

**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

1219 N Santa Rita Ave
The University of Arizona
Tucson AZ 85721 USA

520 621-5850
520 626-9095 fax
mesana@u.arizona.edu
www.mesana.org



1 May 2008

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert
3 Kaplan St., Qiryat Ben-Gurion
PO Box 187
91919 Jerusalem
Israel

via fax: 972-2-6512631

Dear Prime Minister Olmert:

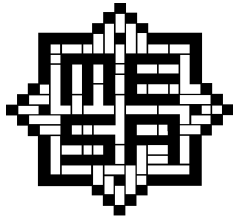
I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) to express our concern about the continued restriction of movement and travel imposed by the government of Israel on Palestinian students from Gaza. Though a shuttle service for transporting the students via the Erez Crossing and then on to Egypt or Jordan, for exit to third countries, was put into effect in late 2007 it proved to be no more than an ad hoc arrangement that facilitated the passage of fewer than half of the 730 students who need to reach universities abroad. While waiting for the shuttle service to begin or for subsequent shuttles to operate, many of the students in Gaza missed the start of the academic year at universities around the world. Some lost their places for the entire year, as well as their scholarships, because they did not arrive at their campuses in time. It is impossible to estimate how many students, faced with the intensifying closure policy, lost hope and gave up altogether on trying to pursue their studies abroad.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2700 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

On October 19, 2007, we addressed you about this matter and now wish to reiterate our expectation that the government of Israel will establish a reliable policy that will allow Palestinian students so wishing to pursue their academic studies abroad.

In particular, we wish to bring to your attention the cases of ten Palestinian students who have been prevented from leaving Gaza to pursue their academic studies in the U.S., Belgium, U.K., Germany, and Jordan:

1. Mariam Ashour, 18 years old, received a scholarship from the Hope Fund to study business administration at Columbia College in South Carolina.
2. Yahia Abu Hashem, 18 years old, received a scholarship from the Hope Fund to study computer information technology at Roanoke College in Virginia.



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3. Wajdi Halabi has been accepted to complete a PhD in computer science at Vrije University in Brussels, supported by the European fellowship program Erasmus Mundus.
4. Wissam Abuajwa has been admitted to an MA program in environmental studies at a British university.
5. Nibal Nayef is the recipient of a scholarship from the German scholarship program DAAD to study at the Technical University in Kaiserslautern, Germany for a PhD in computer science.
6. Basheer Obaid is the recipient of a scholarship from the German DAAD program to study at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany for a PhD in infrastructure engineering.
7. Ahmed al Hayak has been accepted to a Master's program at the Herder-Institute of Leipzig University in Germany, and is a recipient of a scholarship of the German DAAD program.
8. Fatma Shbair is a recipient of a scholarship from the German DAAD program for a Master's degree in computer science at the New York Institute of Technology in Amman, Jordan.
9. Samah Hamouda is a recipient of a scholarship from the German DAAD program for a Master's degree in industrial engineering at the University of Jordan in Amman.
10. Ahmed Ghorab is a recipient of a scholarship from the German DAAD program for a Master's degree in computer engineering at the University of Applied Sciences in Amman, Jordan.

Israel has the responsibility to ensure the Right to Education as enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which it ratified in 1991. The ongoing disruption of Palestinian education constitutes a violation of a basic human right that will have long-term and negative political, economic, and humanitarian consequences for all peoples involved. We call on the Israeli government to create a reliable policy that will allow the ten students mentioned above as well as the hundreds of other registered Gaza university students to travel to their educational institutions abroad.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mervat F. Hatem". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mervat Hatem
MESA President

cc: Minister of Defense Ehud Barak