



**Middle  
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12 December 2019

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Dear Prime Minister, Ministers, Major, and Major-General,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to condemn the detention of Ubai Aboudi, a Palestinian-American scholar and director of the Bisan Center for Research and Development. In the early morning of 13 November 2019, twelve heavily-armed members of the Israel Defence Forces raided Mr. Aboudi's home in Kufr Aqab in East Jerusalem and forcibly detained him, seizing his US passport. The following day he was brought before an Israeli military tribunal and kept in Israeli custody despite the fact that no charges were brought against him. We condemn in the strongest possible terms this illegal abduction of a Palestinian and US national, and we urge the Israeli army and security forces to halt their arbitrary raids of Palestinian civil and human rights organizations and abductions of their leaders. These raids and abductions are in violation of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

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 over 2,700 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.

Ubai Aboudi is the director of the Bisan Center for Research and Development. Based in Ramallah, the Bisan Center is a key civic and research institution, conducting scholarship and issuing policy papers on issues of political economy, development, democracy and progressive politics, humanitarianism, education, the environment and climate change, among others. It was founded in 1989 and, under Ubai Aboudi's directorship, has expanded its work to encompass advocacy and outreach across Palestine. It has been a particularly effective research center in support of rights to education, academic freedom and freedom of thought and speech.

Aboudi is a political economist whose recent work has focused on expanding Palestinian educational capacities in STEM research. He was slated to speak at the Scientists for Palestine Third International Meeting at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in January 2020. He was a key organizer of this initiative, and we are concerned that his detention is part of an effort to target Palestinian scholars involved with international scientific and intellectual communities and organizations. If so, his detention would mark an escalation of Israel's targeting of Palestinian academics so as to further isolate them from colleagues abroad.

Five days after his detention, Aboudi was brought before an Israeli military court with minimal legal representation and no actual charges filed against him. As we have mentioned in earlier letters (see, for example, letters dated 24 September 2019 and 8 August 2019), this court routinely violates the rights of Palestinians to a fair trial and representation, and has a 99% conviction rate. It sentenced Aboudi to four months of prison detention, - subject to renewal. On 1 December, this sentence was reduced to two months of administrative detention without charges filed, and it remains unclear if the detention will be subject to further renewal.

We have noted that the undeclared but indisputable Israeli policy of administrative detention has intensified its targeting of Palestinian scholars and students in the last few years, in particular punishing those who might have access to audiences beyond the occupied territories. Our committee has written to you in the past to protest the repeated arbitrary arrests of Palestinian scholars and students (most recently, see letters dated 24 September 2019; 11 April 2019; 22 January 2018; 8 August 2019), and we condemn these actions in the strongest possible terms.

International human rights organizations have expressed grave concern regarding Aboudi's detention. Amnesty International describes these administrative detentions, when they are prolonged or repeated, as amounting to "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment." Furthermore, these arbitrary arrests are clear violations 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. As a party to the UDHR and a signatory to the ICESCR, Israel is obligated to uphold these conventions. We call upon you to immediately and unconditionally cease these arbitrary arrests, release Ubai Aboudi from detention and permit his travel abroad, and protect Palestinian rights to education and free speech.



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We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dina Rizk Khoury', with a long, sweeping underline.

Dina Rizk Khoury  
MESA President  
Professor, George Washington University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', with a stylized, cursive script.

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

cc:

Ambassador David Melech Friedman  
US Ambassador to Israel  
Fax: +972-2-624-2560