

To Members of Global Civil Society and Academia

We, Presidents of Palestinian institutions of higher education, wish to bring to your attention an alarming yet unannounced Israeli policy that affects our society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip at large, and education in particular: the denial of entry, re-entry, and continuous residence to foreign passport holding Palestinians and non-Palestinian family members, lecturers, NGO workers, and international development experts.

Since the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, Israel has unilaterally controlled the civil register of the Palestinian population, and has restricted movement in and out of the Occupied Palestinian Territory for Palestinians and other non-Israelis, thus depriving the Palestinians of their basic right to freedom of movement and residence.

Since the beginning of 2006, and especially after the parliamentary elections, many thousands of foreign passport holders of Palestinian and non-Palestinian origin living and/or working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have suddenly been denied entry or even threatened with deportation. Israel has arrogated to itself the prerogative of allowing or refusing work permits to foreigners in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Most of these are Palestinian-born and currently hold foreign passports because their IDs have either been revoked while studying or working abroad, or their applications for family reunion rejected by the Israeli occupation authorities under various pretexts since October 2000. Yet they are citizens who have built their lives in Palestine, paying local taxes and voting in regional and national elections in their embryonic State.

The majority of foreign passport holders who are denied entry have family connections in Palestine and are entitled to family integrity by international conventions and recognized norms. Israel has also signed agreements of reciprocity in diplomacy and immigration rules with other countries, which it is now violating while consistently failing to provide a proper reason for its behavior, depriving threatened persons of their basic rights of access to justice, transparency and state accountability. Israeli citizens, meanwhile, enjoy unfettered entry into most countries around the world, while citizens of these countries are being denied similar treatment when they cross Israeli borders.

The business community has also been severely affected. Several successful diaspora businessmen, who have invested heavily in building their community for over a decade, are now being refused entry or deported with barely a month's warning.

Diaspora Palestinians and foreigners have withstood humiliating interrogation at entry points, continuously threatened with the insecurity of not having their tourist visas or visitor's permits renewed every three months. Most of them are a part of the local educated class whose contributions to civil society, educational institutions and the private sector have been invaluable for the construction of a viable pluralistic country and laying the foundations for a future Palestinian state. There have been at least five cases of academics and university staff being denied entry to the West Bank, the most recent in July 2006. Numerous international students were turned away at the borders

and unable to register or continue their studies in Palestine. Even Trustees of various university boards have been issued final permits and are being told to exit the country.

We call on you to support appropriate collective action against this dangerous policy of denial of entry- and re-entry to Palestinians and other nationals that threatens to empty the Occupied Palestinian Territory of its educated classes:

- To achieve the reversal of this illegitimate, discriminatory and immoral form of population control
- To secure the total freedom of access to education and other activities in Palestine.

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