

Saturday, 14 November 2009

Subject: Update on Bethlehem University Student: Berlanty Azzam (18 days since she was blindfolded, handcuffed, and taken from Bethlehem to Gaza)

Dear Friends of Bethlehem University,

When I last wrote to you, it was early Thursday morning, 12 November, and we were just about to go to the Israeli High Court for a hearing with Attorney Yadin Elam from [GISHA](#) arguing against the lawyers for the Israeli state and military to "bring Berlanty back to Bethlehem."

Today, on Saturday morning, 14 November 2009, may I share with you what happened at the hearing at the Israeli High Court on Thursday, 12 November:

- The High Court criticized the Israeli military for its violation of due process procedures that resulted in our 21 year old student, Berlanty Azzam, being handcuffed, blindfolded, and removed by force from Bethlehem to Gaza on 28 October 2009.
- The High Court ordered the Israeli military to conduct an Administrative Hearing next week at which Berlanty and Yadin Elam, her attorney, must be present – so that Berlanty has the opportunity to challenge her removal from Bethlehem to Gaza.
- The High Court ordered the Israeli military to present the findings of their Administrative Hearing to the High Court before 22 November – when the Court will decide if there is a need for a further court hearing.
- The High Court rejected the State's request to prevent Berlanty's attorney, Yadin Elam, from being present at the Administrative Hearing.
- The High Court rejected Yadin Elam's request to allow Berlanty to return to her studies at Bethlehem University while the legal matters are being sorted out.
- While the lawyers for the Israeli state and military claimed that Berlanty was in the West Bank "illegally", Gisha lawyers claim that her passage to the West Bank was done legally via a permit from the military commander that had no conditions of limitations. Since the Israeli state could not produce any documented evidence about this matter, the High Court said that these matters appeared "to be foggy."

We expect to hear back from the Israeli High Court on or about 22 November 2009.

You can hear Berlanty's voice on the BBC Interview they posted on 13 November 2009:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/>

The Israeli military did not give permission for Berlanty Azzam herself to be present at the High Court Hearing (12 November 2009), but there were 13 of us (4 Brothers, 4 Priests, 2 Sisters, and 3 Laymen) from

- Bethlehem University,
- the Tantur Institute for Ecumenical Studies,
- St.Yves Catholic Human and Civil Rights Center, and
- the Latin Patriarchate

who were in attendance to show support for Berlanty and for the significant legal work provided by GISHA, the Legal Center for Freedom of Movement.

The case was heard by a three judge panel and lasted a total of about 45 minutes with additional time for two short recesses.

At the beginning of the hearing, the presiding judge asked the lawyers for the Israeli state and military to permit Berlanty to return to Bethlehem on humanitarian grounds to complete her bachelors degree courses for these remaining 6 weeks of the academic semester. However, the lawyers for the Israeli state and military refused to accept this recommendation of the court, stating that this is a matter of principle.

Gisha issued a [press release](#) with more details of Thursday's court hearing (here is the URL):

<http://www.gisha.org/index.php?intLanguage=2&intItemId=1633&intSiteSN=113>

Also, the [Associated Press](#) and the [Washington Post](#) published stories on this hearing (here are the URLs):

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/12/AR2009111209266.html?wprss%3Drss_world/mideast&sub=AR

What can you do now to help?

First, please accept our deepest gratitude – especially the gratitude of Berlanty herself – for your good efforts over the past 18 days. You have done a lot already and it is making a difference. Berlanty kows of your prayers and support -- and your letters to your elected representatives and to the Israeli Embassies in your countries.

Secondly, please contact your elected representatives ONCE AGAIN to ask them to make a formal request to the Israeli Embassy and Government to “bring Berlanty back to Bethlehem.”

For our friends who are citizens of the UK, there is an on-line [petition](#) for Berlanty that you may consider signing so that the petition can then be presented to Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Here is the URL where you can sign the [petition](#)

<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/berlantyazzam/>

Others friends from elsewhere in Europe, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, Philippines, and other lands, might wish to write to our elected representatives, Foreign Offices, State Department, etc – and consider saying something like the following:

I am a constituent of yours. I am very familiar with and grateful for the good work that is happening at Bethlehem University in the Holy Land, a Vatican-sponsored De La Salle Christian Brothers university that serves both Christians and Muslims - fostering peace and justice in a troubled land.

I am writing to you regarding the case of Ms. Berlanty Azzam, a 21 year old student at Bethlehem University who is in her final few weeks of studies to earn her bachelors degree.

Berlanty has been enrolled at Bethlehem University since 2005 and is to complete her studies for a bachelors degree in Business Administration in a few weeks time, December 2009. However, on 28 October 2009 she was "deported" to Gaza - blind-folded and handcuffed by the Israeli military - because she has an ID card that indicates that her parent's home is in Gaza. Her father works for the YMCA in Gaza and her mother works for the UN Relief and Works Agency in Gaza. Berlanty, however, has been living in Bethlehem and studying at Bethlehem University since 2005. She has not been accused of any crime, nor of being any security threat. It is just because her parents live in Gaza and her ID card lists this address that the Israeli military summarily removed her from Bethlehem to Gaza without any due process procedure.

While some Israeli military officials claim that Berlanty has no right to be in Bethlehem, as has been reported in

1. [The Chronicle of Higher Education on 29 October 2009](#) ,
2. [CNN.com on 31 October 2009](#) ,
3. [BBC World News on 12 November 2009](#) ,
4. [Associated Press on 12 November 2009](#) , and
5. [Washington Post on 13 November 2009](#) ,

Berlanty did not need a permit to be in the West Bank since no such permit existed in 2005 when she moved to Bethlehem in order to study at Bethlehem University. She only needed the Israeli permit in 2005 to move from Gaza through Israel to the West Bank, which she received. Since that time, Berlanty has been in Bethlehem enrolled at Bethlehem University in the West Bank –and she only seeks to be in Bethlehem in the West Bank, not in Israel.

I ask that you formally request of the Israeli Embassy that on humanitarian grounds, they instruct the Israeli military to return Berlanty to Bethlehem immediately so she can complete her degree program by the end of December.

Permitting Berlanty to return to Bethlehem to complete her degree would be in the spirit of the “Agreement on Movement and Access” negotiated with the assistance of the United States, between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in 2005.

I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your assistance in the pursuit of justice.

Your involvement is already making a difference! THANK YOU!

We expect to hear back from the Israeli High Court on or about 22 November 2009.

Bring Berlanty Back to Bethlehem!

Blessings to you,

Brother Jack