



The cramped Referral Abroad Department in Gaza plans to move to larger office space in October 2014.

Referral of Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: RAD 9 (Oct. 26, 2014)

Summary: September 2014

The 50-day Israeli military operation in Gaza in July and August caused widespread damage, including to 50% of all hospitals and clinics. As a result, some disruption has been experienced in health services. Administrative delays in referral services have affected several hundred patients who are waiting for either financial approval for treatment in non-Ministry of Health facilities or, in the case of casualty patients, travel coordination to sponsored medical care in outside countries.

Access

- **Casualty patients exit:** 131 patients with injuries exited Gaza during the month --- 86 via Erez checkpoint and 45 via Rafah border with Egypt (of which 42 were destined for hospitals in Germany). One casualty patient was arrested at Ben Gurion airport while on his return to Gaza (see page 7).
- **Erez permit applications and approvals decline:** 1,561 patients applied for Israeli permits to exit Gaza via Erez for medical treatment in September and only 83.73% of applicants were approved. **41 patients** (6 females and 35 males, including 2 children and 1 elderly) **were denied permits; among them were 13 casualty patients** (see page 6-7). 213 patients (71 females and 142 males, including 44 children and 14 elderly people over 60) received no response to their applications, and missed their medical treatment appointments.
- **Interrogations:** 15 patients (including 2 females) were requested to attend Israeli security interviews after applying for a permit to cross Erez.
- **Rafah border:** Egypt permitted 994 patients to cross Rafah border for medical reasons, the highest number since Egypt closed the terminal in July 2013.

Referrals

- **Casualty patients referred:** 131 casualty patients were referred by the Ministry of Health during September. An additional 200 casualty patients have been waiting for referrals for 6 to 8 weeks.
- **Regular referrals declined 20%:** In September, the number of non-casualty patients referred to hospitals outside of Ministry of Health (MoH) facilities in Gaza by the Referral Abroad Department (RAD) was 1,490, 80% of the monthly average for 2014.
- **Gender gap:** The gender gap in referrals widened: 58.79% male patients versus 41.21% female patients. 22% of all referrals were for children aged 0-17 years and 19.73% were for patients aged over 60 years.

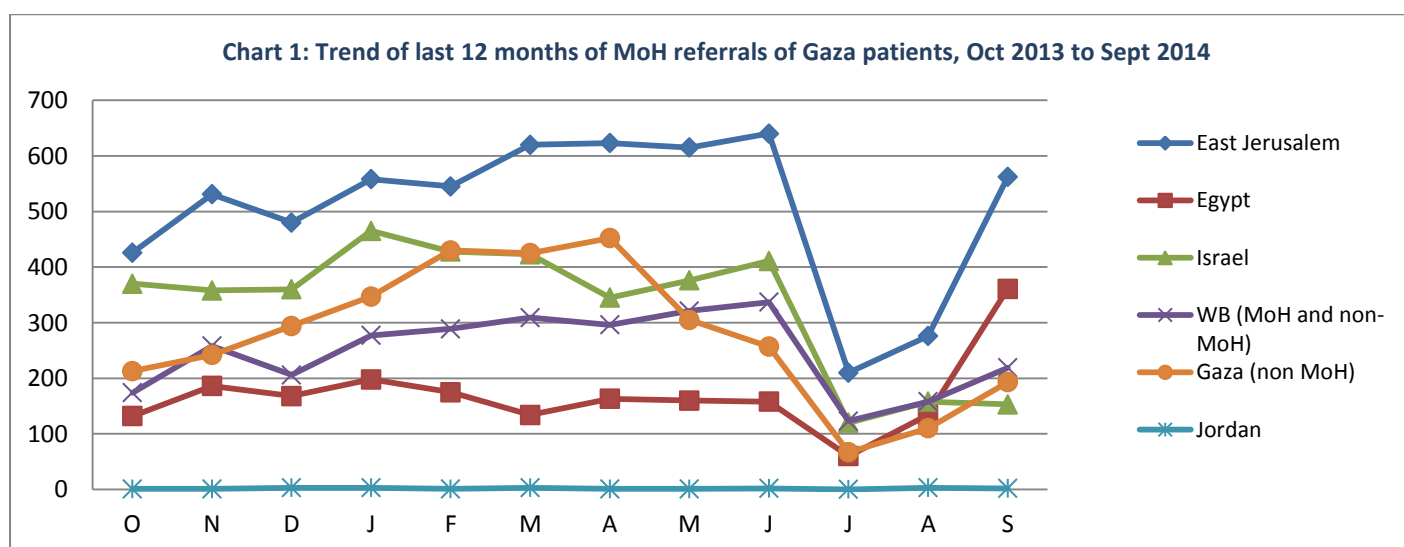
Referrals of Gaza patients back up to 76% of average

The Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 1,490 referrals for chronic patients in Gaza in September, 77.6% higher than the previous month, but 24% less than the monthly average (1,849) in 2014 so far, showing some recovery of the referral system after the serious disruption caused by the conflict in July and August (**Table 1** and **Chart 1**). (WHO referral data omits patients referred for treatment of casualties, as they are not reflected in the RAD system).

Table 1: Palestinian MoH Referrals, by destination, January – September 2014

Referral Destination	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Total	Monthly average Jan-June 2014
Gaza (non-MoH facilities)	347	430	425	452	305	257	67	110	193	2,586	369
WB (MoH and non-MoH)	277	289	309	296	321	337	123	158	219	2,329	305
East Jerusalem	558	545	620	623	615	640	210	276	562	4,649	600
Jordan	3	1	3	1	1	2	0	3	2	16	2
Israel	465	428	423	345	376	411	120	158	153	2,879	408
Egypt	198	175	134	163	160	158	60	134	361	1,543	165
Total	1,848	1,868	1,914	1,880	1,778	1,805	580	839	1,490	14,002	1,849

Source: MoH Referral Abroad Department, Gaza



In September, 63% of applications for referral were processed by RAD within one week, 21.54% within 2 weeks, 4.43% within 3 weeks, and 1.95% within 1 month. The remaining 8.79% took from 1-6 months. Referrals to Israel remained below average while referrals to East Jerusalem increased and to Egypt doubled from the average. 62.8% of referral patients required permits to exit Gaza to reach referral destinations through Erez crossing (936 patients) during September.

22% of patients referred were children aged 0-17 years and 19.7% were elderly patients over 60. Female referral patients were 41.2% of the total.

Medical reasons for referrals of chronic patients: The top ten specialties requiring referrals for treatment were: oncology—233 referrals (15.64%), nuclear medicine—130 (8.72%), ophthalmology—127 (8.52%), heart catheterization—123 (8.29%), orthopaedics—114 (7.65%), MRI —88 (5.91%), neurosurgery—87 (5.84%), paediatrics—70 (4.7%), general surgery—66 (4.43%), and heart surgery—58 (3.89%) and The remaining 394 (26.44%) of referrals were to 20 other specialties. The estimated cost of 1,740 referrals for Gaza ID holders from the main RAD in Ramallah for September 2014 was NIS 6,646,367.

Financial Coverage: In September, 86.16% of all patients applying for Israeli permits were referrals from the Palestinian MoH, 4.55% were self-funded, 3.27% were casualties funded by Turkey, 2.24% funded by receiving hospitals in the West Bank, East Jerusalem or Jordan, 1.15% by Nour Al-Alam foundation, 0.96% by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, and 0.90% by the Peres Center for Peace and other organizations. Patients and companions often face financial problems during long stays in hospitals due to uncovered costs such as transportation, companion costs and some patient care items such as medicines not available in the hospital supply.

Casualty patients referred outside: In addition to the usual caseload of referral patients, the Ministry referred 131 casualties to hospitals outside of Gaza. Hosting hospitals offered to treat casualties free of charge as a humanitarian support to the Palestinian health system which has been overwhelmed by the large number of casualties (**Table 2**). RAD officials in Gaza estimate that 200 casualty patients are still on waiting lists for care in Italy, Venezuela, Spain, Germany, Jordan and France, pending completion of required medical and travel documentation. The Palestinian MoH and MoFA are coordinating for their travel. Patients and their families report being under stress about the uncertainty of further medical treatments and access to health care outside the Gaza Strip. Many of the casualty patients who are referred are suffering complications from nerve injuries or unhealed fractures that require very fine surgeries not available in Gaza.

Destination	Number
West Bank	1
East Jerusalem Hospitals	14
Egypt	3
Turkey	51
Jordan	20
Germany	42 through Rafah terminal
Total	131

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office and RAD, MoH -Gaza.

Patient access to Egypt remains restricted:

According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the terminal was declared open by the Egyptian authorities from 10:00 to 16:00 daily every day in September. 10,262 persons attempted to cross from Gaza to Egypt, including 994 persons seeking medical care, and 553 were registered as patient companions (**Table 3**). The RAD reported the referral of 3 casualty cases to Egypt in addition to 42 injured children to Germany through Egypt. The ambulance station at the terminal reported the transfer of 40 patients by ambulances, 13 of which were casualties. The 42 children, some of whom were toddlers, were transferred to Germany without family companions. The terminal authorities also reported the return of 7 casualty patients who completed their treatment abroad.

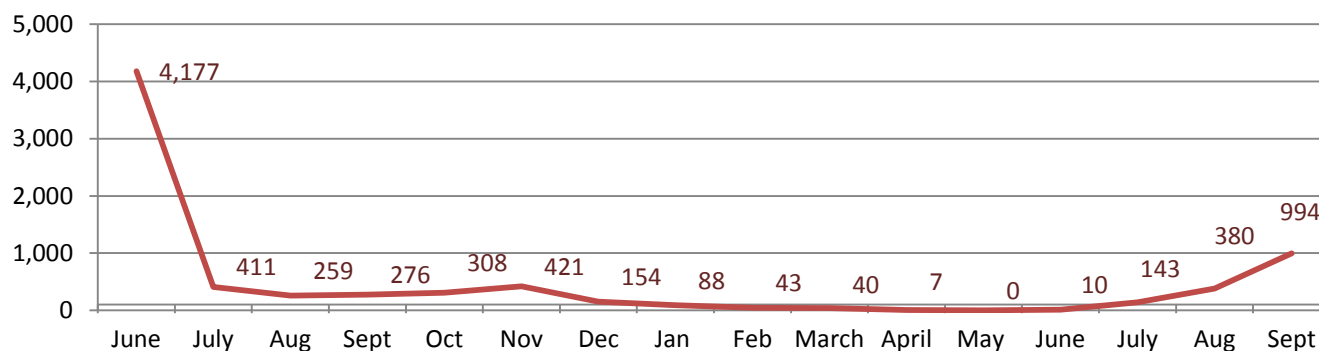
Item	Number
Total registered and tried to cross towards Egypt	10,262
Seeking medical treatment (patients)	994 patients and 553 companions
<i>Transferred by ambulances</i>	40
Denied access and returned by Egypt	1,147
Total crossed	9,115

Source: Rafah Terminal

According to ambulance station personnel at the terminal, in September the Egyptian medical officer on the Egyptian side stopped coordinating ambulances to transfer patients from Rafah to Cairo. Patient companions now need to coordinate ambulance transport which delays travel and makes the process more difficult and more expensive.

Egyptian authorities refused access for 1,147 (11.17%) travellers and returned them to Gaza. Of those who crossed, 2,737 (30%) were pilgrims, 994 (10.91%) were seeking medical care (**Chart2**), and 553 (6%) were accompanying patients. The remaining 4,831 (53%) were primarily people holding Egyptian or foreign passports or legal residency abroad (**Table3**). Access to Egypt has been restricted since July 2013 but there was some improvement in the total number of travellers in July, August and September. In September 9,115 travellers were allowed to cross to Egypt. In August the total number of travellers (9,880) was the highest since July 2013.

**Chart 2: Patients seeking health care access through Rafah terminal to Egypt
(Jun. 2013-September 2014)**



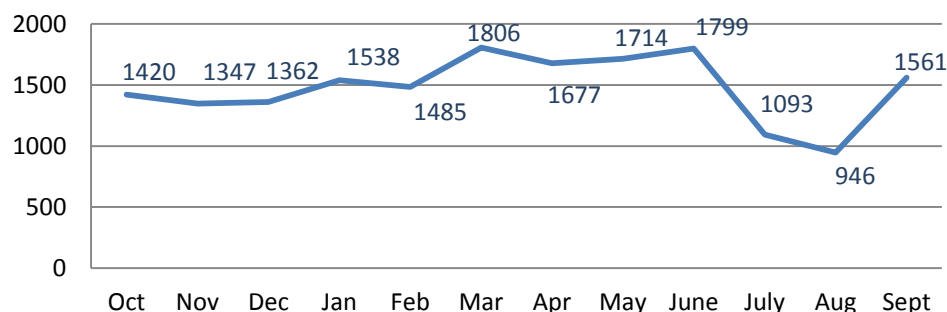
Limited access to Gaza for medical delegates and medical aid via Rafah

The Palestinian authorities at Rafah terminal reported that 10 medical delegations (comprising 47 health professionals) were allowed to cross into Gaza from Egypt during September, mainly from Kuwait, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Germany, France, and Morocco. The terminal authorities also reported that 2 ambulances entered Gaza in addition to 2 shipments of medical aid during September: 18 truckloads donated by the Egyptian Red Crescent and 11 truckloads donated by Algeria.

Patient referral access through Erez

In September, the total number of Erez permit applications (which includes casualty patients as well as the usual referral patients) was 1,561, slightly less than the January to June 2014 monthly average. In the previous two months there was a sharp drop in the total number of applications (**Chart 3**).

Chart 3: Total number of patients permit applications to cross Erez, Oct 2013-Sept 2014



In September, 83.7% of patients' permit applications were approved, very close to the average approval rate for the first half of 2014 of 84% (**Table 4**). 2.63% of applicants were denied access and 13.64% lost their appointments in hospitals and therefore suffered delay in their treatments. **Chart 4** shows trends of percentages of approval, denial and delays over a 12-month period.

Table 4: Decisions by Israeli District Liaison Office on patient permit applications to cross Erez by age, sex and GSS risk, Sept. 2014

Age group	Total		Approved		Denied		Delayed		Called for GSS interrogation	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
0 - 3	57	93	50	83	1	0	6	10	0	0
4 - 17	125	184	111	169	1	0	13	15	0	0
18 - 40	184	274	142	170	3	24	39	80	2	9
41 - 60	190	219	180	183	1	10	9	26	0	4
Missed	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Over 60	107	127	103	116	0	1	4	10	0	0
Sub-total	663	898	586	721	6	35	71	142	2	13
Total	1561		1307 (83.73%)		41 (2.63%)		213 (13.64%)		15 (0.96%)	

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

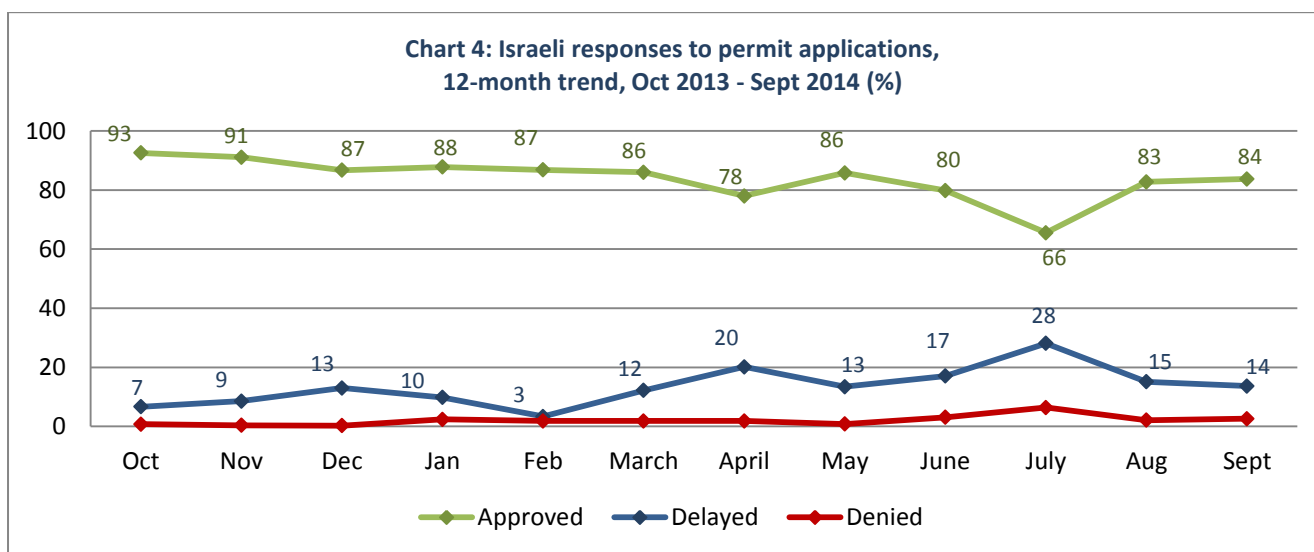
The volume of permit applications for the period from January-September was 41% higher in 2014 than in 2013, while the approval rate was 4.7% lower for the same period. A total of 352 patients were denied access so far in 2014 compared to only 20 patients denied in 2013 during the same period indicating increased restrictions in health access (**Table 5**).

Table 5: Decisions by Israeli District Liaison Office on permit requests to cross Erez, by response, sex of applicant and comparison with corresponding periods in 2013 and 2014 (number and %)

Period	Sept 2013		Sept 2014		January-Sept 2013		January – Sept 2014	
Total	1,303 (F:579; M:724)		1,561 (F:663; M:898)		9,647 (F:4,500; M:5,147)		13,619 (F:6,186; M:7,433)	
Approved	1,182 (F:539; M:643)	90.71%	1,307 (F:586; M:721)	83.73%	8,398 (F:4,035; M:4,363)	87.05%	11,212 (F:5,352; M:5,860)	82.33%
Denied	5 (F: 0; M:5)	0.39%	41 (F:6; M:35)	2.63%	20 (F:2; M:18)	0.21%	352 (F:110; M:242)	2.58%
Delayed	116 (F:40; M:76)	8.9%	213 (F:71; M:142)	13.64%	1,229 (F:462; M:767)	12.74%	2,055 (F:724; M:133)	15.09%
<i>-- called for GSS interrogation (of total applicants)</i>	7 (F:1; M:6)	0.54%	15 (F:2; M:13)	0.96%	128 (F:25; M:103)	1.33%	127 (F:18; M:109)	0.93%

Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Denied care: 41 patients (6 females; 35 males) were denied permits to access through Erez, including 2 children and 1 person over 60 years. 23 of the denied patients had appointments in East Jerusalem and West Bank hospitals, 14 in Jordan, 2 in Turkey and 2 in Israel. 13 out of the 41 denied were conflict-related casualties, most of them destined to Jordan. Of the denied patients, 24 were financially covered by the Palestinian MoH, 11 were casualties covered by the receiving hospitals, 3 self-funded, 2 by Turkey and 1 by Noor Al-alam. 28 patients waited 8-14 days and 3 patients waited 15-30 days before their applications were denied. 14 patients out of the 41 people denied had appointments for neurosurgery, 8 orthopedics, 5 ophthalmology and 3 neurology. The rest were for other specialties.



Source: Palestinian District Coordination office, MoH -Gaza.

Delayed care: According to the Palestinian District Coordination office, 213 patient applicants (142 males; 71 females), including 44 children and 14 patients over the age of 60, received no response to their applications and consequently lost their hospital appointments. Of the 213 patients delayed, 65.73% had scheduled appointments in East Jerusalem or West Bank hospitals, 27.7% in Israel, 4.69% in Jordan and 1.88% in Turkey. The Ministry of Health financially covered 88.26% of these referrals, 4.23% were self-funded, 2.82% for casualties covered by the receiving hospitals in West Bank including Jerusalem, 1.88% by Turkey, 1.88% covered by Physicians for Human Rights and 0.94% by Noor Al-Alam.

Patients should apply 10 days prior to their appointments and Israeli authorities should give a response to applicants within that time. Of the patients delayed, 54.46% of applications (116 of 213) were submitted within 1 week prior to the scheduled appointment. 60 patients were still awaiting a response up to 2 weeks, 33 up to one month and 3 after one month. Out of the 213 applications, 18 were eventually approved but after the appointment date had passed.

Security Interviews: 15 patients (13 males; 2 females) were called for security interviews by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS) as a condition to process their application.

Access through Erez crossing

The office of the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that the actual number of patients crossed Erez in September towards hospitals in West Bank including Jerusalem, to Israeli hospitals, or Jordanian hospitals was 1,080, in addition to 1,042 companions. Of the 1,080 patients 118 were transferred by ambulances (back-to-back). The Ministry of Health District Liaison office in Gaza reported the return of 11 dead bodies through Erez. Erez crossing was open for 24 days with regular day-time working hours and closed for 6 days (4 Saturdays and 2 Jewish holidays) during the month.

Medical delegates through Erez:

The WHO applied for a total of 47 foreign physicians to enter Gaza to support the Palestinian health system in the aftermath of the July-August violence. The WHO applies for permits through an online system for health professionals to cross Erez into or out of Gaza. Until October 21, 2014, 26 physicians (55%) of the 47 physicians who applied were approved entry, while 1 was denied and 20 are still in process.

CASE STUDIES

Returning patient arrested by Israeli authorities at airport

Ghassan Maher Abdenabi, a 22-year-old man from Beit Lahia, a law student in Al-Umma University in Gaza, was injured during the recent conflict and on August 3 was referred to the local Kamal Adwan hospital where he was treated for serious abdominal injuries. He remained about two weeks in the hospital and was discharged early due to overcrowding in the hospital. During the conflict, Abdenabi's family home had been destroyed after a short warning from the Israeli army to evacuate.

Ghassan required antibiotic treatment, analgesics and dressings for his wounds which he received from Medecin sans Frontieres, according to his father. Two weeks following his discharge he was given a referral to complete his treatment in Turkey. His referral to Turkey was coordinated through Erez crossing and Ben Gurion airport. He stayed more than two weeks in Turkey during which time his situation improved significantly. On September 11 on his return to Gaza accompanied by his mother, the Israeli authorities arrested Ghassan in Ben Gurion airport and released his mother to Gaza. Following 35 days in detention, the ICRC succeeded to visit him once and reported to the family that he was still under interrogation but that his health status was good. The family reported on October 21, 2014, that Ghassan was still in detention.

Patients denied permits: Among the 41 patients denied exit from Gaza through Erez checkpoint in September were 13 patients suffering from serious conflict-related injuries that had led to loss of vision, loss of mobility, paralysis of extremities or other severe conditions. Several have appealed their denials through human rights organizations. Below are case summaries of 10 denied patients who were interviewed by WHO:

- Iman, 10 years old, suffers from continuous pain related to trauma to her eye during the conflict and ophthalmologists in Gaza decided to refer her for specialized treatment that might save her vision. The RAD listed her with a group of patients to be referred to Jordan. As of the date of this report, she has not received a permit to enter Jordan and was denied a permit to exit Gaza by Israel on September 22. The family requested the RAD to change the destination of treatment and remains waiting for coordination to travel.
- Ayman, a 27-year-old multiple sclerosis patient, was injured and suffers from pain in the abdomen caused by shrapnel. He has been waiting for referral to Jordan and was denied access by Israel as well.
- Abdullah, 19 years old, suffered head injuries to the head. Shrapnel penetrated his eye and lodged in his brain causing him severe headaches. He is currently waiting to be referred to Jordan but he has not yet received a permit to cross Erez or to enter Jordan.

- Abed, a 35-year-old casualty patient, suffers from a comminuted fracture in the leg that has not healed. He requires an internal fixation of the fracture that cannot be done in Gaza. The RAD referred him to Jordan but he has been waiting for more than 6 weeks for a permit to enter Jordan and in the meantime he has been denied a permit by Israel.
- Three young men, Mohamed, 23, Sulieman, 20, and Mohamed, 19, suffer from traumatic injuries to the brachial nerves and partial paralysis in their arms caused by shrapnel. They need fine surgery to repair their nerve injuries in order to regain mobility of the arms and hands. The three have been waiting for permits to enter Jordan for more than 6 weeks and they were denied permits by Israel to exit Gaza.
- Alaa, a 21-year-old young woman who lost 9 of her family members during the conflict, is currently living with her uncle. She had been referred for treatment in a Jordanian hospital and has been waiting for a permit to enter Jordan. She was denied a permit to exit Erez by Israel. Her uncle requested the RAD to change her destination to another country. She is suffering paralysis in her arms caused by from multiple injuries.

2 non-casualty patients with severe ophthalmic conditions denied 3 times:

- Ibrahim, 21 years old, suffered an injury to the eye that caused retinal detachment. He needs urgent surgery to save his vision and applied 3 times to cross Erez to access St. John's Ophthalmic Hospital in Jerusalem but he was denied. He appealed to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) to appeal the decision and is still waiting for a response.
- Israa, an 18-year-old girl, suffers from retinal detachment. She was treated in St. John's Hospital in Jerusalem in April 2014 and her surgeon recommended that she return for further surgery. She applied for a permit 3 times and was denied by Israel. She also has appealed to the PCHR seeking their help to obtain a permit. She is still waiting for a response.