



Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

The University of Arizona • PO Box 210410 • Tucson AZ 85721-0410

September 12, 1996

Mr. Oren Shahor
Coordinator of Activities in the West Bank and Gaza
Tel Aviv, Israel

Fax: 03-697-6306

Dear Mr. Shahor,

The Committee on Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa of the Middle East Studies Association is writing to express its concern about Israeli measures causing serious disruptions in the educations of Palestinian students who are Gaza residents studying at Birzeit University.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2600 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.

Many Gaza students opt to study in West Bank universities, including Birzeit, because they offer specialties unavailable in Gaza, such as electrical and chemical engineering, sociology and political science. It has been brought to our attention that over the 12 months of the 1995-96 academic year, your office issued permits to only 95 Gaza students (i.e., less than one-fourth who are enrolled), and to them for only one three-month period. In reaction to the bombings in the spring of 1996, these permits were canceled several weeks before they were due to expire, in other words before the end of the term. Such policy constitutes collective punishment and thus is an illegal infringement on Palestinian rights.

Now that the 1996-97 academic year is upon us, we learn that so far no permits have been issued to Gaza students. Such actions and inaction infringe on Palestinian students' right to an education. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that: "Everyone has the right to education" (Article 26).

Because Israel is the governing power with supreme authority over Gaza and the West Bank, the Israeli government and its representatives are responsible for abiding by the various international laws and conventions that apply, including those ensuring the right to education.

The closure policy, which has been in effect for months and has taken a harsh toll on Palestinian society, has particularly deleterious effects on students from Gaza: they must pass an arbitrary and

Mr. Oren Shahor
September 12, 1996

time-consuming process to receive permission to reside in the West Bank, including the obligation to renew the residency permit every fourth month. Students face the prospect of unexplained denial at every step, arbitrary confiscations of permits by Israeli authorities and soldiers, and blanket cancellations of valid permits. Many students are denied permits without any explanation being provided.

If there are some legitimate security concerns that warrant the restriction of permits for individual students from Gaza, we respectfully urge that you make those concerns public. As it currently appears, residence permits are being misused by the Israeli government in order to preclude Palestinian students from Gaza from obtaining higher educations, a policy for which your office bears responsibility.

We respectfully request that these problems be rectified immediately. Specifically, we request that the procedures that your office uses to determine who receives a permit and when or under what circumstances a permit might be cancelled be made transparent for all concerned to see and understand. Second, we request that you issue your decisions regarding permits for students in written form, delivered in a timely manner. Third, we request that permits, once granted, be respected throughout the duration of an academic term. Fourth, we request that permits not be denied arbitrarily or punitively in the case of Palestinians with a history of non-violent political activity. Overall, we are requesting that the Israeli government desist from discriminating against Gazans by placing restrictions on their movement, one effect of which is to disrupt people's education.

We respectfully urge you to make the necessary arrangements for Gaza students to be permitted to go to Birzeit University and pursue their studies.

Respectfully,



Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: Benjamin Netanyahu, Office of the Prime Minister
Brigadier General Ilan Shiff, Judge Advocate General
Colonel Moshe Rosenberg, Legal Adviser for the Central Command
David Liba'i, Minister of Justice
Judge Yosef Harish, Attorney General
Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich