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Dear Prime Minister, Ministers, Ambassador, and Brigadier-General,

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’ practice of arbitrary arrests of Palestinian students. These arrests not only affect the individuals themselves, but also obstruct academic life for thousands of students. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the harm the Israeli army inflicts upon students at all levels of education through these arrests.

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 2,500 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.

Over the past academic year, and in a clear escalation of these detentions,
more than eighty (80) Palestinian university students and at least five
schoolchildren were arbitrarily arrested; all have been interrogated, many
are being detained without charge and have been denied access to legal
representation. Recently, on 22 April, two Birzeit University students,
Abd al Rahman ‘Alawi and Muhammad Hasan, were detained. On 21
May, Israeli forces arrested three other Palestinian students: Basil
Barghouti, ’Iz Shabbaneh, and Mahdi Karajeh. On 5 June, Munthir Yasin
was arrested by IDF soldiers as he crossed the Hawara checkpoint in
southern Nablus, and Yahya al-Qarut was arrested at his home in Tulkarm.
Wisam Uwaidat was taken into custody at a checkpoint near the settlement
of Ma’ale Adumim on 7 June, and on 8 June, IDF soldiers arrested Layan
Kayed near Za’atar checkpoint.

Many of these students face the prospect of extended detention without
trial. Samah Jaradat – about whom we wrote to you on 24 September 2019
– was released after a nine-month detention in Ramle prison and Shatha
Hasan after five months. Both of these students were subjected to physical
harassment and psychological torture. Mais Abu Ghush, a Birzeit
University student, was also subjected to torture, and on 3 May, she was
sentenced to 16 months in Damon prison, despite our 11 May 2020 letter
calling for her release.

These arrests, detentions and imprisonments are part of a broad campaign
to target Palestinian students in the West Bank. Palestinian sources
suggest that there are now 300 Palestinian students in Israeli prisons.
These students are all active in movements and student councils on their
campuses. These recent arrests are a continuation 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 11 May 2020, 24 September 2019, 11 April
2019, 8 August 2018, 22 January 2018) and we condemn these
unwarranted actions in the strongest possible terms.

The detentions described above are grave violations of Palestinians’ rights
to academic freedom, as well as of their right to education as 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. Hence, it must ensure the rights of
the Palestinian people to education. We call upon you to immediately
cease these arbitrary arrests unconditionally, release the detained students from prison, and protect Palestinian students’ right to education.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University

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

cc:

European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine (ECCP)

Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories

James Heenan, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ramallah

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, MENA section

Noha Bawazir, Head of Office and UNESCO Representative, UNESCO Liaison Office, Ramallah

Palestinian delegation to UNESCO

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer - Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) - European Parliament