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Dear Prime Minister, Ministers and Ambassador,

We write to express our concern regarding the limitations imposed on international faculty at Palestinian universities in the West Bank and Gaza, some of whom are members of our associations. For the past three years, the Israeli authorities have increasingly denied new and reentry visas, imperiling the right to education of Palestinian students.

Like peer institutions globally, Palestinian universities employ academics and administrators who are foreign nationals. Since the 2017-2018 academic year, well over half of the international faculty and staff members, some of whom have taught for years in Palestinian universities, have had to deal with a wide range of arbitrary demands to obtain re-entry visas, and many have been refused visa renewals. These include: changing documentation requirements without prior or official notification; lengthy processing periods that force applicants to overstay valid visas or leave the country; shortened and arbitrary duration of visas; the issuing of visas that restrict the holder to the West Bank; restrictions on ports of entry/exit; and demands for financial bonds of 5,600 to 22,500 USD. These ambiguous and obstructive measures have meant that international faculty and staff are unable to determine if they can accept a job offer from a Palestinian university, if they can continue their employment for the duration of the appointment, or if they can travel for academic conferences or for research.

At Birzeit University, for example, in the 2018/19 academic year, nearly all international academics and staff have encountered problems in visa renewals.

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Teaching, instruction in foreign language, curriculum planning, program development, committee work, and the supervision of theses, in addition to faculty recruitment, have been disrupted and, in some cases, prevented altogether.

These measures contravene international humanitarian and human rights law. As the occupying power, in the view of the United Nations and international law, Israel must not interfere in the functioning of Palestinian civil institutions, including Palestinian universities, and therefore is obliged to issue a transparent policy that allows the entry and presence of foreign faculty and staff members. It is also obligated to ensure the right of the Palestinian people to education, as enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966).

To enable Palestinian universities to maintain knowledge production and academic freedom, we call on Israel to refrain from imposing arbitrary restrictions on the duration of stay or extension of stay for international academics, and to clarify lawful procedures for issuing entry visas and work permits for international academics in the West Bank and Gaza.

American Anthropological Association
American Political Science Association
Middle East Studies Association
National Women's Studies Association
Society of Architectural Historians