



Rt Hon James Cleverly MP  
Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
London SW1A 2AH

24 February 2021

Dear Minister Cleverly,

**Re: Requesting the UK Government's intervention in the prolonged unlawful arbitrary military detention of three young female Palestinian Birzeit University students: Ms Layan Kayed, Ms Elyaa Abu Hijla and Ms Ruba Asi.**

As a UK legal charity committed to the protection and promotion of Palestinian human rights, we request the UK Government's urgent intervention to urge Israel's authorities to immediately release three young female Palestinian Birzeit University students from prolonged arbitrary military detention. Ms Layan Kayed (aged 23), Ms Elyaa Abu Hijla (aged 21) and Ms Ruba Asi (aged 20) have been held in military detention since 8 June, 1 July and 9 July 2020 respectively, identically charged with participation and affiliation of a democratic student association at Birzeit University.

On 22 December 2020, Elyaa was sentenced to 11 months imprisonment. Layan and Ruba's cases remain pending following repeated postponement of their hearings. They are all detained in Damon Prison, inside Israel. The transfer of protected persons outside of occupied territory is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

At the time of their arrests, Layan, Elyaa and Ruba were in full-time education at Birzeit University in the occupied West Bank and had no previous engagement with the law. Layan was arrested at a military checkpoint on 8 June 2020, and Elyaa and Ruba were arrested following terrifying night-time arrest raids on their family homes.

Each were subjected to: body searches, handcuffing with the use of iron cuffs; the imposition of face and eye masks to block their vision; and interviewed without a lawyer present. They were identically charged with 'affiliation with an illegal group', namely a student group at Birzeit University: the Democratic Progressive Student Pole, which does not affiliate with a political party. From the beginning of the military occupation in June 1967 through to July 2019, Israel's Defence Ministry has classified 411 organisations as "hostile," "unlawful" or "terrorist" associations under the Defence (Emergency) Regulations (1945). Members of designated organisations can be criminally charged for their membership in or affiliation with the group. These repressive and excessive military laws are being systematically utilised to target, arrest and arbitrarily detain Palestinian university students.

The punitive and discriminatory use of these military laws to detain Palestinian university students for exercising their basic rights of freedom of association, assembly and expression, constitutes unlawful arbitrary detention and is in clearly apparent breach of international human rights law. LPHR and Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association



have submitted a joint complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention based on our careful assessment that Layan, Elyaa and Ruba's military detention is unlawful and arbitrary in nature; the UN Working Group is formally engaging with their cases.

### **Context of systematic and intensifying targeting of Palestinian university students**

The arrest, arbitrary detention and criminal charges against Layan, Elyaa and Ruba fall within an intensifying pattern since August 2019 of the Israeli military authorities detention of Palestinian university students for peaceful exercise of their basic human rights of freedom of assembly, association and expression (please see this [public statement](#) by Birzeit University). Israel's military authorities are systematically acting in a manner which appears purposefully designed to intimidate and deter other Palestinian university students from exercising their fundamental civil and political rights.

Our work on Layan's, Elyaa and Ruba's cases followed soon after we submitted a complaint (on 21 May 2020) to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention regarding the near six-month military administrative detention of another young female Palestinian student from Birzeit University, Ms Shatha Hasan, who was the head of its Student Union Council. Shatha was detained on secret evidence without charge or trial after being arrested in the middle of the night on 12 December 2019, when approximately 15 Israeli soldiers stormed her home. Like Elyaa, Ruba and Layan, Shatha had no previous engagement with the law.

### **Request for the UK Government's urgent intervention**

We respectfully urge the UK Government's immediate intervention in these appalling arbitrary military detention cases against three young female Palestinian university students, by taking the following suggested necessary actions:

1. Call for the immediate release of Ms Layan Kayed, Ms Elyaa Abu Hijla, Ms Ruba Asi, and other Palestinian university students being detained for association with a university student group;
2. Call upon Israeli military authorities to cease arresting, detaining, and/or charging Palestinian university students for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression; and
3. Call for the end of the inadmissible use of military courts to try civilians, including Palestinian university students.

We would be grateful for your careful consideration of this urgent request and for your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Tareq Shrourou (Director) and Aleisha Ebrahimi  
**Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights**