

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

December 4, 2009

Honorable Richard Durbin  
Assistant Majority Leader, United States Senate  
309 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
FAX (202) 228-0400

Dear Senator Durbin:

I am writing to you to alert you to our concern regarding the sudden and probably illegal deportation of a student at Bethlehem University, a very well respected institution of higher learning that was established by the Vatican three dozen years ago and is administered by the De La Salle Christian Brothers of the United States, the same religious order that sponsors Lewis University. Located in the Holy Land, Bethlehem University has provided educational opportunity to generations of Palestinian students, both Christian and Muslim. Despite occasional closing during conflicts, Bethlehem University has flourished and served the Holy Land as an educational resource through times of peace and hostility.

Recently, the Israeli military has taken action to stop the movement of faculty teaching at Palestinian universities in the West Bank. Movement by its students also is strictly governed. I understand the fragility of the relationships in the Middle East, but I am concerned because a student in her final year of work at Bethlehem University was detained at the end of October and was forcibly deported to Gaza by Israeli authorities. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported on October 29, 2009 that Berlanty Azzam, a 21 year old student who has been pursuing business administration and translation at Bethlehem University since 2005, was stopped at a roadside checkpoint in the West Bank. Ms. Azzam had expected to complete her degree studies in December, but now has no access to return to complete her studies and graduate. Ms. Azzam had moved to Bethlehem to attend the University in 2005, but her address in the Population Registry is listed in the Gaza Strip, the home of her parents.

Bethlehem University is also cooperating with Gisha Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, an Israeli NGO, on a legal appeal to reverse Miss Berlanty's deportation and allow her to return to classes in Bethlehem. According to the University website, Ms. Azzam has not been accused of being a security threat and has committed no crime. Permitting her to return to the University to complete her degree would be in the spirit of the "Agreement on Movement and Access," negotiated between the Palestinian Authority and Israel in 2005.

On Monday, November 30, the Israeli High court allowed Ms. Azzam to be returned to Gaza, not to Bethlehem, while instructing the Israeli Army to "attempt to locate the documents relating to

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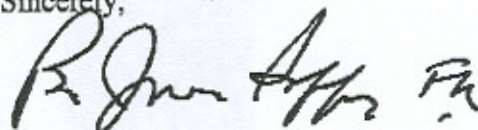
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the request from 2005 and the permit that was issued." This refers to her permit to attend the University. Results are to be submitted to the Court no later than December 6, 2009. I respectively request that you ask for leniency to allow this fine student to complete her academic program and graduate from Bethlehem University. I sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in November to inform her of the situation, but I have received no reply from the State Department.

Lewis University has a long-standing partnership with Bethlehem University in which Lewis provides graduate scholarships for outstanding Bethlehem alumni who commit to teach for a period of two or three years at Bethlehem when they complete their studies. They all have been wonderful young adults and many are now teaching at Bethlehem University.

If there is any way that you can intervene in this diplomatic issue, it would be deeply appreciated. I hope that you will assist Berlanty Azzam if possible, so that she will be able to graduate and begin a career in her homeland. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brother James Gaffney, FSC". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials "FSC" written more clearly at the end.

Brother James Gaffney, FSC  
President