

11 January 2010
Bethlehem, Palestine

She did it!

You did it!

We did it!

Thanks for all your support!

**Gaza Student Completes Her Bachelors Degree
from Bethlehem University**

1. **Ms. Berlanty Azzam completes course requirements for her bachelors degree!**
2. **75 days from when she was blindfolded, handcuffed, and taken from Bethlehem to Gaza**
3. **Berlanty graduates in Gaza at the Holy Family Church**
4. **Bethlehem University expressed gratitude to Gisha and to thousands of local and international friends who joined in the efforts to seek justice for Berlanty.**
5. **Bethlehem University continues to seek support for other Palestinian students from Gaza to enroll in and attend courses at the Vatican- sponsored Bethlehem University – as well as at all other Palestinian universities in the West Bank or Gaza.**

Bethlehem University officials traveled to Gaza on Sunday, 10 January to mark the occasion of Ms. Berlanty Azzam completing her semester courses, to encourage other students from Gaza who seek to pursue their education at Bethlehem University or other Palestinian universities in the West Bank, and

- to recognize the more than 430 other graduates of Bethlehem University from Gaza.

Brother Peter Bray, Vice Chancellor, the Papal Nuncio H.E. Archbishop Antonio Franco, Chancellor, Brother Joe, Vice Chancellor Emeritus, and Trappist Abbott Thomas traveled to Gaza for the 10am Mass at the Holy Family Church where they met Ms. Berlanty Azzam and her family and friends among the parishioners, as well as some of the other Bethlehem University students who await permission from the Israeli military authorities to come to Bethlehem to pursue their education at the Vatican-sponsored Bethlehem University.

“I never imagined that my graduation ceremony would be held in a Church in Gaza with no one from my classmates attending,” said the exuberant 22-year-old Berlanty Azzam, “but I am so happy and grateful to my teachers and all of the friends of Bethlehem University who came forward to help me. I really worked hard and prayed for this moment and will do my best to help others who seek to study at *my university!*” Arriving in Gaza to present Berlanty with her certificate, Vice-Chancellor of the Bethlehem University Brother Peter Bray said “the University has a commitment to help Berlanty – and all our students in good academic standing – to graduate and succeed in life.”

H.E. Archbishop Antonio Franco, Papal Nuncio and the highest ranking representative of the Pope to Israeli and Palestine, also traveled all the way to Gaza to award Berlanty her degree in Business Administration and to celebrate Mass at Holy Family Church in Gaza.

Brother Joe, Vice-Chancellor Emeritus and Trappist Abbott Thomas Davis accompanied Brother Peter to Gaza for meetings with some of the more than 400 graduates of Bethlehem University from Gaza as well

as some of the current Bethlehem University students who continue to await for permission from the Israeli military to study at Bethlehem University.

As reported in the Washington Post, CNN, BBC, America Magazine, The Chronicle of Higher Education, Maan News and other media, Berlanty's case drew high-level attention: including inquiries from the State Department of the United States, members of the US Congress, members of Parliaments and Ministers of Foreign Affairs from Ireland, the UK, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Australia, as well as Vatican officials, Cardinals, and Bishops Conferences in Canada, the UK, the United States, and Germany.

The Israeli human rights legal group Gisha took on Berlanty's case, seeking a ruling from the Israeli High Court to overturn the Israeli army's decision to not allow Berlanty the right to return to Bethlehem for the final two months needed to complete her bachelors degree. All attempts to seek justice, however, resulted in the Israeli High Court refusing to instruct the Army to allow Berlanty to return to the West Bank. Noting that the 22-year old female student had no security or other charges against her, and that she had been living in Bethlehem and dutifully pursuing her education at Bethlehem University for nearly four years without incident, dismay was expressed by many, including the Gisha lawyers who brought her case to the Israeli High Court.

"I really wanted to be among my colleagues on such a day," Berlanty said as she lit a candle and kneeled after the homily and the readings as peace overwhelmed the church. "I still don't know why I was taken from Bethlehem and moved to Gaza while being handcuffed and blindfolded." She continued, "I am sad because I was not able to graduate with my colleagues in Bethlehem, but I was able to challenge the occupation and today I am graduating from Bethlehem University," her eyes filled with tears of joy.

Timeline of Events for Berlanty Azzam and the Israeli military's interference in her education:

- Sept 2005: Berlanty enrolls at Bethlehem University as a first year student
- 28 Oct 2009: Berlanty blindfolded, handcuffed, and taken from Bethlehem to Gaza by Israeli military
- 12 Nov 2009: Israeli High Court Hearing, Court orders Israeli Military to hold due process hearing
- 18 Nov 2009: Israeli Military Conducts an Administrative Hearing with Berlanty at Erez Crossing
- 30 Nov 2009: Israeli High Court Hearing, Court orders Israeli Military to submit 2005 permission
- 9 Dec 2009: Israeli High Court issues ruling: Berlanty cannot return to Bethlehem
- 10 Jan 2010: Berlanty Graduates in Gaza at Holy Family Church

graphic

Here are pictured some of the other students from Gaza who have been accepted at Bethlehem University and still await permission from the Israeli military to come to Bethlehem for their university education.

Pray for them and help to support our "Gaza Student Initiative" efforts.

**Please send your gift check made payable to
“Bethlehem University” noting support for the
“Gaza Student Initiative” to:**

Brother Dominic Smith, FSC
Bethlehem University - USA Development
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A tax receipt will be issued for all donations.

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