



Attia Darwish hit in the face by a tear gas canister. Photo: Nidal Al-whaidy

The tear gas canister hit Attia Darwish, a 31-year-old photojournalist, in the face under his left eye when he was covering demonstrations near the Gaza fence for a local newspaper.

“I was taking photos when my phone rang, and I tried to take the call. Suddenly, I felt a blow to my face and fell down,” Attia said.

The ambulance picked him up within minutes and took him to a trauma stabilization point close to the fence. After initial assessment and first aid, Attia was rushed to Shifa hospital in Gaza for treatment.

He had multiple facial fractures and severe bleeding at the back of his eye, putting his sight at risk. He had surgery to remove shrapnel from the wound, fix his lower jaw and replace fragmented bones in his face with metal plates. Attia received initial treatment for his eye injury, but needed review and specialist care outside Gaza.

“As a photographer, I depend on my eyes to do my job. Now, I can hardly see with my left eye. Getting proper treatment is something critical for me,” Attia said.

Attia had a medical referral from the Palestinian Ministry of Health to go for an appointment to St John’s Eye Hospital in Jerusalem. He applied to Israeli authorities for a permit to exit Gaza for treatment, but when the date of his hospital appointment came his permit application was still under review.

Attia despaired of getting a permit to exit Gaza via Erez crossing with Israel and asked the Services Purchasing Unit in the Ministry of Health to refer him instead for treatment to Egypt. On the day of his travel, however, Rafah crossing point to Egypt was closed for exit.

“I cannot feel the left side of my face. I can only eat soft food and I’m suffering with the pain. The cold weather makes it even worse. When I was in hospital, one of the doctors said I either need a bone graft or an artificial implant. But neither of those is available in Gaza.”

When WHO spoke with Attia, he still had not received his permit to leave Gaza to Jerusalem. His case is not an exception. Of 435 permit applications to Israeli authorities by those injured during the Great March of Return demonstrations, only 19% have been approved. Those unable to access the health care they need face a higher risk of complications and poorer health outcomes.

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