



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

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5 April 2022

Prime Minister Naftali Bennet
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Minister of Education Yifat Shasha-Biton
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Minister of Justice Gideon Sa'ar
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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 Idit 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 Israel's recently released directive, "Procedure for Entry and Residency of Foreigners in Judea and Samaria Region," scheduled to take effect as policy in May 2022. Released by COGAT (Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories), the policy vests the Israeli military with the unilateral power to select and exclude international faculty, academic researchers, and students who wish to teach, study, and conduct research at Palestinian universities. We regard this as both an attempt to isolate Palestinian scholars and students from the international scholarly community and a form of censorship aimed at constraining the freedom of speech and association of international academics and students by denying them access to and engagement with Palestinian scholars and students, as well as professional and educational opportunities at Palestinian universities. We condemn this proposed policy in the strongest terms as a clear escalation of the persistent efforts of your government to deny Palestinians the right to education.

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.

If the above directive becomes policy, written into law, it will limit the number of foreign instructors to 100 and foreign students to 150 annually for all institutions of higher education in the West Bank. The Israeli military will have the authority to determine the acceptability of the qualifications and fields of study of applicants. To quote the proposed policy, lecturers and researchers who excel in "necessary professions" will be approved "if it is proven, to the



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satisfaction of the authorized COGAT official” (32). It is unclear what, if any, expertise such an official would have to adjudicate qualifications of these academics and students, nor is a clear timeline given for this approval process. Moreover, if issued, a permit to teach or study at a Palestinian university would be valid for a period of one year and renewable for twenty-seven months, after which the scholar would have to depart the West Bank for nine months before applying for a permit again. The entire period of residence, even in this non-consecutive structure, cannot exceed five years. This policy will uproot faculty and students who do not hold residency permits (which are rarely granted) and constrain Palestinian universities’ capacity for recruitment and intellectual exchange. It also imposes an unworkable timeframe on long-term research programs and initiative planning, undermines the accreditation, recruitment, appointment and promotion procedures already in place at Palestinian educational institutions, and further constrains existing projects and programs funded by donor states and institutions — including the European Union, US Department of Education, the British Council, and other international bodies.

We know that a state like Israel that values higher education and learning would not accept an occupying military force to act as an academic arbiter in its own institutions. Yet, this directive is but the most recent development in the ongoing constriction and violation of Palestinian academic freedom. A brief glimpse over the last months points to this long record. In fact, our committee has written to you numerous times about egregious and violent attacks on Palestinian university students and staff, and in particular those at Birzeit University (see our latest letters on [8 February 2022](#); [22 December 2021](#); [21 July 2021](#); [28 June 2021](#); and earlier on [11 April 2019](#).) These attacks, assaults, and detentions are grave violations of basic rights to education and academic freedom. Specifically, these 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. Israel is a party to the UDHR and a signatory to the ICESCR and is therefore obligated to uphold them.

We call upon you to reject these proposed policies and prevent their becoming law.

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



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Professor, University of Pennsylvania

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

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

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

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

Hady Amr, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israel and Palestinian Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Christopher Le Mon, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State

Scott Busby, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State

George Noll, Palestinian Affairs Unit Chief, U.S. Embassy, Israel