

June 24, 2016

Hon. Anne W. Patterson
Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs
US Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520
Via E-Mail: PattersonAW@state.gov

SUBJECT: Protecting Academic Freedom in Israel-Palestine

Dear Assistant Secretary Patterson,

On behalf of the American Anthropological Association, I am requesting your office's support in appealing to the Israeli Ministry of Education in the name of protecting the scholarly pursuit of open inquiry for the sake of increased understanding. The American Anthropological Association is dedicated to supporting the development and dissemination of anthropological knowledge, and to applying this knowledge in helping solve human problems. The foundation of anthropological knowledge rests on open inquiry that illuminates the patterns and processes of culture, past and present. Academic freedom is the lynchpin to open inquiry. When the Association encounters government policies and practices that pose a threat to open inquiry, we feel an obligation to call attention to such threats, and to propose constructive ways in which to reduce the risk of harm to those most vulnerable.

At the request of Association members who work in Israel, on the West Bank, in Gaza, and in East Jerusalem, and who collaborate with Israeli and Palestinian scholars and students, we strongly urge your agency to do everything within its authority to encourage the Israeli Ministry of Education to consider changes in the ministry's policies and practices that result in threats to academic freedom and the human rights of these scholars and students. More specifically, we ask that your agency press the Ministry to consider changes to policies and practices that result in:

- restricted freedom of movement for Palestinian academics and foreign academics going to the West Bank and Gaza;
- restricted access to publications among libraries at West Bank and Gaza universities;
- disparities in Internet access that restrict academic pursuits at West Bank and Gaza universities

- unjust denial of full accreditation for Al-Quds University;
- unjust denial of freedom of expression to Palestinian and dissenting Jewish faculty and students at Israeli universities, including civil penalties for speaking publicly in opposition to government policies and practices, and a show of military force on university campuses to threaten freedom of expression;
- unjust denial of freedom to Palestinian students for gathering and action, including expression of their identity; and
- undue delays of salary payments to West Bank and Gaza university faculty.

We feel that your office is especially well positioned to influence change for good in the State of Israel. The US government provides significant sums of financial assistance, accompanied by close cooperation with Israeli defense and public safety authorities. From our perspective, your agency has substantial leverage to work for changes that remove threats to academic freedom, and this is a particularly urgent moment for this leverage to be applied.

The university is the lifeblood of democracy precisely because it is one of the key places in society that promotes critical inquiry and teaches students to advance understanding by questioning basic assumptions. Education is one element in the overall human rights situation in Israel and the occupied territories, and is of direct concern to the Association. For more on this, we refer you to the publically available AAA Task Force on Israel-Palestine's report. As an association, we are pleased to take constructive steps that will promote understanding and scholarly exchange that can lead to lasting peace in the region through publications and other resources. We appreciate your consideration, and urge you to encourage the Israeli government to take the necessary and active steps to remove these threats to academic freedom and the human rights of scholars, students and of all people in Israel-Palestine.

Sincerely,



Alisse Waterston, AAA President
Professor, Department of Anthropology



Edward Liebow, Executive Director

Cc: Hon. Evan Ryan, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs

