

RTE Situation Update - August 2018

Palestinian academia undermined

On 8th June 2018, seven international faculty members at Birzeit University (BZU) — one-third of the international staff at the university — were refused visa extensions by the Israeli authorities. Both the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Education and Birzeit University have strongly objected to the denials (<https://www.birzeit.edu/en/news/birzeit-university-condemns-breach-academic-freedom-after-academics-forced-leave-palestine>).

“This development portends a dramatically negative impact on education at BZU, and ultimately for many other Palestinian universities, as it will further extend the isolation of Palestinian universities from the global academic community, reducing their capacity to maintain internationally recognized standards of higher education.” – Birzeit University

Local and international protest to these denials and to broader restrictions on entry and presence of foreign nationals working at Palestinian higher education institutions, have been widespread. Birzeit University alone reports that visa renewal requests for 15 international faculty members have been refused or significantly delayed. Press updates and more relevant statements and information can be found at: <http://www.righttoenter.ps/>

West Bank visa renewals still obstructed

Meanwhile, **a clear, consistent and lawful policy and accompanying procedures on entry to the oPt, and internal visa renewals in the oPt, remains lacking.** Reports of haphazard issuance of visas by Israel's Ministry of Interior continue. For the few foreign nationals that have reported successfully receiving extensions, most are reporting being issued only 3-month B2 visas (“stay permit – not permitted to work”), single entry and stamped “Judea and Samaria only,” regardless of their specific visa requests. Visa processing times continue to be well over one month, often requiring foreign nationals to overstay valid visas to complete the process. The Campaign has also received reports of foreign nationals receiving 10-year bans on entry into Israel (and thus the oPt) upon exiting the country on grounds that they have overstayed their visas for several days/weeks.

Gaza access restrictions

In Gaza, **1.9 million Palestinians remain in “lock down”** for over two decades running. On 20 August, Erez Crossing was completely closed, with the exception of cases defined by Israel as “humanitarian.” The Israeli Minister of Defence announced that the decision was a response to the previous Friday's protests along the perimeter fence, part of ongoing demonstrations held by Palestinians since March 30. Kerem Shalom, the primary commercial crossing in/out of Gaza was closed for over a month from 10 July on similar punitive grounds. At the time of writing, Rafah Crossing was also closed during the week-long 'Eid holiday, with scores of Gaza residents reportedly waiting on the Egyptian side of the crossing to return home for many days and in difficult conditions (<http://gisha.org/updates/9454>).

Also of concern are reports of **heightened restrictions on movement of Palestinian humanitarian workers out of Gaza** in recent months. In a press release issued 8 August, the UN's Organisation for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that restrictive measures by the Israeli authorities include an increase in the processing time for exit permits, a rise in denials and one-year

bans, restrictions on the type of items allowed to be taken out of Gaza, and new crossing procedures at the vehicle terminal. According to the release, the past 12 months have seen “a dramatic increase in the processing time for permit applications to exit Gaza to Israel and the West Bank from 14 to 55 working days. The processing time for applications for a one-day permit to travel to Jordan via Israel is now 70 working days. Along with this negative trend, the duration of security clearance necessary to access approved permits has been extended from six to nine months”

(<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/increased-restrictions-movement-humanitarian-staff-out-gaza>).

Entry denials to the oPt

Arbitrary denials of foreign nationals destined for the oPt for short-term visits or longer-term stays continue at Israeli ports of entry. These include foreign nationals of both Palestinian and non-Palestinian descent; among them are relatives, brides and grooms, and also students, teachers, human rights workers, business people, NGO staff, clergy and others who are vital contributors to various productive sectors of society.

Israeli and international media has also reported **an escalation in incidents of foreign nationals being questioned and sometimes banned from both the oPt and Israel for their political views.** A number of prominent Israeli leftist activists and journalists, too, have been subjected to questioning upon entry into the country. (See, for example, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-so-you-ve-been-detained-at-israel-s-airport-here-are-your-rights-1.6383189>).

Information for all foreign nationals

(1) “Tanseeq” for visa extensions applications based on employment in the West Bank

The Palestinian Authority’s Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA) will now provide foreign nationals with a dated and stamped proof of PA transfer of the foreign national’s initial request for “coordination” to COGAT via MoCA upon request. Such documentation can be valuable proof in any legal proceedings should Israeli authorities unjustifiably deny an application on administrative/procedural grounds. Due to the current frequency of denials, we recommend all foreign nationals request this documentation.

(2) Transfer of Family Unification applications from the PA to Israeli authorities

Upon request, the Palestinian Authority’s MoCA has provided foreign nationals with a dated and stamped documentation of transfer of family reunification (*lem sheml*) requests from the PA to the Israeli authorities. Such proof is crucial for foreign nationals engaged in family unification legal proceedings, since cases are often dismissed on the basis of allegations that the request for family reunification was never transferred by the PA to Israeli authorities. Foreign nationals can also inquire with the PA after the status of their application either by directly visiting the Ministry of Civil Affairs’ relevant office or via Al Haq in coordination with the Right to Enter campaign. The relevant form and information for inquiring into the status of applications can be found at <http://www.righttoenter.ps/lem-shemil-status-form/>

(3) Lawyers’ list

For foreign nationals experiencing issues with entering or maintaining presence in the oPt, a list of lawyers willing to work on cases of denied entry or difficulties in obtaining visa extensions can be found at <http://www.righttoenter.ps/denied-entry/qualified-lawyers/>

Information for US citizens

If you are experiencing delays or other difficulties in renewing your visa, the United States Citizens Services has indicated that it will inquire after your visa case with COGAT, or the Israeli foreign ministry, or any other relevant Israeli authority, following your submission of a privacy waiver to them and a short summary of the problems you are facing. The waivers are meant to obtain your permission to share your personal data. You will have to stipulate the purpose for which the data can be shared and indicate the relevant authorities with which it may be shared (e.g. ““COGAT, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant Israeli authorities who can resolve this matter.”). The ACS will require the original form, signed. (You can send it to the Consulate General Jerusalem, American Citizen Services, 18 Agron Road, Jerusalem 9419003). For the form go to: <http://www.righttoenter.ps/united-states-privacy-waiver/>