

Palestinian Education



'Very difficult.'
Azzam Photo:
AP

Palestinian expelled by IDF fears she won't finish degree

Bethlehem University student sent back to Gaza month before completing her business studies. 'I miss my life in Bethlehem, and pray that I'll be able to return and get my degree,' she says. Rights group: Moderate Palestinians being oppressed
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Berlanty Azzam was expelled from the West Bank after a routine examination of her identification papers at an IDF checkpoint in late October revealed that she was listed as a resident of Gaza.

The army said that Azzam, 21, had resided in the West Bank illegally while misleading authorities.

Azzam, who is enrolled at Bethlehem University, told Ynet on Thursday, "Now I am in Gaza with family. This is very difficult for me. I've lived in Bethlehem for the past four years, and I'm supposed to finish my business studies at the university in two months.

"The university is being very supportive and is trying to find a way for me to complete my studies over the Internet. I miss my life in Bethlehem, and pray that I'll be able to return and get my degree," she said.

Attorney Sari Bashi, the executive director of Gisha, an Israeli not-for-profit organization whose goal is to protect the freedom of movement of Palestinians, said such measures by the army repress moderate Palestinians.

"There are many (Palestinian) students who want to learn in a liberal atmosphere, some of them are Christian, like Berlanty. It is not

clear what the State of Israel is gaining by impeding the independence of Palestinian higher education," she said.

Gisha has filed an appeal with the High Court of Justice on behalf of Azzam and other Palestinians. Azzam's hearing is scheduled to be held at the Erez Crossing (located on the Israel-Gaza border) next week, at which point the army will decide whether or not she will be permitted to return to the West Bank.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit said Azzam was expelled because she had been residing in the West Bank illegally.

"In August 2005 her request to enter the West Bank to attend Bethlehem University was denied, as the entrance of Gaza residents to the West Bank for the purpose of studies is prohibited due to security concerns."

According to the army, Azzam used a temporary stay permit allowing her to visit Jerusalem for a few days in 2005 to illegally reside in the West Bank.

Tal Rabinovsky contributed to the report

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3804686,00.html>