

FACTS & FIGURES

Oppression of Issawiya Neighborhood

Correspondence between CAF & HUJI

Committee on Academic
Freedom (CAF)

Editor's Note:

“Letters from the Middle East Studies Association’s Committee on Academic Freedom to Hebrew University regarding demilitarizing the campus and police harassment of Issawiyah neighborhood,” reprinted with permission from MESA.



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Committee on
Academic Freedom

22 January 2020

Professor Asher Cohen
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Professor Menahem Ben-Sasson
Chancellor, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
huchancellor@savion.huji.ac.il

Professor Barak Medina
Rector, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
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Dear President Cohen, Chancellor Ben-Sasson, and Rector Medina,

We write to you on behalf of the committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America to condemn Hebrew University's complicity in the Jerusalem District Police's violence against and harassment of the Issawiya neighborhood, adjoining the Mount Scopus campus.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

The Issawiya neighborhood has long suffered from the impact of Israeli policies: inadequate sanitation services, insufficient classrooms, in part due to a lack of zoning plans and shortage of building permits. Since May 2019, as was widely reported in *Haaretz*, the situation has deteriorated significantly: the Jerusalem District Police have conducted daily raids and set up checkpoints in the Issawiya neighborhood. Over 600 residents have been arrested since May, but only twenty indictments have been filed. Police actions have included arresting minors, raiding high schools, and arresting school strike leaders. As reported by Academia for Equality, an organization of 550 teachers, students and others involved in academic life in Israel, and including sixty members of the Hebrew University community, the University has been complicit in this violence in two concrete ways.

The first concerns the closure of the southern entrance to the neighborhood, which adjoins the Mount Scopus campus and Hadassah Hospital. This entrance has been closed intermittently since 2001, and continuously since 2007. The Jerusalem District Police have justified this closure as a security measure to protect Hebrew University and Hadassah Hospital. However, this closure is an act of collective punishment that confines the movement and freedom of Issawiya's twenty thousand inhabitants, who are left with only one entrance to their neighborhood. According to the neighborhood's committee, the police claimed that the closure was implemented at the request of the Hebrew University, and that the closure would be rescinded if the university announced that it was no longer needed on security grounds.

The second way the University has been complicit is by allowing the Jerusalem District Police to use the Mount Scopus campus to engage in harassment. Academia for Equality informed us that on 4 December 2019, two uniformed Jerusalem District Police officers



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were photographed standing on the roof of the Rabin Building on campus. Next to them were binoculars and a video camera mounted on tripods and pointed towards the center of Issawiya. In response to a letter from Academia for Equality, Rector Medina responded that this operation "was made necessary by information the police possessed about an intention to carry out concrete criminal action against faculty and students at the University," that it "was coordinated with the University's Security Department," and that "the police activity foiled the attempt to harm faculty and students." When Academia for Equality responded with more queries on these alleged threats and criminal acts, they did not receive a response.

These reports, if correct, are evidence of a troubling violation of the principle of academic independence and neutrality, damaging the trust between the University, its neighboring communities, and its students and staff, among whom are Palestinians, including residents of Issawiya. These events follow the introduction of the University's new "Havatzalot" program, in cooperation with the IDF's Intelligence Corps, which gives military intelligence cadets a bachelor's degree alongside their military training. This program, which grants broad privileges to student-soldiers (including priority in dorms and certain classes, and the designation of areas on campus restricted to their use) has significantly increased the presence of uniformed soldiers in classrooms and in all public spaces in the university. [Palestinian student groups](#) have already expressed their opposition to this increasing military presence on campus and their concern that further implementation of this project would marginalize them within the university.

These actions together contribute to a dire trend of militarization of the campus, which is surrounded by the neighborhoods of occupied East Jerusalem, and to the propagation of a hostile environment vis-à-vis the Palestinian members of the community. We join our colleagues in Academia for Equality in condemning Hebrew University's complicity in the oppression, harassment, and constriction of movement of the people of Issawiya. We call on you to inform the police that the southern entrance to Issawiya does not pose a security threat to the University, and to work towards the re-opening of the southern gate, re-instating a second exit to the neighborhood of 20,000 inhabitants. We also call on you to prevent the Jerusalem District Police from entering the Hebrew University campus to conduct operations against and harassment of the residents of Issawiya.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor, University of Southern California

cc: Academia for Equality, info@academy4equality.com

updated 23 January 2020

From: [President of The Hebrew University](#)
To: [Committee on Academic Freedom](#); [Chancellor of The Hebrew University](#); Barak.Medina@mail.huji.ac.il
Cc: matan.kaminer@gmail.com; [President of The Hebrew University](#)
Subject: RE: Oppression of Issawiya neighborhood
Date: Thursday, January 23, 2020 12:54:20 AM

Dear Ms. Dina Rizk Khoury and Mr. Laurie Brand,
The police have sole responsibility for protection of human life and property in Israel. The Hebrew University is not involved in any decisions about police activity in Issawiya or any other area.

Best regards,



Liron Saban | Coordinator

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מאת: Committee on Academic Freedom <caf@mesana.org>
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עותק: matan.kaminer@gmail.com
נושא: Oppression of Issawiya neighborhood

Please see our [letter](#) condemning the complicity in Jerusalem police harassment of al-Issawiya neighborhood.



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4 February 2020

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Dear President Cohen, Chancellor Ben-Sasson, and Rector Medina,

Thank you for your [23 January 2020](#) response to our letter dated [22 January 2020](#).

In your letter you stated that Hebrew University “*is not involved in any decisions about police activity in Issawiya or any other area.*” Like our colleagues who are members of Academia for Equality, we are disturbed that such a position disregards the university administration’s duty to maintain the autonomy of the university campus as a free space.

In addition, your letter failed to address the question of the closure of the southern entrance to Issawiyah, which renders the university a de facto partner in the collective punishment of the neighborhood’s residents.

Along with the members of Academia for Equality, we repeat our call for the administration of the University to declare its solidarity with Issawiyah and to act immediately to demilitarize the campus.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor, University of Southern California

cc: Academia for Equality