



**Middle
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Association**

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11 May 2020

Prime Minister and Minister of Education Benjamin Netanyahu

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Major Bassem Hino

Commander of the Erez Coordination Officer

Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories

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Dear Prime Minister, Ministers, and Major Hino,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to protest the recent sentencing and ongoing imprisonment of Mais Abu Gush, a Birzeit University media and journalism student, and member of the university's media club. Ms. Abu Gush has been held in detention since her brutal arrest on 29 August 2019, based on charges related to her activities on campus and her participation in a conference in Beirut. She has now been sentenced to 16 months in prison followed by a 12-month suspended sentence and a fine of 2000 NIS. This arrest follows a pattern of Israeli repression against Palestinian students, and clearly violates Ms. Abu Gush's rights, as a student in a university under the jurisdiction of the Israeli occupation authority, to free speech and peaceful protest. We demand an end to the Israeli military and security forces' practice of arbitrary arrests and imprisonment of Palestinian students, and the immediate release of Mais Abu Gush.

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 2,700 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.

We wrote to you previously on [24 September 2019](#) to protest the arrest of Mais Abu Gush along with other faculty and students from Palestinian universities. Following her arrest on 29 August 2019 and transfer to the Moskovia Detention Center, Abu Gush was subjected to physical and psychological torture for well over one month, and lengthy interrogation

sessions during which she was beaten and deprived of sleep. She was also denied the right to meet or consult with an attorney, and her detention was extended without access to legal representation.

Eventually, Mais Abu Gush was indicted on two charges: affiliation with illegal organizations (the Progressive Democratic Student Group and the media club at Birzeit University), and communication with an “enemy party,” in that apparently, she had met activists from Hizbullah during a conference in 2018 in Beirut on the Right of Return. Her trial began on 29 January 2020, but since her lawyer had been prevented from gaining access to her file, he was restricted in his ability to properly represent her. This past Sunday, 3 May 2020, the Israeli military court at Ofer sentenced Mais Abu Gush to 16 months in prison from the time of her arrest last August, followed by a 12-month suspended sentence and a fine of 2000 NIS.

According to Palestinian sources, there are currently about 300 Palestinian students in Israeli prisons. Their detentions are emblematic of an undeclared but indisputable Israeli policy of targeting and disrupting Palestinian higher education. 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 2018](#)); we condemn these cruel and unwarranted actions in the strongest possible terms.

The detention and sentencing of Mais Abu Gush are yet another example of the ongoing mistreatment of Palestinian students by the Israeli authorities. 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 of the ICESCR, Israel is obligated to uphold these conventions. Hence, it must ensure the rights of the Palestinian people to education. We call upon you to cease these arbitrary arrests immediately and unconditionally, to release Mais Abu Gush from prison, and to protect Palestinian students’ right to education.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University



Re: Protesting the recent sentencing of Palestinian student, Mais Abu Gush

11 May 2020

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Laurie Brand'.

Laurie Brand

Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor, University of Southern California

cc:

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman

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