



LAWYERS FOR PALESTINIAN  
HUMAN RIGHTS



Rt Hon James Cleverly MP  
Foreign Secretary  
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

4<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Dear Foreign Secretary,

**Re: Israeli military raid on Birzeit University and detention of eight students**

We are writing on behalf of UK charities working to support the rights of the Palestinian people to express our deep concern and urge immediate action regarding the recent Israeli military raid on Birzeit University's campus in the occupied West Bank.

On Sunday 24th September, dozens of Israeli military forces entered Birzeit University campus by force, assaulting security guards and restraining them. Israeli armed forces then broke into the offices of the Student Council, vandalising its contents. Eight Palestinian students were then arrested: Abdulmajid Hassan (President of the Student Council), Amro Khalil, Abdullah Mohammad, Ahmed Awaidat, Yahya Farah, Mahmoud Nakhleh, Hassan Alwan, and Abdullah Abu Qiyas. At the time of writing this letter, they are still held in military detention. The Israeli army and intelligence services claimed that the students were “planning an armed attack” but as of the date of writing, none of the students have yet been formally charged with any offence. Palestinians are routinely treated as suspects by the Israeli authorities. Arbitrary arrests and the widespread use of administrative detention are key components of Israel’s system of apartheid.

The Israeli military's incursion into a place of learning and scholarship, just one day after the start of the new academic year, is an alarming attack against Palestinian higher education. It undermines fundamental principles of the right to education, academic freedom, the sanctity of educational institutions and the basic safety of students and staff.

Despite the arbitrary restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities on Palestinians, Birzeit University is a leading educational institution in the Middle East. It plays a vital role in Palestinian national life, meeting the educational needs of both the younger generation of Palestinian citizens and those living under the enduring weight of Israel’s apartheid system and prolonged occupation. The right to teach and learn without fear of intimidation or harassment is a fundamental entitlement for both students and faculty members.

However, last Sunday’s raid into the university campus is alarmingly not an isolated incident. It is part of a recurring pattern of practices that deliberately target Palestinian universities and their students, ultimately eroding the fundamental right to education for Palestinians. These

practices include imposing restrictions on faculty members teaching at Palestinian universities, limiting movement and access to these institutions, as well as subjecting students in the occupied Palestinian territory to harassment and arbitrary detention.

Birzeit University has experienced multiple Israeli military raids. Only last year, on 10th January 2022, undercover Israeli operatives invaded the university campus, fired live ammunition and detained five students. Students at Birzeit are systematically targeted by Israeli military authorities through arbitrary arrests. They are tried before military courts in proceedings that fail to comply with the minimum international legal standards for fair trial and due process, frequently due to exercising their basic rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

For example, in June 2021, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) [found](#) that three young Palestinian students from Birzeit University, all women, 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 in its Advisory Opinion of 2004. 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. The long-standing tactic of attempting to instil fear in the student community is once again reflected in the timing and gravity of the actions carried out on 24th September 2023. The psychological impact of pursuing students on campus must be underlined and the human rights implications have been upheld by the UNWGAD.

We are deeply concerned by the serious human rights violations that result from the targeting of Birzeit University and its students by Israel's military authorities. In the past academic year, Birzeit University reports that 58 students have been arrested and detained, and today 80 remain in Israeli jails. We accordingly urge the UK government to take the following tangible action:

1. Closely monitor instances of Palestinian university students being subjected to arrest and detention by Israel's military authorities.
2. Call upon the government of Israel bilaterally and work through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations Human Rights Council, to ensure ceases its unlawful practice of subjecting Palestinian university students to systematic arbitrary arrest and detention and end military incursions into Palestinian universities, and to provide appropriate remedy and reparations for victims of this serious human rights violation.
3. Provide assistance and support for Palestinian higher education institutions, teachers, students and researchers facing barriers imposed by Israel's military occupation.

4. Abide with its obligations under international law and to take action in order to bring to an end to Israel's violations of peremptory norms of international law that breach the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing issue. We look forward to hearing about the steps that your government intends to take in response to this matter.

Sincerely,

Omar Shweiki  
Director, Fobzu (Friends of Birzeit University)

Tareq Shrourou  
Director, Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights

Karla McLaren, Head of Government and Political Relations  
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