

June 24, 2016

Hon. Naftali Bennett, Minister of Education  
State of Israel  
Knesset  
Kiryat Ben-Gurion  
Jerusalem 91950  
VIA E-Mail: [nbenet@knesset.gov.il](mailto:nbenet@knesset.gov.il)

SUBJECT: Protection of Academic Freedom and Human Rights

Dear Minister Bennett,

On behalf of the American Anthropological Association, I am appealing to your government's respect for, and adherence to, the search for truth and to its commitment to the scholarly pursuit of open inquiry for the sake of increased understanding. Our 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 our 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 East Jerusalem, and in Gaza, and who collaborate with Israeli and Palestinian scholars and students, we strongly urge you to consider changes in your 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 you consider changes to your ministry's 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.

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. 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 conferences, faculty exchanges, publications and other resources. We appreciate your consideration, and urge your ministry to take the necessary active steps to remove these threats to academic freedom and the human rights of scholars and students.

Sincerely,



Alisse Waterston, AAA President  
Professor, Department of Anthropology



Edward Liebow, Executive Director

CC: The Hon. Anne W. Patterson, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, US Department of State