



**Middle
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December 21, 2017

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Minister of the Interior Aryeh Machluf Deri
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Minister of Education Naftali Bennett
Chairman, Council for Higher Education of Israel
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Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu and Ministers Shaked, Deri and Bennett,

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express MESA's grave concern over the behavior of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the occupied West Bank on Thursday, 14 December, when soldiers violently stormed the campus of Birzeit University.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. It is the preeminent organization in the field. The Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3,000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Around 4 am on Thursday, 14 December, a phalanx of armed soldiers from the IDF stormed onto the grounds of Birzeit University, just outside of Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank. The IDF claimed to be on a hunt for what they called "incitement materials," which included, according to an official Israeli Army statement, "posters, flags, and [other] materials inciting terror." Israeli security forces engaged in similarly destructive activities at Al-Quds University in Abu Dis on the same day.

The raid at Birzeit took place just days after thousands of Palestinian students had rallied on campus to protest the proclamation made by US President Donald Trump that the United States was recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel, and that the US would be moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Israeli



Re: Raid at Birzeit University December 14, 2017

Page 2

December 21, 2017

officials have declared that these raids on university grounds are intended to deter any further popular dissent.

Students, faculty, and staff at Birzeit University, Al-Quds University, and all other educational institutions in occupied Palestine as well as inside of Israel must be permitted to exercise their protected rights to education and peaceful protest. This committee has written to you numerous times in the past to express our condemnation of assaults that continue to be carried out against Palestinian institutions of higher learning, acts that are illegal under international law. The occupation forces have destroyed the private property of student groups, including flags, banners, posters, and the materials used to decorate them; they have jeopardized the physical wellbeing of students; and they have interrupted the normal conduct of university business. These raids disrupt the regular functioning of the university, and are thereby clear violations of the right to education enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966). Israel is a signatory to both of these conventions.

We, therefore, once again strongly urge the Israeli Ministry of Education to respect the academic freedom of Palestinian students and all members of the university community by forbidding or at least condemning military activities against any and all Palestinian universities. We also call upon the Israel Defense Forces to return whatever property they have confiscated from students, faculty, and staff, and to compensate Palestinian individuals, student groups, and university organizations for whatever damage has been done at Birzeit and Al-Quds as a consequence of these raids.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written in a cursive style.

Judith E. Tucker
MESA President
Professor, Georgetown University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy W. Newhall', written in a cursive style.

Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director