

12 November 2009

Update on Bethlehem University Student: Berlanty Azzam
16 days since she has been taken

Dear Friends of Bethlehem University,

Thank you so much for your TREMENDOUS support from all corners of the globe. We've heard from Australia, New Zealand, England, Ireland, Canada, Egypt, Denmark, Germany, China, France, Jordan, Italy, the Vatican, Philippines, and the United States. Many have contacted their elected representatives, Israeli embassies, and media. Many individual citizens have made themselves known and have expressed their deep concern for this abusive military intervention into the educational activity of the Vatican-sponsored Bethlehem University. You are making a difference and your voices are being heard - THANK YOU!

Y/our 21 year old student, Berlanty Azzam, has been denied permission to be present at the Israeli High Court hearing later today, Thursday, 12 November (though many of the faculty from Bethlehem University will be present). **Berlanty said: "I'm dreaming of the day when I can return to my studies. I worried and fearful of what might happen, and I hope that my right to education will not be violated."**

May I offer you this update concerning y/our student, Berlanty Azzam.

1. It was 16 days ago, on Wednesday, 28 October 2009 that y/our 21 year old female student, Berlanty Azzam, was detained by the Israeli military and then forcibly removed from Bethlehem to Gaza under cover of darkness, being blindfolded and handcuffed: a grave violation of her right to due process.
2. Despite the fact that Berlanty has lived and studied in the West Bank since 2005, and that she has less than two months to go before completing her BA, and the Israeli government has NO security claims whatsoever against her, Berlanty was removed from Bethlehem to the Gaza Strip, based solely on the address listed on her identity card.
3. **Later this morning, Thursday, 12 November @ 9am we will be in the Israeli High Court** with legal representation from GISHA (<http://www.gisha.org/>) on behalf of y/our student, Berlanty Azzam - seeking to have "Berlanty returned to Bethlehem."
4. Gisha's Advocate Yadin Elam, tells us that regarding the State's only claim against Berlanty, which is that she was present in the West Bank "illegally", Berlanty "traveled from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank legally in 2005. The Military Commander himself issued a permit for her to cross to the West Bank with no conditions or limitations, and with no requirement to obtain any special permit. Such permits simply did not exist."
5. A press release from GISHA notes that in 2007, a High Court of Justice ruling determined that students from Gaza wishing to study in the West Bank should be allowed to do so "in cases likely to have positive humane implications." However, to the best of Gisha's knowledge, since this judgment in 2007, Israel has not issued an entry permit for the purpose of traveling to study in the West Bank for a single student from Gaza – despite numerous applications. Just this summer, requests to allow 12 students from Gaza to reach their studies at Bethlehem University were summarily denied.
6. "The detention of a young woman, who poses no danger, security or otherwise, is a breach of the law, morality and common sense, especially because her removal to the Gaza Strip was done under the cover of night, tearing her away from her studies just before she was to complete them, ignoring an explicit official promise, and violating her right to due process," wrote Adv. Elam in the Court Petition.

Thank you for your interest and interventions -- your efforts and prayers are deeply appreciated. Last week, the US Consul General came to visit us at Bethlehem University to learn first hand of the situation. Rep. James Moran (D-VA) sent an official request for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's intervention on behalf of Berlanty, as did Brother Ronald Gallagher, President of Saint Mary's College of California, Brother James Gaffney, President of Lewis University, Dr. Dennis Golden, President of Fontbonne University, and Warren Clark, Executive Director of Churches for Middle East Peace. The German Cardinal Joachim Meisner, Archbishop of Cologne, wrote to the Israeli Ambassador to Germany on behalf of Berlanty. Father Drew Christiansen, editor-in-chief of AMERICA magazine wrote of Berlanty in his weekly column - as did Deal Hudson in inside-catholic.com and Stuart Littlewood in Cairo with AL-AHRAM.

I will update you as to the outcome of today's hearing.

blessings to you

brother jack