



**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

23 December 2021

Prime Minister Naftali Bennet
Fax: +972-2-5664838

Minister of Education Yifat Shasha-Biton
Fax: +972-2-5602390

Minister of Justice Gideon Sa'ar
Fax: +972-2-6285438

Brigadier General Ghasan Alyan
Head of Civil Administration in the West Bank, Coordination of Government
Activities in the Territories (COGAT)
Fax: +972-2-6599133

Chief Clerk Init Malul
Supreme Court of the State of Israel
Fax: +972-2-6759648

Dear Prime Minister, Ministers, Brigadier-General, and Chief Clerk,

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 ongoing and intensified Israeli attacks on Palestinian universities and civil society. Most recently, on 14 December 2021 at around 4:30 in the morning, over one hundred Israeli soldiers broke through the main campus gate of Birzeit University. They assaulted and detained several security guards, tore down the Palestinian flag at the center of campus, and raided the faculties of Graduate Studies, Science, and Pharmacy, Nursing and Health Professions. This violation appears to be part of a larger strategy aimed at harming, if not destroying, the fabric of civil life for Palestinians. We note, in particular, the Israeli government's recent designation of six civil society organizations (Addameer, al-Haq, the Bisan Center for Research and Development, Defense for Children International Palestine, the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees and the Union of Agricultural Work Committees) as terrorist organizations. Designating them thus not only threatens to close these organizations, but also criminalizes the very important work done to date by them in human rights advocacy, socio-economic development, and documentation.

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 2800 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.

The move to classify human rights organizations under the rubric of terrorism announced on 22 October by Israeli Defense Minister, Benny Gantz, represents a dangerous precedent that is part of an ongoing campaign of intimidation,





Re: Palestinian Universities and Terrorist Designations

23 December 2021

Page 2

threats and blatant violence against Palestinian students, scholars, researchers and institutions, about which we have written to you on numerous occasions (see, for example, our letters, [13 April 2021](#), [28 June 2021](#), [13 August 2020](#), [19 June 2020](#)). Indeed, well prior to this recent designation, prominent members of these organizations were detained by the Israeli military in an effort to silence them. Consider the case of the arrest and detention of Ubai Aboudi, director of the Bisan Center for Research and Development and researcher in the field of socio-economic rights, about whom we wrote to you ([see our letter 12 December 2019](#)). We have recently learned that he and other Palestinian civil society workers are being subjected to intensified illegal surveillance as part of the Israeli government's [Pegasus project](#).

By criminalizing these organizations and their workers, Israel is thereby also escalating its targeting of human rights advocacy, documentation and research. The studies and reports produced by these respected institutions are well-researched and carefully documented; for decades scholars of and advocates for international human rights have depended upon these materials for their own work. We therefore concur with Birzeit University [colleagues](#) that this latest move by the Israeli government against Palestinian civil society organizations sends a clear message of intimidation aimed at terminating any attempts by international colleagues to conduct research with these organizations or to utilize documentation developed by them. In so doing, it violates well-established principles of academic freedom.

Furthermore, this criminalization of human rights work violates the rights enshrined in 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 as a signatory of the ICESCR, Israel is obligated to uphold these conventions.

We call upon you to cease these attacks on Palestinian civil society organizations and on Palestinian scholars, students and academic institutions, and to protect Palestinians' rights to education and research.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Eve M. Troutt Powell'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eve Troutt Powell
MESA President
Professor, University of Pennsylvania



Re: Palestinian Universities and Terrorist Designations

23 December 2021

Page 3

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

Laurie Brand

Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor Emerita, 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

The Honorable Veronica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression