



Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
London SW1A 2AH

24 January 2022

Dear Minister Cleverly,

Re: Requesting the UK government respond to two recent Israeli military raids on Birzeit University in the occupied West Bank

As a UK legal charity committed to the protection and promotion of Palestinian human rights, we urgently request the UK's intervention following two recent raids on Birzeit University campus by Israeli military forces that have serious human rights consequences. Birzeit University is situated in the occupied West Bank with over 15,000 enrolled students.

14 December 2021 military raid

At 4:15am on Tuesday 14 December 2021, it is reported by Birzeit University, and numerous media outlets, that over 100 heavily armed Israeli soldiers stormed the Birzeit University campus. LPHR has been able to verify directly with Birzeit University that upon entry these soldiers assaulted and detained several university security guards, damaged the main campus gate, and tore down the Palestinian flag. Once the Israeli soldiers had gained access to the main campus, they raided the Graduate Studies, Science and Pharmacy, Nursery, and Health Profession faculties. LPHR has been informed by Birzeit University that one of their security guards required medical attention in hospital for a foot injury after being physically assaulted, and that another had their money stolen.

LPHR shares Birzeit University's view that the military raid represents an attack against the sanctity of an academic institution and is an unacceptable militarisation of a university campus. Dr Ghassan Al-Khatib, Deputy President of Birzeit University, described the raid as “*a dangerous escalation against education in Palestine*”. No formal explanation for the military raid on Birzeit University has been provided by the Israeli authorities as far as we are aware. LPHR has been informed by Birzeit University that its campus has been subjected to 11 military raids in the past ten years, including four times in just the last two years.

10 January 2022 military raid

On the afternoon of 10 January 2022, undercover Israeli forces used apparent excessive force at the main entrance gate of Birzeit University to arrest and detain five Palestinian students. One of the students, Ismail Barghouti, was shot in the leg with live ammunition, as confirmed to LPHR by Birzeit University. The use of live ammunition to perform an arrest raises the serious concern that unlawful excessive force was used against Mr Barghouti. An additional four students were arrested: Abd Al-Hafiz Sharbati, Walid Herazana, Mohammad Khatib and Kassam Nakhleh. Mr Sharbati and Mr Herazana were released later that night; while Mr Nakhleh was released on 13 January with a broken leg sustained while running from the



undercover soldiers. Mr Barghouti was taken to hospital and then transferred to Magiddo prison inside Israel, where he is detained to this date along with Mr Khatib.

Overarching context of systematic military targeting of Palestinian university students

These two recent militarised raids at Birzeit University takes place against a pattern of systematic military targeting of its students for participation with student groups. As part of our Tom Hurdall Student Protection project, LPHR has reviewed credible reports over the last two years showing a large number of Birzeit University students are being subjected to arrest and prolonged military detention by Israel's military authorities. Last June, following our legal complaint, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that three young female Palestinian students from Birzeit University were being unlawfully held in arbitrary detention by Israel's military authorities due to participating with a university student group. The UN panel of experts added: “[We] request the Government of Israel to take the steps necessary to remedy the situation of Ms. Kayed, Ms. Abu Hijla and Ms. Asi without delay... [T]he appropriate remedy would be to release Ms. Kayed, Ms. Abu Hijla and Ms. Asi immediately and accord them an enforceable right to compensation and other reparations, in accordance with international law.”

It is important to note in this context that the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) applies to the actions of an occupying power, as confirmed by the International Court of Justice. Article 13 of the ICESCR recognises the right of everyone to education, affirming it should be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity. Repeated military targeting of a university campus and its students seriously disrupts the activity of tertiary education, and constitutes an apparent serious violation of Article 13 of ICESCR.

Request for urgent intervention by the UK government

LPHR is deeply concerned by the serious human rights violations that result from the targeting of Birzeit University and its students by Israel's military authorities. We accordingly request the UK government to closely monitor this specific human rights issue, and to urge the government of Israel to:

1. Cease the use of excessive force against Palestinian university campuses and students;
2. Cease its internationally unlawful practice of subjecting Palestinian university students to military detention for participation with student groups, and to provide appropriate remedy and reparations for victims of this serious legal and human rights violation.

We would be grateful for your careful consideration of the above and for your written reply.

Yours sincerely,

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