

July 22, 2002

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon
3 Kaplan Street
Kiryat Ben Gurion
Jerusalem, ISRAEL

*By Facsimile: 972 2 651 2631
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Dear Prime Minister Sharon,

We write to you today to convey our grave concern regarding Israel's closure of the administrative offices of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, and to urge the immediate reopening of those offices and the return of computer files and other materials confiscated by Israel.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) comprises 2700 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa, and is the preeminent professional association in the field. The association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression in the region and in connection with the study of the Middle East and North Africa.

On 9 July 2002, according to numerous reports, Israeli soldiers and police surrounded the Al-Quds University offices and ordered all personnel to vacate the premises. Included in the closure was the office of the President of Al-Quds University, the renowned scholar and peace activist Dr. Sari Nusseibeh.

The closure of the university offices and seizure of documents was ordered by Uzi Landau, who holds the post of minister of internal security in your cabinet. The closure order reportedly states that the official reason for shutting the offices was that the building was being used for political activities on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Dr. Nusseibeh, who is also the Jerusalem representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization, has spoken out prominently against Palestinian suicide bomb attacks against civilians, and publicly urged Palestinians to compromise regarding the right of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes. Israel's action appears to be political in nature rather than related to genuine security matters, intended to disrupt and silence those Palestinians advocating a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We understand that the ultimate sovereignty of Jerusalem is to be decided through final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. In the meantime, legitimate Palestinian educational facilities in Jerusalem should not be harmed in any way pending the outcome of negotiations. This includes most especially Al-Quds

University, an accredited educational institution, founded in 1978, that educates over 6,000 students.

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We urge the Government of Israel to rescind immediately the order closing Al-Quds University offices in Jerusalem, return all confiscated materials, and allow the university administration to resume its work without delay.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Amy W. Newhall
Executive Director

cc: Uzi Landau, Minister for Internal Security
Secretary of State Colin L. Powell