

**EMBARGOED UNTIL THURSDAY
AFTERNOON, 11 JULY, 12:00**



Israel forcing international lecturers out of West Bank Palestinian universities

Birzeit University, Adalah, Al-Haq now fighting to end escalating discriminatory Israeli policy aimed at blocking international academics from entering the country and refusing to renew visas for those with teaching contracts.

8 July 2019

Israel is refusing to issue work permits for international academics working at Palestinian universities in the occupied West Bank and is escalating a harsh visa policy that is forcing them to abandon their students and leave the country. Murky and arbitrary Israeli regulations leave international lecturers and their families in constant uncertainty and subject to deportation at any time.

[\[CLICK HERE to read this press release on Adalah's website\]](#)

Now, a Palestinian university in the West Bank, together with two Palestinian human rights groups, are taking legal action.

After three consecutive academic years during which Israel has intensified its efforts to force international lecturers to leave the country, Birzeit University, Al-Haq, and Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, are demanding an immediate halt to this policy targeting Palestinian academic freedom and isolating Palestinian institutions of higher learning. **Birzeit University – despite operating under Israeli military occupation – must be guaranteed the ability to exercise its right to freedom of education.**

[\[CLICK HERE for stories of Birzeit University faculty members personally affected by Israeli policy\]](#)

In a [letter sent on 30 April 2019](#) to Israeli Interior Minister Aryeh Deri, Israeli Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit, Israeli Chief Military Advocate General Sharon Afek, and the Israeli military's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Kamil Abu Rokon, Birzeit University, Al-Haq, and Adalah demand that Israel:

- lift the restrictions preventing international academics employed by Birzeit University from staying and working in the West Bank;
- refrain from imposing arbitrary restrictions on the duration of stay or extension of stay for international academics;
- order the publication of a clear and lawful procedure for issuing entry visas and work permits for international academics in the West Bank, which will enable the university to manage and maintain its academic freedom.

THE NUMBERS

While only Israeli authorities can provide full figures over the past number of years, by 2017 a variety of sources confirmed an escalation in Israel's refusal to renew visa extensions as well as a range of other conditions. The Right to Enter Campaign, which has monitored the issue of entry and visa procedures for foreign nationals for over a decade, reports a clear escalation in refusals on visa extension applications and tightening of restrictions since at least mid-2016.

For example, the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, an affiliate of the Board of Trustees of Birzeit University, reported a 200 percent increase in visa denials over the past two academic years alone: In the 2017-2018 academic year, four international faculty out of 20 were denied visa extensions or entry at the border; in 2018-2019, eight international faculty out of 19 were denied visa extensions or entry.

Between 2017 and 2019, four full-time and three part-time international lecturers at Birzeit University were compelled to leave the country and were not able to continue their teaching because Israel refused to renew their visas. In 2019, Israel denied entry to two international academics with Birzeit University contracts. Not a single international faculty member, with the exception of those directly employed by foreign government-sponsored programs, was issued a visa for the length of their 2018-2019 academic year contract. As of press time, six full-time international faculty members contracted for the 2018-2019 academic year are without valid visas; another five – including a department chair – are overseas with no clear indications of whether they will be able to return and secure visas required for them to stay for the coming academic year. Over 12 departments and programs face losing faculty members in the coming academic year because of the Israeli policy.

Birzeit University President Abdullatif Abuhijleh said: "Blocking our right to engage international academics is part of an ongoing effort by the Israeli occupation to marginalize Palestinian institutions of higher education. The latest escalation in visa restrictions is just one in a longstanding and systematic Israeli policy of undermining the independence and viability of Palestinian higher education institutions".

PALESTINIAN UNIVERSITIES IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Birzeit University is not alone: universities across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, are being affected by the Israeli policy.

A February 2018 Palestinian Ministry of Education study found that more than half of the international lecturers and staff (32 out of 64) at eight universities were detrimentally affected during the previous two years by Israeli rejections of applications for new visas or visa extensions or by refusal to allow them to enter the West Bank. These academics, many of them Palestinians holding foreign passports, are citizens of various countries including the Netherlands, France, Germany, India, and Jordan, with the majority from the U.S. and European Union member states.

Over the past two years, Israel has been escalating the visa restrictions it is imposing on international academics, including: denial of entry to the West Bank; refusing visa extensions; delays in processing visa extension applications beyond the duration of the period the visa is valid; arbitrarily granting visas for short periods, sometimes ranging from only two weeks to three months; restricting visas to the West Bank only and permitting entry and exit only via the Allenby Bridge crossing rather than via Ben Gurion Airport; requirements to deposit large sums as guarantees, sometimes as much as NIS 80,000 (approx. US\$23,300).

[\[CLICK HERE for stories of Birzeit University faculty members personally affected by Israeli policy\]](#)

Without work permits issued by Israel and no clear means for securing visas to enter or stay, international academics have no guarantees they can travel to Palestinian universities that recruit them, remain in the OPT for the duration of their academic contracts, or return if they travel abroad for academic or personal reasons.

These Israeli restrictions have severe repercussions on Birzeit, its students, and the Palestinian public at large, isolating the university from other educational institutions around the world and diminishing the quality of education it offers to the Palestinian people.

ISRAELI POLICY ILLEGAL

In 2019's QS World University Rankings, Birzeit University ranked within the top three percent of universities worldwide. But these rankings are based on a number of key indicators – including the proportion of international faculty and international students – that Israel is now targeting. By preventing Birzeit from employing international faculty, Israel is impeding its ability to function as a university that meets international standards.

The Israeli policy toward international academics violates both Israeli law and international law. It violates universities' freedom to expand the areas of research and studies it offers to Palestinian and international students alike. As such, Israel is blocking the occupied Palestinian population from determining for themselves what kind of education they want to provide.

Adalah Deputy General Director Attorney Sawsan Zaher, who drafted the letter to Israeli authorities, said: "Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip – like all other peoples around the world – are entitled to exercise their right to academic freedom as part of their right to self-determination. The Israeli military occupation cannot prevent Palestinians from exercising this right".

Indeed, according to the interpretation applied to Article 43 of the Hague Regulations of 1907, sovereignty of education does not change hands – it is inalienable – and must remain in the hands of the occupied Palestinian population.

[CLICK HERE for stories of Birzeit University faculty members personally affected by Israeli policy]

[CLICK HERE to read the letter \[Hebrew original\]](#)

[CLICK HERE to read the letter \[Arabic translation\]](#)

[CLICK HERE to read the letter \[English translation\]](#)

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BIRZEIT FACULTY AVAILABLE FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS – SHORT VERSION



HANEEN ADI, who teaches English literature and writing at Birzeit University, has been without a visa and thus effectively restricted to the West Bank city of Ramallah since November of 2017 – the middle of her first semester at Birzeit. Unwilling to risk the possibility that she will be barred from returning, Ms. Adi has been unable to leave the country for nearly two years now. She not only missed being with her family on the occasion of her sister’s wedding, another sister’s graduation and the death of a relative; when her father tried to visit her in the West Bank, Israeli authorities denied him entry. [CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)



DR. RANA BARAKAT, an assistant professor of history and contemporary Arab studies, spent 18 months unsuccessfully pursuing a visa extension while teaching undergraduate and graduate students at Birzeit University. Awarded a prestigious Columbia University fellowship in the spring of 2019, Dr. Barakat faced a huge dilemma: “I was afraid that if I left before I secured a visa extension for my current stay, I wouldn’t be allowed to return to Birzeit”. [CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)



DR. RANIA JAWAD, assistant professor of English literature, has been threatened with deportation since fall 2017. She is married to a Palestinian with a West Bank ID, also a BZU faculty member, and together they have two small children. She was told by an Israeli official that her visa extension would be granted only if she resigns from her position at Birzeit University. The official informed her that were she to be granted a visa extension on grounds of her marriage to a West Bank ID holder, she would not be permitted to work. [CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)



DR. OMAR TESDELL, assistant professor in Birzeit’s Department of Geography, is one of only a few active researchers in biodiversity conservation, landscape transformation, and agroecology in Palestine. He also advises several graduate students. The difficulties with regard to residency have affected his ability to support students, conduct research, and maintain an active research agenda by traveling for workshops and conferences. [CLICK HERE FOR MORE](#)



A CURRENT CHAIR OF FACULTY OF ARTS AT BIRZEIT was told by Israeli authorities in late 2017 to resign if she wanted her visa extended. An EU citizen married to a Palestinian ID holder and mother to small children, she refused to tender her resignation and continues to teach at Birzeit. Her commitment has come at a high cost and her efforts to secure visas for the past two years have been met with a litany of obstacles including being ignored by Israeli authorities, forced to pay a NIS 30,000 deposit, and banned from travel via Ben Gurion Airport. She has now been denied entry and is stuck outside the country, depending on colleagues to administer her exams on her behalf.

BIRZEIT FACULTY AVAILABLE FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS – FULL VERSION

HANEEN ADI, who teaches English literature and writing at Birzeit University, has been without a visa and thus effectively restricted to the West Bank city of Ramallah since November of 2017 – the middle of her first semester at Birzeit.

Ms. Adi holds an M.A. in English Literature and Critical Theory from Brooklyn College. Before coming to Birzeit, Ms. Adi taught in the City University of New York system, where her experience in teaching students with English as a second language employing new pedagogical methodologies in writing provided her with an area of expertise of critical importance to the largest Department in Birzeit's Faculty of Arts. Ms. Adi's academic training in transnational identities and post-colonial studies, supports the Department and its students in keeping in-step with the ways the discipline is changing in the rest of the world. Unwilling to risk the possibility that she will be barred from returning, Ms. Adi has been unable to leave the country for nearly two years now. She not only missed being with her family on the occasion of her sister's wedding, another sister's graduation and the death of a relative; when her father tried to visit her in the West Bank, Israeli authorities denied him entry.

Ms. Adi earned her M.A. in English Literature and Critical Theory from Brooklyn College, New York and her B.A. in English from Youngstown State University, Ohio.

DR. RANA BARAKAT, an assistant professor of history and contemporary Arab studies, spent 18 months unsuccessfully pursuing a visa extension while continuing to teach undergraduate and graduate students at Birzeit University.

Dr. Barakat joined Birzeit's History and Archeology Department in 2007 and was a Fulbright scholar in 2008. As a historian of ideas and contexts with expertise in Euro-American literature and philosophy as well as Middle East history, she offers an exceptional comparative perspective to both undergraduate and graduate students at Birzeit. In addition to teaching courses in American and European history and cultural studies, she has been instrumental in the development of Birzeit's Ph.D. program and various M.A. courses. Her inter-disciplinary approach, grounded in rigorous academic training, her innovative pedagogical style, and her devoted mentorship of students are widely recognized as critical contributions to Birzeit's commitment to providing quality liberal arts education.

Dr. Barakat was awarded the Arcapita Visiting Professor Fellowship at Columbia University for the Spring term of 2019. While a clear recognition of her outstanding scholarship, the opportunity also created a huge dilemma: "I was afraid that if I left before I secured a visa extension for my current stay, I wouldn't be allowed to return to Birzeit," explains Barakat. In January 2019, Dr. Barakat left the country to take up the fellowship; despite continuous efforts of her lawyers, she still had not secured a visa. "I left with my trepidation exceeded only by my persistent hope that I would be able to come back, supported by a file full of papers documenting the ongoing appeal for my visa." Lawyers continue to work on securing agreement for her re-entry in time to assume to teach a full course load and advising several graduate students for the 2019-2020 academic year.

Dr. Barakat earned her Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago; her M.A. in Middle East Studies from the University of Chicago; and her B.A. in English Literature and History from Northwestern University.

DR. RANIA JAWAD, assistant professor of English literature, has been threatened with deportation since fall 2017. Dr. Jawad joined Birzeit's Department of English Language and Literature in 2009 and served as the department's chairperson from 2016-2018. She is the only department faculty member with a specialization in theater and performance studies. She also serves on the Board of the Institute of Women's Studies. Dr. Jawad is married to a Palestinian with a West Bank ID, also a BZU faculty member, and together they have two small children. She was told by an Israeli official that her visa extension would be granted only if she provided documentation that she had resigned from her position at Birzeit University; the official informed her that if she was granted a visa extension on grounds of her marriage to a West Bank ID holder, this means that she is not permitted to work.

Dr. Jawad holds a Ph.D. in the Culture and Representation track of the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Department, New York University; an M.A. in German Literature from New York University; and a B.A. in English Literature from Boston College.

DR. OMAR TESDELL is assistant professor in the Department of Geography at Birzeit University. He is an active researcher in biodiversity conservation, landscape transformation, agro-ecology, and his research is supported by several grants. He is one of a few researchers in this field in Palestine. Omar's research on biodiversity conservation has encouraged others to engage in this vital topic. He also advises several graduate students. The difficulties with regard to residency have affected his ability to support students, conduct research, and maintain an active research agenda by traveling for workshops and conferences.

Dr. Tesdell also serves on the Board of Trustees of Ramallah Friends School, a Quaker school committed to excellence and inclusiveness. The school has received American support for many years.

Dr. Tesdell holds a Ph.D. in Geography and Sustainable Agriculture from the University of Minnesota and was a postdoctoral fellow at Columbia University in New York in 2015.

A CURRENT CHAIR OF FACULTY OF ARTS at Birzeit was told by Israeli authorities in late 2017 to resign if she wanted her visa extended. An EU citizen married to a Palestinian ID holder and mother to small children, she has, with persistence and the help of a lawyer, refused to tender her resignation and continues to teach at Birzeit. Her commitment to Birzeit has come at a high cost and her efforts to secure visas for the past two academic years have been met with a litany of obfuscations and obstacles: she was given a visa extension for just one month and another time refused a visa extension altogether.

She has sought coordination to allow her to travel and re-enter the country on the advice of Israeli authorities but received no response. She's been prohibited from traveling via Ben Gurion Airport; traveled over Allenby Bridge three times midway through the 2018-2019 academic term in order to renew her visa, with no certainty about whether or not she would be able to return; and was required to pay a NIS30,000 deposit and sign a paper saying she would not pursue a visa extension from inside the country in order to enter the country. In early June 2019, she was denied entry when she left the country to avoid overstaying her visa and was thus obliged to rely on colleagues to administer her final exams.

She earned her M.A. in linguistics from a European university.