

## **Call to Action**

### **Birzeit University Rejects Israeli Measures Against Academic Freedom**

Birzeit University rejects Israel's most recent attempt to constrict the fundamental right of Palestinians to education and to undermine the academic freedom and autonomy of Palestinian universities. Scheduled to take effect in May, 2022, the "Procedure for Entry and Residency of Foreigners in Judea and Samaria Region" grants Israeli military immense powers to isolate Palestinian universities from the outside world, and to determine the future course of Palestinian higher education.

The new directive invests the Israeli military the absolute right to select which international faculty, academic researchers and students may be present at Palestinian universities, as well as impose their own arbitrary criteria on which fields of study are permissible and what qualifications are acceptable. It requires each applicant to submit to interrogation at an Israeli diplomatic mission in the country of origin, while imposing stiff monetary bonds on those selected for entry. Further, the directive sets a low ceiling on the number of foreign teachers and students (100 and 150 per year, respectively), and limits the duration of employment to five non-consecutive years, thereby denying sustainable hiring and promotion of faculty. Consequently, some current faculty and students who do not hold residency permits may be forced to leave and academic programs face the inability to recruit new hires and undertake collaborative scholarly research and exchanges. Plainly put, the directive puts Palestinian Universities under siege and divests them of basic control over their academic decisions.

The attack on the right to education and academic freedom that these proposed procedures embody are part of the ongoing assault on Palestinian institutions of higher learning since their establishment. Birzeit University students, faculty and employees have suffered for decades under a relentless Israeli military campaign that includes forced closures (one of them shut down the university for over four years), campus incursions, intimidation, and imprisonment. Such actions are inseparable from the racist and multilayered system of apartheid and persecution which denies the Palestinian people their most fundamental rights, including to freedom of expression, and the pursuit of scientific advancement and development.

We call on all academic and human rights organizations to join us in refusing these procedures, and demand that governments worldwide hold Israel, the occupying power, accountable for this clear violation of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), 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).

This moment is dangerous for the future of Palestinian higher education, but it is also a moment to join together for justice, freedom, and equality. Palestinian universities, like all universities, are places of knowledge production that connect scholars and students across the globe and inspire them to imagine and build a better future for all.

Support our efforts to defend the Palestinian people's right to education, free from duress, intervention, and political persecution. Work with us to break the siege that these regulations impose on Birzeit and other Palestinian universities. Accept our invitation to teach and learn in Palestine. Help us exercise our basic right to education and to preserve the institutional autonomy that we built over the decades despite all obstacles.