



**Middle  
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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu  
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Minister of Justice Yariv Levin  
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Brigadier General Hisham Ibrahim  
Head of Civil Administration in the West Bank, Coordination of Government  
Activities in the Territories (COGAT)  
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Chief Clerk Idit Malul  
Supreme Court of the State of Israel  
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Dear Prime Minister, Ministers, Brigadier-General, and Chief Clerk,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to protest against the Israeli army's ongoing targeting and intensification of arrests of university students in the West Bank, occupied Palestinian territories.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes *the International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

In the last five weeks and as of 20 November, thirty-five Birzeit University students have been arrested. According to the Birzeit University Right to Education campaign, these students include undergraduates and graduate students. The growing list of students includes: Danya Saqr Hantasha (BA in Accounting, currently under interrogation); Muhammad Zahir al-Zahir (BA in Public Administration, currently under interrogation); Fairouz Hasan Salameh (MA program in Israeli Studies, currently under interrogation); Baleegh Muqbil Barghouthi (BA in International Studies, currently under interrogation); Osama Mohammad Farraj (BA in Accounting, currently under interrogation); Basel Samer Barghouthi (BA in Accounting, currently under interrogation); Odai Mahmoud Mohammad (BA in Finance, currently under interrogation); Yaman Samer Birnat (BA in Information Security, currently under interrogation); Jamal Mohammad Taweel (MA program in International



Studies, currently under interrogation); Othman Issam Abed-Alrahman (BA in Mechanical Engineering, currently under interrogation); Shadi Jamal A'mera (BA in Sociology, currently under interrogation); Mohammad Tha'er Hasan (BA in Finance, currently under interrogation); Jalal Hasan Khatib (BA in Physical Education, currently under interrogation); Ruba Fahmi Dar-Asi (BA in Sociology, administrative detention); Sufian Bassam Miqdadi (BA in Physical Education, administrative detention); Mohammad Nidal Erman (BA in Accounting, administrative detention); Mohammad Fida'i Nafi' (BA in Physical Education, administrative detention); Bara' Ahmad Hamed (BA in Geo-Informatics, administrative detention); Mohammad Salih Bader (MA program in Israeli Studies, administrative detention); Qassam Hussein Awad (BA in Computer Science, administrative detention); Osayd Mohammad Abu-A'adi (BA in Media Studies, administrative detention); Al-Mo'tasem Ameen Erman (BA/PharmD Program in Pharmacy, administrative detention); Basel Mahmoud Barghouthi (BA in Computer Science, administrative detention); Hisham Heider Taha (BA in Law, administrative detention); Sadeeq Mounther O'ori (BA in Finance and Advertising, administrative detention); Salih Salameh Dar- Sleeman (BA in Economics, administrative detention); Mo'tasem-Belallah Ayman Zaloum (BA in Finance and Advertising, administrative detention); Mohammad Hussien Abu- Hadeed (MA program in International Studies, administrative detention); Nimer Najih Nafie' (BA in Physics, administrative detention); Osama Omar Be'raat (BA in Computer Science, administrative detention); Nasruallah Fateen Salah (BA in Chemistry, administrative detention); Obaida Mohammad Qattouseh (BA in Electrical Engineering, administrative detention); Mohammad Rashad Awad (BA in Political Science, administrative detention); Khaled Omar Bi'yan (BA in Media, administrative detention).

In the last several weeks, the mere act of documenting the detention of students at BZU has become, according to the Right to Education, a massive, ongoing project. With these most recent arrests, Birzeit University alone now counts over 115 of its students under arrest, some of whom have been subjected to intense interrogations and are being held without charge under administrative detention.

As evidenced by the many letters our committee has written to you over the past two years (see our latest letters on [16 October 2023](#), [22 December 2021](#); [21 July 2021](#); [28 June 2021](#)), there has been a deeply concerning pattern of the Israeli armed forces' repeatedly intervening in Palestinian institutions of higher education, harassing and detaining students, and in increasing numbers. The numbers from BZU are representative of other universities in the West Bank, where students, as well as faculty, have been targets of arrest. The alarming intensification of this pattern in recent weeks not only represents a clear violation of university autonomy and the rights of students to education, but it obstructs the very functioning of the university. Indeed, the continuing

attacks on institutions like BZU and the intensification of harassment and arrests at Palestinian universities on the West Bank more generally appear to be an extension of the invasion and assault on the Gaza Strip, where military attacks continue to destroy the educational infrastructure and kill faculty, staff, and students.

Such arbitrary arrests and detentions of students are a clear violation of the right to education enshrined in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 13 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Israel is a party to the UDHR and a signatory to the ICESCR and is therefore obligated to uphold them. We call upon you to abide by the principles of the right to education and the sanctity of university campuses, and to ensure the rights of all Palestinian students to education, including as activists, unobstructed. We also request that you immediately release from detention all those students who have been arrested.

Thank you for your attention to these pressing matters. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Aslı Ü. Bâli  
MESA President  
Professor, Yale Law School



Laurie Brand  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

Josep Borrell-Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for  
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer - Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), European Parliament

Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories

Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories

James Heenan, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ramallah

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, MENA section

Noha Bawazir, Head of Office and UNESCO Representative, UNESCO Liaison Office, Ramallah, Palestinian delegation to UNESCO

The Honorable Veronica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression