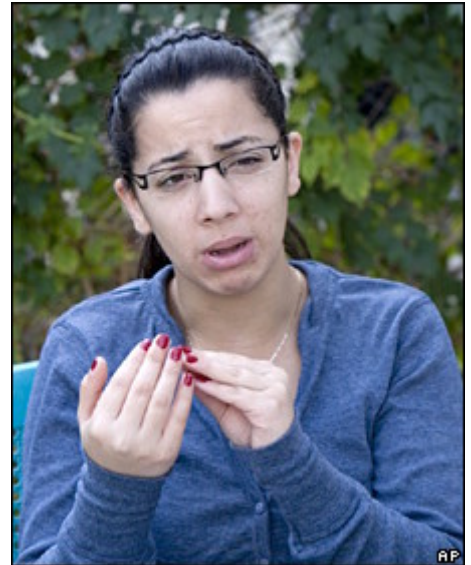


West Bank deportation challenged

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Berlanty Azzam had nearly finished her degree at Bethlehem University

Israel's Supreme Court has said a Palestinian woman whom the Israeli army deported to Gaza from the West Bank should be able to challenge the move.

Bethlehem University student Berlanty Azzam, 21, was deported two weeks ago.

The Israeli military said she had been given a permit in 2005 allowing her to spend only a few days in Jerusalem.

But an Israeli human rights group says that when Ms Azzam left Gaza there was no such thing as a special permit for Palestinians to enter the West Bank.

The organisation, Gisha, believes tens of thousands of other Palestinians in the West Bank are also under threat of deportation for similar reasons.

'Illegal resident'

Ms Azzam was stopped at a checkpoint in the West Bank by Israeli soldiers at the end of October, two months before she was due to complete a degree in business management in Bethlehem.

“ I'm dreaming of the day when I can return to my studies
Berlanty Azzam

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When they saw that the address listed on her identity card was in Gaza, she was detained for six hours, then blindfolded and handcuffed and told she would be taken to a detention centre in the southern West Bank.

"The driving took longer than it should have and I started to think something was wrong. I started to wonder, what are they doing to me?" Ms Azzam said. After the car stopped and the blindfold was lifted, she saw she was at the Erez crossing to Gaza. She was then forced to enter the territory without being given the chance to speak to a lawyer.

"The decision that a person's address listed in the Population Registry constitutes an essential condition for the legality of his/her residence at that address - with no explicit legal basis and with no official notification... undermines the fundamental principles of the law," said a lawyer for Gisha, Yadin Elam, in its petition to the Supreme Court.

Gisha warned that if Ms Azzam's deportation were permitted, an estimated 25,000 Palestinians living in the West Bank who had Gazan addresses on their identity cards risked being removed.

The human rights group also noted in its petition that Israel had made no security allegations against Ms Azzam, and that the manner in which she was removed had violated her right to due process.

Regarding the army's claim that Ms Azzam was present in the West Bank "illegally", Gisha argued that at the time she left Gaza, a special permit for Palestinians to remain "simply did not exist".

Furthermore, it said, Israel did not allow people to change their addresses from Gaza to the West Bank, and had not issued a single entry permit for the purpose of travelling to study to Palestinians from Gaza despite an Israeli High Court ruling in 2007 saying they should be allowed.

At Thursday's hearing, the Supreme Court ordered the state to give Ms Azzam the chance to challenge the process of her deportation.

There will be an "administrative hearing", before Israeli military officials, at the Erez crossing next week, for which she will be entitled to legal representation. "I'm dreaming of the day when I can return to my studies. I am worried and fearful of what might happen, and I hope that my right to education will not be violated," Ms Azzam said.