

Israeli court: Bethlehem student won't leave Gaza

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Berlanty Azzam [MaanImages]

Bethlehem - Ma'an - Bethlehem University student Berlanty Azzam will not be allowed to enter the West Bank to finish her studies, a three-judge panel on Israel's Supreme Court ruled Wednesday.

In late October, the student was pulled out of a public bus on her way to Bethlehem because her place of residence is listed as Gaza on her ID card.

Her lawyers argued that her detention and subsequent deportation to Gaza was an illegal move. Israeli forces should have no control over which Palestinian area those with Palestinian Authority residence cards live, they contend.

Azzam was granted a permit to visit Jerusalem in 2005, and then nearby Bethlehem, an area under Palestinian Authority control, before her permit expired. She lived in the West Bank from 2005 until 29 October 2009.

Hesitant of setting a precedent, the State of Israel had urged its military to resolve the case itself, but the army countered that the deportation was appropriate because Azzam held no permit to be in the West Bank.

Elam, Azzam's attorney, countered that Palestinians do not need permission to live in PA-controlled areas, and that in any case the military did not issue such permits in 2005, when the business administration student first enrolled at the Catholic university.

"[I]n the midst of all of this, let us always remember that we are talking about the real life of a real young woman and her future goals and aspirations - all being placed 'on hold' without any accusation

whatsoever of any criminal or other negative behavior being leveled against her," said Brother Jack Curran, the university's vice president for development, in a statement last week.

Since 2000, Israel has enforced a total ban preventing Palestinian students from Gaza from studying at West Bank universities.

According to Gisha, an Israeli human rights group, Israel began in 2003 prohibiting Gazans from being in the West Bank, even if they had been living there for years. It also began a policy of arresting Palestinians whose registered address is in Gaza, including those whose homes, families, and jobs are in the West Bank, and removing them to Gaza against their will.

This position contradicts an obligation undertaken in the Oslo Accords and incorporated into the military legislation governing the West Bank, which recognizes the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as a "single territorial unit" where Palestinians may lawfully reside.

In 2007, an Israeli Supreme Court ruling determined that students from Gaza wishing to study in the West Bank should be allowed to do so "in cases likely to have positive humane implications." In practice, however, Israel has not issued a single entry permit to students from Gaza for the purpose of traveling to study in the West Bank – despite numerous applications, according to Gisha.

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