

DELEGATE DIARIES

The Red Cross Field Hospital in Rafah, Gaza, opened on 9 May 2024. Implemented by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in coordination with the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and supported by the National Red Cross Societies of Australia, Austria, Canada, China (Hong Kong branch), Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Japan, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom, the field hospital has been kept operational by a dedicated team of local and international staff, including medical, psychosocial support and technical experts.

This compilation brings together reflections from international staff deployed at the field hospital over the past 16 months. Their words capture the realities of providing lifesaving care in a conflict zone.

Susanne Bojesen, Nurse, Denmark

Diary entry from 4 October 2024

I now overlook what resembles the world's largest displacement camp. As far as the eye can see in every direction, there are hastily erected shelters side by side. It must have been so different just a year ago (*October 2023*).

This horrifying contrast was evident at the hospital the other day. A colleague showed me pictures of her daughter's fifth birthday last year compared to her sixth birthday this year. It was heartbreaking. Last year's photo was full of color and joy. This year's was taken in a dark tent, with a cake baked over an open fire and people sitting on the ground in a small group.

Birte Abild, Head nurse, Norway

From July 2024

There is a maternity section in the field hospital where babies are delivered. How does that contradiction make you feel?

A baby is always hope. Among all this mass casualty, a woman came to have a baby. That gives hope to everyone around them. At the same time, it feels... You don't know how to feel. You see someone is dying, someone's very hurt, and then you hear a baby cry. But this is a hospital for everyone, whoever you are. It's a hospital where everybody can get help. Also, I hope that we can give them something to live for, for the future, to survive.

Ida McFadzean, Gynaecologist, Norway

From June 2024

- I remember just the face of the father when he took him to the ambulance to be transferred. It was devastating to look at. His emotions were not able to be hidden, and his face was filled with despair and agony over the situation.

That is something that we see, the agony of the people, the suffering, the empty glances out in the air. But also we see that sometimes they're able to smile and find hope.

- We've seen women who have had very little follow-up during the pregnancy. They're struggling with access to clean water, enough water, enough toilets, showering... this basic hygiene, basic food, especially some have to prioritise to give food to the children instead of themselves during this pregnancy.

Kirsi Pääkkö, Emergency nurse, Finland

From July 2024

Some local civilians have already lost everything they can lose: children, parents, other relatives and family members... there are serious physical injuries, such as the amputation of both legs or a leg and an arm. It's hard to say which are worse and heal slower: physical or mental injuries.

Jouni Hirvioja, Emergency doctor, Finland

From May 2024

- “The girl we operated on yesterday smiled sunnily on the ward round! The days of nausea and pain were gone. It looks good. Today I did check-ups for newborn babies. Healthy babies! They were born into this place at a bleak time, but not without hope.
- The kindness and resilience of the local people has made a great impression. Children seem to find joy and play in any circumstances. It comforts and gives hope.
- I leave Gaza with a sober acknowledgment that many here don't even know where their loved ones are and how they're doing.”

Miia Siurola, Pediatric nurse, Finland

From May 2024

Every encounter here is unique. People's stories stop you. Everyone has lost someone, some have lost everything. Many find it hard to see the future. Everyone is worried about the children.

Rieke Hayes, Physiotherapist, Ireland

From March-April 2025

- Having to change my scrubs because they were soaked in blood is something I never thought I'd do – especially as a physiotherapist. But during a mass casualty incident (MCI) it's all hands on deck. I was stopping bleeding, I was applying dressings, I was taking vitals - anything I could do to help.
- I don't think I've ever been so embedded within a conflict. There's no obvious frontline – the sounds and sights and smells of war are all around you. In other conflict zones where I've worked, the frontline is somewhere else, far away: the faint sound of gunfire or an explosion in the distance. But where's the frontline in Gaza? Even our own staff have become casualties.