



**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

16 October 2023

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
Fax: +972-2-5664838

Minister of Education Yoav Kisch
Fax: +972-2-5602390

Minister of Justice Yariv Levin
Fax: +972-2-6285438

Brigadier General Hisham Ibrahim
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 against the Israel army's invasion of the Birzeit University campus and the arrest and detention of Birzeit University students that occurred on 24 September 2023.

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.

According to a statement released by BZU Right to Education campaign, "under the cover of night, the Israeli forces violently raided Birzeit University's campus and broke through the university's main gate. The forces moved through the campus and forcefully invaded the BZU Student Council center. They abducted and unlawfully detained eight students. Among those unjustly arrested are the President of the Student Council Abdel Majeed Hasan, Abdallah Nejjim, Amr Khalil, Mahmoud Nakhleh, Ahmad Owiedat, Hasan Alwan, Abdallah Abu Qias, and Yahya Farah." This raid is the latest in a series of such violations including a similar incident on [10 January 2022](#) when the army invaded the BZU campus in broad daylight and arrested five BZU students. This most recent incident occurred at the beginning of an academic year and is a clear part of systematic violations of universities and obstruction of their ability to function.





Re: Birzeit University

16 October 2023

Page 2

Our committee has written to you before regarding the ongoing harassment and detention of Palestinian university students and staff (see our latest letters on [22 December 2021](#); [21 July 2021](#); [28 June 2021](#); and earlier on [11 April 2019](#)). After these most recent arrests, Birzeit University alone now counts over 80 of its students under arrest, some of whom are being held without charge under administrative detention.

Such arbitrary arrests and detentions of students are 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 to the ICESCR and is therefore obligated to uphold them. We call upon you to abide by the principles of right to education and the sanctity of university campuses to ensure the rights of all Palestinian students to education, including as activists, unobstructed.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Eve M. Troutt Powell'.

Eve Troutt Powell
MESA President
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:

Josep Borrell-Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine

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



Re: Birzeit University

16 October 2023

Page 3

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

Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories

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

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

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