



**Middle
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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 to express our grave concern over the impact Israel's security barrier is having on the Palestinian educational system in East Jerusalem. In practical application, the barrier infringes on the academic freedom and right to education of hundreds of teachers and thousands of pupils by effectively denying access to East Jerusalem schools. We urge you to take decisive action that will guarantee the full right of access of all Palestinian teachers to their schools in East Jerusalem and the right of education to all Palestinian students.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) comprises 2600 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 in North America and elsewhere.

Israel's security barrier has nearly been completed in the Jerusalem area. In this area, the barrier is being built entirely on Palestinian lands occupied in the 1967 war, in clear contravention of International Humanitarian Law. Because it is being built deep inside Palestinian areas, the barrier has cut off Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem from surrounding Palestinian communities making it nearly impossible for teachers living in the outlying areas from reaching their schools in East Jerusalem.

It is our understanding that nearly 700 East Jerusalem-based teachers fall into the category of living outside the barrier without an Israeli identification card and thus cannot reach their schools. Even though Palestinian schools are about to open, only a small number of these teachers have been approved entry. Essentially barring hundreds of teachers from reaching their schools will have a devastating effect on the 18,000 pupils in the 50 private schools that provide the bulk of education to Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

We have further concerns over the potential of unwarranted delays in crossing the barrier even for those teachers who have the necessary paperwork; this has been a common problem elsewhere for Palestinians seeking to cross the barrier or pass other military checkpoints in the West bank. Punitive or other delays not linked directly to immediate and legitimate security risks would likewise constitute an abridgement of the Palestinians' right to education.

Guaranteeing the right to education for Palestinians in East Jerusalem is a test case for how Israel intends to use the barrier. To date, it has not been encouraging. We ask that you immediately lift all restrictions on teachers seeking to cross the barrier to access their schools in East Jerusalem. This can be done without harming Israel's legitimate security requirements.

Sincerely yours,

Ali Banuazizi
MESA President