



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

The University of Arizona · 1232 North Cherry Avenue · Tucson, Arizona 85721

August 16, 1994

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin  
Office of the Prime Minister  
3 Kaplan Street  
Jerusalem 91919  
Israel

Dear Prime Minister:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association is concerned about news of the detention of Birzeit University students, including student activists and leaders. We understand that this is not the first such instance of student detention. Our preliminary information about the current cases is sufficiently disturbing that we wish promptly to register our concern. The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2300 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 the principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

Among the detained are Fakhri Ibrahim Sabbah, co-president of the Birzeit Student Council, and Ammar Loweheidi, a member of the Birzeit Student Council for Academic Affairs. Other detainees include Adeeab Ziadeh, Ahmed Ibrahim Said, Ahmed Mahmoud Hassan Ammar, Imad Shaker Al-Atowneh, Bassem, Ibrahim Sabbah, Nasr Qaqour, Hussein As-Selik, and Hani Saleh 'Abdullah Muzher. At least some, according to our information, are members of the campus Islamic Bloc. We understand that the students were detained beginning on June 29 in the Al-Fara, Ashkelon, Tulkarem, and Ramallah prisons and the Dhahriyya detention center and have been held without charges amidst allegations of restricted access to counsel and mistreatment. The information we have received on Hani Saleh 'Abdullah Muzher is particularly troubling; there are indications that his interrogation has been conducted under conditions of prolonged sleep deprivation that seriously threaten his well-being and that have prompted self-mutilation. We understand that he was denied access to a lawyer from July 13 to August 11 in violation of the 1990 basic principles on the role of lawyers.

The fact that the detainees include students who have been politically active and who have been prominent in organs of student government raises the question: were these students singled out for incarceration because of their political opinions and affiliations? Obviously, if Birzeit students are being treated as criminals simply because of their ideas and their associations, this would mean that their internationally guaranteed human rights have been infringed.

We are puzzled by these developments, since we understand that four Birzeit students -- including former student council president Marwan Barghuti -- who were expelled from the Occupied Territories have recently been allowed to return. Allowing their return constituted a distinct improvement in the observance of international law and is hard to reconcile with the policy embodied in the most recent repressive measures aimed at Birzeit student leaders and activists.

We respectfully request you to provide us with information as soon as possible about the reasons for the detention of these students and the nature of the criminal charges -- if any -- being brought against them. We further call on you to investigate to ensure that these are not cases of students being detained solely by reason of their political opinions and associations. In the event that this is so, we call for the students to be immediately released. We further urge you to take prompt steps to ascertain if the allegations of mistreatment of detainees and restrictions on their access to counsel are well-founded and, if so, to take remedial measures to end such practices.

Respectfully,



Anne H. Betteridge  
Executive Director

cc: Brigadier General Ilan Shiff, Judge Advocate General  
Brigadier General Shaul Mofaz, Commander of the West Bank  
Colonel Moshe Rosenberg, Legal Adviser for the Central Command  
Judge Yosef Harish, Attorney General  
Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich