

The Irish Parliament makes note of the injustice the Israeli Military and Government has brought upon Bethlehem University student Berlanty Azzam.

**Question No. 265**

**Parliamentary Question - Dept Details**

To ask, Michael Martin, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, if, in view of the fact that Israel has no security concerns regarding a person (details supplied), he will make representations to ensure that they are allowed to continue their studies at Bethlehem University; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Rory O'Hanlon.

\* For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 15th December, 2009.

Berlanty Azzam

**Ref No:** 47167/09

**REPLY**

In my reply of 4 November to a Question from the Deputy on this case, I stated:

“This Israeli action has very negative implications for the future of Bethlehem University and the ability of young Palestinians to receive third level education. I call upon the Israeli authorities to reverse this apparently unjustified and mistaken action, and allow the person concerned to return to Bethlehem immediately.”

Subsequently, I wrote directly to the Ambassador of Israel in the same terms. At that point there seemed reason to hope that a judicial appeal in Israel might reverse this decision.

I was therefore disappointed at the end of last week to learn that the Israeli High Court has refused to overturn the Israeli Army's decision to deport the person concerned to Gaza. Initial reports of the hearing indicate that the military authorities made no claim of any security risk from this student. The Court had asked the Army to reconsider its decision and also to produce the student's entry permit, a crucial document in the case which was misplaced after it was taken from her. Despite the Army's failure to meet either of these requests, the Court declined to act further. This is in line with reports from many sources that the Israeli courts are becoming increasingly reluctant to exercise judicial oversight of the actions of the military in the Occupied Territories. This has the effect of denying Palestinians legal redress for the actions of the state.

I regret the action taken in this case and the refusal to reconsider it. A number of disturbing implications arise:

The student was arrested while travelling between two areas of the West Bank controlled by the Palestinian Authority. It is difficult to see why Israel should be interfering in something which relates to where Palestinians live within Palestinian territory - except in the specific circumstances of a clear security threat.

Second, the community of Palestinian Christians in Gaza is being cut off from Bethlehem University, a key centre of their community life.

Third, the case raises unsettling questions about Israel's view of Gaza and the rights of its inhabitants.

I am concerned about an approach in this case which seems deeply counter-productive in terms of political reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Dr. Rory O'Hanlon T.D.