



Middle East Studies Association of North America

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Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan Street
Kiryat Ben Gurion
Jerusalem 91919
ISRAEL

Your Excellency:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association appreciates the prompt response by Z. H. Hurwitz, adviser to the Prime Minister, on 17 July 1990 to our letter of 21 June 1990 concerning the continued closure of universities on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. We note that Bethlehem University has reopened in October, enabling 1500 students to resume their studies after a three-year closure that began on 29 October 1987.

We remain deeply concerned that the leading universities on the West Bank -- notably Bir Zeit University, Hebron University and an-Najah University -- and the sole university in the Gaza Strip are still closed. Most of the young people who graduated from secondary school in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990 are thereby deprived of vital educational opportunities. Moreover, faculty cannot conduct their scientific research or utilize the library resources. Such comprehensive and prolonged closures are indiscriminate in their impact and constitute collective punishment against the Palestinian population. Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) prohibits any collective punishment: "No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties...are prohibited."

We understand the need for the Israeli authorities, as the occupying power, to maintain order on the West Bank and Gaza. But we believe that must be balanced by the obligation to ensure the well-being of the protected population. In that regard, Article 50 of the above-mentioned Convention states: "The Occupying Power shall...facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children."

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Your adviser notes that Israel is proud that five universities have been created in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since the Israeli occupation began in 1967. We expect that you are therefore anxious to end their prolonged closure, since closing educational institutions negates the very purpose for which they were established. We trust that you will cancel the order closing the universities and permit them to reopen forthwith.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: Shmuel Goren, Coordinator of Activities in the Territories
Ambassador Moshe Arad, Embassy of Israel, Washington, DC
Ambassador William Brown, Embassy of the United States of America
John Hirsch, Israel Desk, US Department of State
Dr. Michael Van Dusen, House Committee on International Relations
Philip Wilcox, US Consul General, Jerusalem, Israel
Senator Nancy Kassebaum (Kansas), US Senate
Representative Howard Nielson (Utah), House of Representatives