

Minister for Foreign Affairs Expresses Concern over Expulsion of Bethlehem University Student

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The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Micheál Martin, T.D., has issued a strong appeal to the Israeli Government to re-consider the expulsion and forcible return to Gaza last week of a young Bethlehem University student, Ms. Berlanty Azzam.

"I was extremely concerned to hear of the circumstances surrounding Ms. Azzam's detention last week and subsequent forcible return to Gaza. Ms. Azzam was on the verge of completing her business degree studies at Bethlehem University and there appears to be no credible justification for detaining and forcing her to return to Gaza, simply because she came from there originally."

"It should be obvious that young Palestinians like Berlanty who, despite her difficult background is just a few weeks short of graduating, represent the best hope for a peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians alike, and should be encouraged. As a Business graduate, Berlanty will also be in a position to contribute to the overall economic development of the Palestinians territories to which we all attach such importance."

"I would also be concerned that this decision, if not reversed, could have very serious implications for the future of Bethlehem University and the ability of young Palestinians to receive third level education. I therefore urge the Israeli authorities to reverse this apparently unjustified and mistaken action, and allow Ms. Azzam to return to Bethlehem University to complete her studies."

Note for Editors

Berlanty Azzam, a fourth year Business Administration student at Bethlehem University and who is originally from Gaza, was detained by the Israeli military authorities on 28 October 2009 and subsequently returned the same day to Gaza. Ms. Azzam has been living in the West Bank and studying at Bethlehem University since 2005 and was within weeks of completing her Business Administration degree. Palestinian residents of Gaza are currently banned by the Israeli authorities from studying at Palestinian universities in the West Bank.

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