

SOA-USA: Report from the 2025 US Investiture.

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FOR THE FAITH AND
IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY



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INVESTITURE MEETING OF THE ST. JOHN OPHTHALMIC ASSOCIATION

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On Friday afternoon of the Investiture and Rededication weekend in Washington, DC, the United States chapter of the St. John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group Ophthalmic Association (SOA – USA) convened its tenth meeting. Established in 2015, the SOA International comprises twelve chapters across five international hubs.

SOA – USA was established in 2018 and has since hosted an annual meeting at the American Academy of Ophthalmology annual meeting and a dedicated event during the US Priory's Investiture weekend. The

most recent Investiture at the Fairmont Hotel in Washington, DC, was the fifth such meeting and the third open to all confreres.

The event was presided over by US Priory Hospitalier, Dr. David Pyott. Following an introduction from Prior Nigel Heath, the program speakers included Chairman of the St John Eye Hospital Group, Sir Andrew Cash, CEO of the SJEHG, Dr. Ahmad Ma'ali, and Order Hospitalier, Dr. David Verity. Two captivating recorded video case presentations were presented by two of the Jerusalem Eye Hospital residents, Dr. Jomana Swiden and Dr. Mahmoud Qabaja, and moderated discussions ensued after each case by Dr. Suzanne Freitag and Dr. Bitá Esmaeli, academic advisors for the SOA-USA.

Sir Andrew Cash and Dr. Ahmad Ma'ali engaged in a comprehensive discussion on the clinical activities of the



Dr Ma'ali Goes to Washington

SJEHG in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. They also provided a financial overview, highlighting the sources of donations and gifts for the hospital, which is led by the US Priory. Both speakers elucidated the rationale behind adopting the new philosophy of delivering eye care directly to where patients reside, exemplified by the remarkable success of the Kufor Aqab Center and the Nablus Hospital.



David Pyott, CBE, CStJ, kicks off the 10th meeting of the SOA-USA

The primary factors driving the strategic shift in SJEHG eye care include limited access to eye care due to physical and geographical barriers, dire economic conditions that hinder patients from seeking treatment, low levels of health awareness within communities, a high prevalence of avoidable eye diseases such as cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, and refractive errors, and the urgent need to reduce preventable blindness and mitigate its social and economic consequences.

In 2024, the Eye Group successfully treated over 175,000 patients and performed over 4,000 major surgeries. Strategic projects planned for 2026 encompass general anesthetic services at the Hebron Hospital, the remodeling and renovation of the doctors' flats, the establishment of a modern commercial pharmacy in Jerusalem, and the installation of solar panels at the Eye Hospital to enhance renewable energy.

An update on the Gaza War and its impact on the Gaza Hospital was presented. The hospital sustained further collateral damage prior to the most recent cease-fire, and the hospital group is collaborating with partners to restore the premises and equip the hospital. Plans are underway to commence the renovation of the operating theaters, which may take approximately six to eight weeks to complete. It is

evident that the Gaza Hospital restoration will be a substantial undertaking.

The meeting subsequently transitioned into the clinical and academic segment, presided over by Dr. David Verity, Director of Ophthalmic Plastic Surgery at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London. Dr. Verity provided an in-depth analysis of the 10-year history of the SOA and its visionary outlook for the forthcoming decade.

The meeting concluded with two case presentations presented by two resident eye doctors from the Jerusalem Eye Hospital. The first case was a pediatric retinal case seen at the Nablus Hospital and moderated by Dr. Suzanne Freitag, Director of Ophthalmic Plastic Surgery at Massachusetts Eye and Ear at Harvard University. The second case was a lacrimal

gland tumor, moderated by Dr. Bitá Esmaeli, former Director of Ocular Oncology at MD Anderson in Houston.

Dedicated to advancing research, teaching, and training at the St. John Eye Hospital Group, the SOA has now conducted over 35 meetings worldwide. The meeting in Washington DC once again successfully brought experts from diverse medical and non-medical specialties together to discuss the service work of the hospital group, our clinical and research projects, and case reports from the Eye Hospital. The SOA – USA and the US Priory express gratitude to the extraordinary international leaders of the SJEHG and devoted doctors in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza for enabling us to host such a high-quality meeting to further advance our mission to serve our Lords the sick and the poor by "saving sight and changing lives" in the Holy Land. ✨

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