

4 November 2009

An Update on the return of Berlanty Azzam from Gaza to Bethlehem University

Dear Friends,

Below is an update on the case of Berlanty, the date of the next Israeli court hearing, and a request for another letter from you to help Berlanty.

1. Thank you for your continued support for the Bethlehem University student Berlanty Azzam to be returned to the University campus by the Israeli military who took her blindfolded and handcuffed to Gaza on Wednesday, 28 October 2009.

2. The Israeli High Court of Justice will hold another court hearing on Berlanty's case next Thursday, 12 November 2009 at 9:00am to have the Israeli military to further explain why Berlanty was removed from Bethlehem to Gaza. We will keep you informed of the outcome ... but for now, we need to ask for yet more involvement from you if we might.

3. On Tuesday, 3 November 2009 the lawyers at Gisha were informed that the state of Israel claims that Berlanty has no right to be at Bethlehem University – to be in the West Bank. However, Berlanty did not need a permit to remain in the West Bank after entering, and no such kind of permit existed in 2005, so she couldn't have requested one. Berlanty only needed the Israeli permit to cross through Israel from Gaza to the West Bank, which she received.

4. In their response to the court, the Israeli state admits that a “mistake” was made in removing Berlanty on the night of Wednesday, 28 October 2009. Orders were given by the legal adviser's office not to do it. It was done anyway and still, they refuse to return her to her studies at Bethlehem University.

What did the judge do in response to this November 3rd report from the state of Israel?

1. The judge ordered another hearing as soon as possible (Thursday, 12 November 2009 at 9:00am) for the state of Israel to further explain why Berlanty was removed from Bethlehem to Gaza while she, and her lawyers, were told when she was first detained by the Israeli military that this would not happen.

2. Your involvement is already making a difference! Can we ask for you to go one step further?

Many of you – and your friends through you – have contacted your elected and appointed government officials. We have heard from citizens in the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, France, Italy, Spain who have done so. This is making a real difference – some of these governments and media in these countries have contacted us and Berlanty's lawyers.

This is part of the reason why, along with the international media attention, the Israeli High Court of Justice is continuing to have the Israeli military to further explain why Berlanty was removed from Bethlehem to Gaza.

3. In the meantime, Berlanty is still in Gaza where she was brought blindfolded and handcuffed on Wednesday 28 October (this is day #8). Her father, who works for the YMCA in Gaza, and her mother, who works for the UN Relief and Works Agency, are with Berlanty. She and they and all of us want for her to return to Bethlehem to complete her bachelors degree in these last few weeks of the academic semester.

What can you do?

PLEASE consider sending a specific letter to

- To your local newspapers (letters to the editor, perhaps)
- To you elected officials – again –

- To the United States Consulate in Jerusalem (UsConGenJerusalem@state.gov)
- To the United States Secretary of State, Secretary Clinton. Go to the website: http://contact-us.state.gov/cgi-bin/state.cfg/php/enduser/std_alp.php

Click on the BLUE TAB (Email a Question/Comment), fill in the box with your question / comment about “Berlanty Azzam”

You might consider saying something like:

I am writing to you regarding the case of Ms. Berlanty Azzam, a fourth year student at Bethlehem University in Bethlehem who was detained and deported –blindfolded and handcuffed – to Gaza by the Israeli military on October 28, 2009. Ms. Azzam, 21 years old, is only few months away from completing her four year Bachelor’s degree in business administration. A petition against Berlanty’s deportation has been filed in Israeli courts. The courts have ordered attorneys for the state of Israel to further explain at a court hearing on Thursday, November 12th at 9:00am why – after they admittedly made a “mistake” in removing Berlanty from Bethlehem to Gaza on Wednesday, October 28th. She has not been accused of being a security threat and has committed no crime. She has not yet been returned to Bethlehem University, a Vatican sponsored university.

While some Israeli officials have claimed that Berlanty has “no right” to be at Bethlehem University in the West Bank because they say that she does not have a “permit” from the state of Israel allowing her to do so, Berlanty did not need a permit to remain in the West Bank after entering in 2005 since no such kind of permit existed in 2005, so she couldn’t have requested one. Berlanty only needed the Israeli permit in 2005 to cross through Israel from Gaza to the West Bank, which she received. Since that time, Berlanty has been in Bethlehem, the West Bank – and only seeks to be in the West Bank, not in Israel.

I ask that on compassionate and humanitarian grounds you request that the Israeli government, military, diplomatic, and legal officials allow this young woman, Ms. Berlanty Azzam to return to Bethlehem University to complete her studies.

I believe permitting her to return to Bethlehem to complete her degree also would be in the spirit of the “Agreement on Movement and Access” negotiated between the Palestinian Authority and Israel in 2005.

In the meantime, Berlanty is still in Gaza where she was brought blindfolded and handcuffed on Wednesday 28 October. Her father, who works for the YMCA in Gaza, and her mother, who works for the UN Relief and Works Agency, are with Berlanty. She and they and all of us want for her to return to Bethlehem to complete her bachelors degree in these last few weeks of the academic semester. Your kind and immediate assistance is deeply appreciated.

Background information:

1. As previously reported (http://www.bethlehem.edu/archives/2009/2009_063.shtml) the Israeli court ordered attorneys for the state of Israel to submit a preliminary written report on Berlanty's case by Tuesday, 3 November 2009. This is response to the petition filed on 29 October 2009 by Gisha (<http://www.gisha.org/>), the Israel non-profit legal organization whose goal is to protect the freedom of movement of Palestinians.

2. More updates will be forthcoming as the situation develops.

Thanks for all that you are doing to help return Berlanty to Bethlehem – and also for what you are doing to help to get our 12 first year students out of Gaza and to Bethlehem for the first time. Click here <http://www.bethlehem.edu/archives/2009/2009-10-15EnrolledStudentsSeekingAssistanceforTravel.pdf> for more background on this aspect of the quest for education and freedom of movement in Palestine.

Today, 3 November 2009, is day #8 of Berlanty’s absence from Bethlehem University due to the Israeli military removal of Berlanty to Gaza.

Blessings to you,

Brother Jack

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