



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

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26 May 2022

Naftali Bennett, Prime Minister of the State of Israel  
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Omer Bar Lev, Minister of Public Security  
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Yaacov 'Kobi' Shabtai, Chief of Police

Dr. Daniel A. Chamovitz, President of Ben Gurion University

Prof. Ariel Porat, President of Tel Aviv University

Prof. Adi Stern, President of Bezalel Academy of Art and Design

Prof. Chaim Hames, Rector of Ben Gurion University of the Negev

Prof. Mark Shtaif, Rector of Tel Aviv University  
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Dear Prime Minister, Minister, Chief of Police, University Presidents and Rectors,

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 spate of Israeli attacks on Palestinian students at Israeli universities.

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.

On 12 May 2022 at 2:00 pm, an undercover special unit of the Israeli police arrested Maryam Abu Qwaider, a student at Ben Gurion University, in coordination with campus security. A fellow student, Hitaf al-Huzayyil, who rushed to the police station where Abu Qwaider was being held, was also briefly detained. The students were holding a peaceful vigil at Ben Gurion University's Bi'r al-Sab' campus in memory of the al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who had been killed the previous day (11 May) by Israeli military snipers in Jenin. On 19 May, the Israeli Central Court extended Maryam Abu Qwaider's detention an additional four days. On 22 May her detention was commuted to a 2-week house arrest with a ban on engaging with social media.

On 15 May 2022, Ahmad Jabbarin, a Palestinian student at Tel Aviv University, was apprehended on the university campus, along with his colleagues, Nimr Abu Ahmad and Rami Khatib. Both Ahmad and Khatib were released the same day; Jabbarin was released on 18 May. His three-day detention appears to have been politically motivated, as police sought to intimidate and silence students commemorating the 74th anniversary of the Nakba and flying Palestinian flags.



Re: Aggression Towards Palestinian Students  
26 May 2022  
Page 2

Before the commemoration began, members of the far-right Im Tirtzu movement were seen waving banners displaying the phrase “the nakba is a lie”. Incitement via social media, as well, continued throughout this period. Moreover, it has been reported that a day before Jabbarin’s release, a group of far-right Jewish Israelis went to the student dorms shouting racist slurs against Palestinian students.

Most recently, on 17 May 2022, at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem, a Palestinian student was subjected to a heinous verbal assault by an Israeli student who not only objected to his political opinions, but also to his right to be “here” and to “study with us”. The incident was caught on camera and has been viewed widely.

The attacks and detentions described above are grave violations of fundamental rights to education, free expression, protest, and security while protesting. They appear to be part of a larger, concerted strategy aimed at harassing and scaring Palestinian students into feeling unwelcome and unsafe on Israeli campuses. Of note is a disturbing pattern of coordination between far-right groups, such as Im Tirtzu (which, as noted above, violently disrupted the Nakba commemoration on 15 May at Tel Aviv University), and internal security to provoke Palestinian students and accuse them of various unsubstantiated crimes as a pretext to harass and detain them. One year ago, on 11 May 2021, a Palestinian student protest at Ben Gurion University over the pending evictions in Sheikh Jarrah was attacked with rocks and bottles by far-right counter-protestors, resulting in one student being stabbed, the police firing tear gas, and then rounding up Palestinian students in a student residence and arresting eleven of them. On 20 May 2021, Haaretz reported on what by then had become a relentless campaign of attacks and incitement, driving Palestinian students to flee Israeli campuses. Referring to the events at BGU nine days prior, Haaretz continued: “The students recognized some of the demonstrators as their classmates (...).”

These arbitrary arrests and detentions of students are also a clear violation 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 of the ICESCR and is therefore obligated to uphold them. We urge you to cease these attacks on Palestinian students, rein in far-right groups operating on your campuses, whether students or infiltrators, and ensure that Israeli campuses are safe for all their students.

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: Aggression Towards Palestinian Students  
26 May 2022  
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, University of Southern California

cc:

Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories  
Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression  
European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine (ECCP)  
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  
Prof. Eyal Zisser, Vice Rector, Tel Aviv University