

18 November 2009

- Update on Berlanty Assam, Bethlehem University Student
- 22 days since she was blindfolded, handcuffed, and taken from Bethlehem to Gaza

On Tuesday, 17 November 2009 the Israeli military, as ordered by the Israeli High Court on 12 November, held its administrative hearing at Erez, the Gaza border crossing, with our Bethlehem University student, Berlanty Azzam, present.

We are most grateful that Berlanty was provided this opportunity to explain her situation to the Israeli military administrative officers and to challenge their decision to blindfold and handcuff her – and to summarily remove her from Bethlehem to Gaza on Wednesday, 28 October (two months before completing her studies for her bachelors degree at Bethlehem University).

“They didn’t say anything about the way they deported me,” said Berlanty after the administrative hearing. “They just asked me about my permission and what I wanted to do. I said I came to the West Bank legally, stayed for more than 3 and a half years, didn’t do anyone any harm, and want to go back to finish my studies at Bethlehem University.”

At the 12 November 2009 hearing of the Israeli High Court,

- The Court ordered the Israeli military to give Berlanty an opportunity to challenge their removal of her from Bethlehem to Gaza.
- The Court rejected the military’s request to prevent her attorney, Gisha’s Yadin Elam, from being present at the hearing with Berlanty as her legal counsel. Consequently, 21 days after she was summarily “deported” by the Israeli army was the first time that Yadin Elam, Berlanty’s legal counsel, was able to meet her in person, face-to-face. “It was so good to have met Berlanty in person. She is a very impressive person. She’s amazing! She did very well at the hearing” was what we at Bethlehem University heard from the GISHA representatives when they called to tell us about the administrative hearing.

We understand that **the next step** in this legal process is for the Israeli military and for the Gisha lawyers to present reports to the Israeli High Court before Sunday, 22 November 2009. The High Court will then determine if there is a need for a hearing or if Berlanty should be returned to Bethlehem or some other outcome.

While we await the ruling of the High Court, we are all painfully aware that every day of her being held in Gaza against her will, Berlanty is suffering a missed academic day in her pursuit of completing her bachelor’s degree at Bethlehem University.

“I’m just waiting to come back to Bethlehem. I’m really praying for a positive answer – really I am,” said Berlanty on the phone on Tuesday night. “God bless you and all of the people who are working so hard to help me – and others like me here in Gaza. Thank you so much!”

If you have not yet heard Berlanty telling her story in her own words and voice, you may wish to listen to her six minute interview with the BBC:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/2009/11/091113\\_berlantyazzam\\_nh\\_cg.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/news/2009/11/091113_berlantyazzam_nh_cg.shtml)

Yes, Berlanty is an amazing and impressive person. She is like the other students from Gaza who are still seeking Israeli military permission to come to Bethlehem University. You can read about them here: [http://www.bethlehem.edu/archives/2009/2009\\_023.shtml](http://www.bethlehem.edu/archives/2009/2009_023.shtml)

Berlanty wants to come back to Bethlehem University. About a dozen other students from Gaza want to come to Bethlehem University for their education.

We want Berlanty back – and we want to other students to come to begin their studies. WHY? Because this is what Bethlehem University is all about: **providing quality higher education to the people of Palestine, fostering shared values, moral principles, and dedication to serving the common good.**

Thank you so much for your support – you are making a real difference!

Blessings to you,

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