

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

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26 May 2010

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
Minister of Defense Ehud Barak
Mr. George J. Mitchell, US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace
H.E. Michael B. Oren, Ambassador of Israel to the US

Gentlemen:

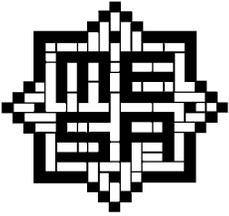
We write this letter on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). We are deeply concerned about Israel's ongoing travel restrictions and new military orders which effectively ban over 400 Palestinian students from Gaza from studying in West Bank universities.

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 nearly 3000 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.

As a committee of MESA charged with monitoring infringements on academic freedom, we have written to you in the past expressing our dismay about Israeli travel restrictions and their impact on Palestinian students and educational institutions. We are disappointed that new military orders have been issued further restricting free travel in the Occupied Territories, dealing yet another blow to the academic freedom of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In particular, CAF is deeply troubled by Military Orders 1650 pertaining to the 'Prevention of Infiltration' and 1649 pertaining to 'Security Provisions' which effectively 'criminalize' all Palestinians from Gaza residing in the West Bank, including students, and deny them the possibility to contest deportation and imprisonment orders outside the Israeli military system. In the strongest possible terms, we deplore the provisions of Military Order 1650 which deem Palestinians from Gaza, including students, residing in the West Bank without Israeli issued permits as 'infiltrators,' and makes them liable to deportation orders, jail terms up to 7 years, and fines approximating 7,500 NIS. Equally, we are concerned that pursuant to Military Order 1649, deportation orders can be contested only before a committee appointed by the local military commander, effectively denying students the right to appeal these decisions in accordance with any accepted standard of proper judicial review.

Such actions constitute an extreme and unwarranted denial of academic freedom, as well as a form of collective punishment. These policies have resulted in grave consequences for the local Palestinian population in all aspects of life, not least education. The blockade on the Gaza Strip has left institutions of higher education severely lacking personnel and basic resources such as books, equipment, and laboratory instruments. Moreover, educational



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programs vital to the well-being of any society, such as dentistry, physical and occupational therapy, and medical engineering are not available in the Gaza Strip.

These Military Orders demonstrate blatant disregard for international human rights law and standards, including Articles 13 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and relevant articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which guarantee the right to education and free movement, as well as Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which prohibits the forcible transfer and deportation of protected persons (civilians) living in occupied territory. Furthermore, international humanitarian law requires Israel, in its capacity as the occupier, to ensure the safety and well-being of the local residents, and to maintain, to the extent possible, normal living conditions.

We call on the Government of Israel to revoke these policies. Such measures have dire consequences for the very fabric of Palestinian society, and will have long-term negative political, social, and economic consequences for all peoples involved. We ask that you immediately allow students from Gaza to pursue their studies in West Bank institutions of higher education.

Sincerely,

Roger M.A. Allen
MESA President
Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania

Cc: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton