



## 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 is deeply concerned about the continued closure of one of the leading universities on the West Bank, Bir Zeit University. Now in its fourth consecutive year of closure, Bir Zeit is the last university to remain inaccessible to students, faculty, and staff. Although we welcome the reopening of all other universities, we remain concerned that Bir Zeit's students and faculty have been denied access to formal classes on their campus where library, laboratory, and other educational facilities are available.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2,200 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The Association publishes the respected International Journal of Middle East Studies and is committed to ensuring respect for academic freedom throughout the region. In its November 1988 business meeting in Los Angeles, the Association affirmed the resolution that: "MESA members strongly urge that the universities in the West Bank and Gaza be reopened as soon as possible under conditions that will allow students and professors to return to their legitimate scholarly pursuits."

The comprehensive and prolonged closure of Bir Zeit University is indiscriminate in its impact and constitutes 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 offense he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties. . .are prohibited."

We respectfully request that your government reconsider the decision to continue closing Bir Zeit University. Since all other Palestinian Universities were allowed to reopen several months ago, we trust that you will cancel the order closing Bir Zeit University and permit it to resume its vital role as an educational and research center.

Thank you for your prompt consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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