and following their appeal, Fawzi was approved a permit. Despite the approval he was arrested. The father reported that Fawzi is still in detention and will have a court on October 20.