



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

1957 E Street NW, Suite 401
Washington, DC 20052

Phone 520-333-2577

Fax 520-207-3166

caf@mesana.org

mesana.org



19 June 2020

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Fax: +972-2-5664838

pm_eng@pmo.gov.il

Minister of Education Yoav Galant

Fax: +972-2-5602390

yoavg@knesset.gov.il

Minister of Higher Education Ze'ev Elkin

Fax: +972-2-2649438

zelkin@knesset.gov.il

Minister of Justice Avi Nissenkorn

Fax: +972-2-6285438

mancal@justice.gov.il

Minister of the Interior Aryeh Machluf Deri

Fax: +972-2-6703733

sar@moin.gov.il

Ambassador David Melech Friedman

US Ambassador to Israel

Fax: +972-2-6242560

Brigadier General Rasan Alian

Head of Civil Administration in the West Bank

Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories

Fax: +972-2-6599133

mnz@mgar.co.il

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'atara 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