

Palestinian student allowed to appeal deportation

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JERUSALEM (AFP) – Israel's High Court decided on Thursday to allow a Palestinian student to appeal her case after being deported from the West Bank to Gaza because her ID has an address in the coastal strip.

Over objections from the state, the court ruled that Berlanty Azzam, 21, could have a lawyer present at a hearing next week at Erez, the main crossing point between Israel and the Hamas-run Gaza Strip.

Azzam, with just two months left to complete her bachelor's degree at the Vatican-sponsored Bethlehem University, was detained and sent to Gaza blindfolded and handcuffed on October 28, according to Gisha, the Israeli human right's group which filed the case.

She was not allowed to attend Thursday's hearing.

"I had hoped that I could return to my studies after today's court hearing. Each day that passes is critical for my chances of completing my degree," said Azzam, who is studying business management and translation.

Gisha says the army reneged on its pledge that she would be given an opportunity to meet with her legal council and appeal the decision, rushing her to Gaza instead.

"The detention of a young woman who poses no danger, security or otherwise is a breach of the law, morality and common sense," lawyer Yadim Elam argued in Gisha's petition to allow Azzam to return to the West Bank, where she has lived and studied since 2005.

The Israeli army did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the case.

Azzam was removed from the West Bank only because her ID card lists her address as being in Gaza, said Gisha.

Like Azzam, an estimated 25,000 Palestinians could be forcibly sent to Gaza because their addresses are registered there, according to Gisha. Israel controls the Palestinian population registry and since 2000 has not permitted address changes from Gaza to the West Bank.

Residents of Gaza can not leave the tiny, overcrowded coastal enclave, except in some medical emergency cases, because of an embargo Israel imposed after the Islamist movement seized power there in 2007.

Hamas ousted secular forces loyal to moderate Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, who now only holds sway in the West Bank.

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