

## **Moran/Inglis "Dear Colleague" Letter**

### **Support Higher Education Opportunities for Gazan Students in the West Bank**

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We write to express our concern with Israel's ban on travel between the West Bank and Gaza as it relates to Gazan students who wish to study in the West Bank.

Like you, we believe that education is a key to prosperity, stability and peace. We applaud your efforts to support educational opportunities for Palestinian youth, including your initiative to increase U.S. funding for Palestinian universities and educational programs in Gaza and the West Bank.

Unfortunately, Israel's near-total ban on travel from Gaza to the West Bank, even for educational purposes, has meant Gazan students have no access to the many degree programs that are not available in the Gaza Strip, including in humanitarian fields such as occupational and speech therapy. This leaves only the difficult and expensive option of traveling abroad for study - a path available only to a privileged few. For cultural reasons, it is also not a realistic alternative for most of Gaza's female students, for whom study in the West Bank is the only viable option outside Gaza.

As you know, since 2000, Israel has banned Palestinian students from Gaza from studying at West Bank universities. It has done so despite the recommendation of the Bertini Report, incorporated into the "Road Map," that "Israel should ensure that all children, students and teachers have full access to schools and universities throughout the West Bank and Gaza". In 2007, Israel's High Court of Justice ruled that students from Gaza should be allowed to study in the West Bank because it was "likely to have positive humane implications." Despite the Court's recommendation that a mechanism be devised to screen individual applicants as exceptions to the overall policy banning study in the West Bank, in practice, no mechanism has been formulated, and to the best of our knowledge, since this judgment in 2007, Israel has not issued a single entry permit to a Gazan student for the purpose of traveling to study in the West Bank - despite numerous applications.

Toward the end of the 1990s, approximately 1,000 students from Gaza were studying in West Bank institutions. In contrast, very few are studying in the West Bank today. Those that are risk being forcibly removed at any time. The recent case of Berlanty Azzam, a young female student Israeli authorities forcibly deported to Gaza two months before she was due to complete her degree at Bethlehem University, is a stark reminder of the risks these students take in order to pursue an education.

Ensuring that students from Gaza have access to a higher education in the West Bank promotes U.S. foreign policy interests by investing in the future of the region - those bright, talented young people seeking to better themselves and their society.

We urge you to raise this issue with the Israeli government, making clear that the U.S. considers access to higher education, including in the West Bank, a crucial opportunity for Palestinians in Gaza. We urge you to press the Israeli government to end the ban on student travel from Gaza to the West Bank, and in its place establish an effective mechanism to evaluate and approve requests from Gaza residents to study in the West Bank in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

[MEMBER OF CONGRESS]