



[Why Palestinian Students Were Arrested](#)

By Brenna Haggerty

On Sunday, September 24th, Israeli occupation forces raided the Students' Union office of Birzeit University in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah. Eight students were arrested, with two others following on Monday and Tuesday. Around ten military vehicles and special forces surrounded the building and raided Birzeit University's campus at dawn. Birzeit University's student council is run by the Hamas-affiliated Islamic Wafa bloc. They won student elections for the second year in a row back in May. Among the students arrested was student council president, Abdul Majeed Hassan. This is his fourth time being arrested by occupation forces, greatly hindering progress towards his degree. His last arrest was in June where he, along with fellow student activist Yahya Farah, were held for a month due to their student advocacy work.

This was not the first raid on the university. Birzeit University has been systematically attacked since its creation. Just last year, students were shot at on school grounds and then imprisoned by Israeli military forces. Dr. Yasser Amouri, deputy president for communications of Birzeit University, deemed the raids a "violation of international law." The university's board of trustees encouraged action from international institutions to help protect Palestinians and their access to education. The Israeli military claimed the students were planning a terrorist attack on Israel in collaboration with Hamas; claims like this are routinely made by Israel's government after arresting activists. Hamas has condemned the actions of the Israeli occupation forces.

Among the groups to speak out against the occupation force's actions was the Right To Education Campaign. They claim the arrest of Palestinian students is a daily practice, but they are trying to provide legal counsel to all victims. According to the group, Israeli forces have detained 80 students from Birzeit University alone. Nour al-Tamimi, a member of the Right to Education Campaign said the arrests were "barbaric." Troops threatened students with weapons and attack dogs. She said the organization tried to document all the violations that occurred and their data proves the raid was a systemic attack on the student council. Student activist groups are accusing the Israeli government of "criminalizing student activism."

Since the raid, students and teachers have skipped classes to protest against the actions of Israeli forces. According to human rights groups, just this year, occupation forces have arrested over 3,600 Palestinians. They currently detain around 5,000 Palestinians, with 1,200 held without charges. This raid is an example of just one violent arrest campaign among many as Israel's government attempts to destroy the Palestinian education system. Attacking education is a way to erode any Palestinian national identity. Student arrests are not the only way the Israeli military limits Palestinians' right to self-determination. They have a history of destroying important cultural heritage sites, including the bombing of archaeological sites and mosques in the Gaza Strip. These attacks on Palestinian heritage are what human rights group Al-Haq calls a "cultural apartheid."

The Israeli military's attacks on advocacy groups show their mission to undermine Palestinians' ability to connect, express their values, and work together to fight for human rights. The government of Israel is trying to suppress any ideas of collective identity or nationalism among Palestinians. The military's systemic attacks on educational

institutions are a prime example of the settler-colonial dynamic between Palestine and Israel. Any attempt by the colonized to form a collective identity is seen as a threat. Political scientist Virginia Tilley believes that the destruction of culture is a “hallmark feature” of colonialism. It can be seen throughout history from indigenous groups in North America to the apartheid government in South Africa. International institutions can continue speaking out against these abuses, but they have limited power. Now, it is on the large players in global power politics to stand up for human rights and international law, even if it means speaking out against an ally.