



CAMPAIGN FOR THE RIGHT TO ENTER THE  
OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY (OPT)

*A grassroots campaign working for the right to freedom of movement and residency in the oPt*

---

## **Palestinian University professors threatened with expulsion from West Bank**

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.** 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.

Nearly all of the international staff at BZU have faced problems in visa renewals over the past year. Three have left the university in the past two months due to ongoing difficulties in obtaining visas. Affected faculty members include senior faculty and department chairpersons and key administrative staff. They are members on university committees and serve the larger Palestinian community through their activities at educational, research, and cultural institutions. A number have been teaching at BZU for a decade or more. They play a critical role in internationalizing the curriculum, including the teaching of foreign language and by providing global academic perspectives and skills that are crucial to the ongoing provision of quality higher education. Additionally, given that BZU programs play a leading role in educating future generations of teachers and professors the loss of these faculty members will also have negative consequences for the long-term development of Palestinian education as a whole.

For many years, staff members with foreign passports were given extended visas by the Israeli authorities on the basis of their having a contract at the university. These “visa extensions” were how Israeli authorities allowed foreign staff to work at Palestinian universities, without contradicting their official policy of denying formal work visas to foreign nationals wishing to work in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). As such, this was also the only mechanism through which the Israeli authorities allowed Palestinian higher education to benefit from the skills and expertise of international academic staff. However, over the past year, foreign nationals wishing to maintain a presence in the oPt, whether for reasons of work or family unity, have faced **an alarming escalation in the rejection of these visa extension requests and in the frequency and range of arbitrary demands and conditions imposed by the Israeli authorities.**

**“These practices violate the Palestinian people’s right to education and contravene Israel’s obligations as an occupying power,”** stressed Palestinian Minister of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE), Sabri Saidam.

Palestinian educational institutions have been hard hit by Israeli denials or restrictions on entry and presence in the oPt, as evidenced by the recent survey of Palestinian universities undertaken by the Palestinian MOEHE. **Of the eight universities responding, over half of all foreign national faculty and staff have been negatively affected over the past two academic years** causing serious disruption to these institutions academic programs and administrative work. Moreover, it has undermined Palestinian universities’ ability to attract further external expertise as foreign academics are deterred from accepting teaching and research posts by the arbitrary rejections and destructive restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities.

By increasingly isolating the Palestinian academic community from the international academic community, the overall quality and efficacy of education that students receive is diminished as opportunities to integrate global perspectives, experiences, and standards are stymied. The overall development of higher education is thus increasingly compromised. Given the continued absence of clear, transparent and functioning policies and procedures for foreign nationals wishing to enter or stay



CAMPAIGN FOR THE RIGHT TO ENTER THE  
OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY (OPT)

*A grassroots campaign working for the right to freedom of movement and residency in the oPt*

---

in the oPt, Palestinian universities fear that the number of foreign nationals at universities who will be affected is likely to rise once their currently valid visas expire. Palestinian universities are thus concerned that **the 2018/2019 year is likely to be even more adversely affected**, if the situation is not effectively and immediately addressed.

***Addendum: Background on visa extension processes  
for foreign nationals wishing to live in West Bank***

Procedures provided by the Israeli authorities for entry and visa renewals for foreign nationals have always been opaque at best. Without functioning procedures for securing work and residence permits for the oPt or realizing the right to family unification, both those working in the oPt and those wishing to live with their families in the oPt have been obliged to rely on extending B2 visitor visas by exiting and re-entering the country or applying to the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), generally submitting applications via the PA. This has been the only procedure available for foreign national spouses, occasionally for parents of Palestinians registered with the Israeli-controlled Palestinian registry, and for professionals employed by institutions based in the West Bank. Applicants have experienced varying degrees of success since about 2006.<sup>1</sup> However, over the past year, even these procedures have become increasingly dysfunctional.

PA officials report that Israeli authorities have confirmed that new policies have been introduced over the past year. Third state representatives, aware that many of their citizens have already been affected by changing practices, have been in communication with Israeli officials and expressed their concern. However, **no official communication regarding changes in policies or practices has been issued to date.**

Among the worrying developments reported by applicants applying for renewal are shifting documentation requirements without prior or official notification; lengthy processing periods that force applicants to overstay valid visas or leave the country; shortened and arbitrary duration of visas; issuance of the "Judea and Samaria" only stamp; restrictions on ports of entry/exit; and demands for financial bonds of 20,000 to 80,000 NIS. There is also an escalation in Israeli demands for applicants to come to interviews with COGAT personnel, during which some applicants have been subjected to shouting as well as confusing and intimidating lines of questioning. Others have reported being told to sign Hebrew-only documents as a condition for visa renewal.

Of particular concern for academic institutions, where long-term commitment to the development of teaching and research programs is foundational to academic excellence, is an apparent decision by Israeli authorities to **restrict the number of years those on work-granted visas are permitted to stay in the oPt**, including teachers, professors, NGO workers and others. Also of concern is the increasing number of cases in which Israeli authorities have told **spouses that they are not permitted to work (including a number of faculty and staff at Palestinian universities).**

#####END#####

**Press contacts: Dr Roger Heacock tel: 00357-99895469 / email: [rheacock@birzeit.edu](mailto:rheacock@birzeit.edu)**

**Ms Salwa Daibes tel: 0599433823 / email: [righttoenter@gmail.com](mailto:righttoenter@gmail.com)**

---

<sup>1</sup> In 2006, Israel denied hundreds of foreign nationals destined for the oPt to visit, work or join family from entering the country. Following diplomatic pressure from EU member states, the US and others, Israeli authorities issued a statement regarding transit to the West Bank via Israel for foreign nationals. The announcement (issued by the Ministry of Interior in December 2006 and then again by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2007) specified categories of people who would be eligible for entry permits and visa extensions but fell short of providing clear, transparent policies and procedures regarding the grounds for their issuance. While the number of entry denials was greatly reduced, arbitrary entry denials never disappeared and the past decade has seen several waves of escalation.