



**Middle  
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Committee on  
Academic Freedom

January 22, 2019

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Dear Prime Minister, Ministers, and Major,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to urge a halt to the Israeli army and security forces conducting arbitrary arrests at and incursions into Palestinian universities, assaulting students, faculty, and staff, and obstructing the education of thousands of students. We also condemn in the strongest possible terms the Israeli Army's harm to students at all levels of education through these arrests and incursions.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,500 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

On 19 November 2018, the Israeli Army arrested Yehya Rabie, the President of Birzeit University's Student Council and a third-year student of business and economics. The Israeli Army raided Rabie's home in a dawn arrest. In March

2018, five Israeli soldiers disguised as journalists entered the same university and arrested the previous President of Birzeit University's Student Council, Omar al-Kiswani, about whom we wrote to you (see letter dated 13 March 2018). While the Israeli army accused Rabie and al-Kiswani of "suspected involvement in terror activity," both men remain in detention without trial. These arbitrary arrests and detentions without trial are not the exception but the rule.

Birzeit University's Right to Education Campaign estimates that from 2012 to 2018, twenty students from Birzeit University's Student Council have been detained by Israeli forces. Students are not the only targets of arrests. Mahmoud Hammad, the Dean of Students at Bethlehem University, was arrested in April 2018 and Ghassan Thouqan, a lecturer at Najah National University in Nablus, was arrested in July 2018.

These arrests follow a pattern of Israeli forces' aggression on Palestinian campuses. On 13 December 2018, for example, the Israeli Army entered Al-Quds University's Abu Dis campus, raided several faculties and offices, searched student bloc offices, damaged personal belongings, and seized surveillance footage. On 15 July 2018, Israeli forces raided the Hind Al-Husseini College in Jerusalem and banned a planned conference there. The college remains closed. Israeli forces have also used excessive force on campuses, including firing rubber-coated bullets and tear gas canisters at students at the Palestine Technical University in Hebron on 4 March 2018.

The attacks, assaults, and detentions described above are grave violations of basic rights to education and academic freedom. In our view, they are a part of a larger assault on the Palestinian right to education in the West Bank, which has been especially virulent during the past year. As we noted in our letter to you dated 6 August 2018, a number of foreign faculty members at Palestinian universities have been denied re-entry visas while others have faced lengthy processing periods that forced them to overstay valid visas or leave the country. Now, Palestinian faculty and students, who hold US or other passports, face detentions that affect their academic careers. Detentions of students increase the time spent toward the attainment of academic degrees, while arrests of faculty members disrupt instruction at their universities. The new measures, in which students, including student leaders, faculty members, and administrators are detained, turn campuses from safe spaces into zones where the students' and staff members' politics put them in grave danger both on and off the campus.

The arbitrary arrests and detention of students is a clear violation of the right to education enshrined in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 13 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Israel is a signatory to these conventions and is therefore



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obligated to enforce their stipulations. We call on the Israeli government to cease these attacks on Palestinian universities and ensure the rights of Palestinian students to unfettered education.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written in a cursive style.

Judith E. Tucker  
MESA President  
Professor, Georgetown University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', written in a cursive style.

Laurie Brand  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor, University of Southern California