

MAR 01 2010



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

JAN 28 2010

Dear Mr. Dingell:

Thank you for your letter of December 22, 2009, regarding travel between the West Bank and Gaza as it relates to Gazan students wishing to study in the West Bank.

We agree on the importance of higher education for Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza. We have raised these issues with the Government of Israel in the context of expressing concern about Gazan student Berlanty Azzam, whose case you referenced. In that particular case, Israel's High Court upheld the Israeli military's decision to prohibit Ms. Azzam from remaining in the West Bank to complete her studies at Bethlehem University, though the court was critical of the military's summary removal of Ms. Azzam to Gaza. We have learned that Ms. Azzam was able to complete her remaining coursework remotely from Gaza, and she graduated from Bethlehem University this week.

We are committed to increasing the educational opportunities available to Palestinian university students. We will urge the Government of Israel to consider allowing Gazans to study in the West Bank, which we understand is permissible in certain cases under a 2007 Israeli High Court ruling. Specifically, we will seek permission from the Government of Israel to allow West Bank study for Gazans selected to the U.S. Government-funded A-PLUS program. A-Plus is a new initiative begun by Secretary Clinton to provide scholarships to Palestinians students for study at universities in the West Bank and Gaza.

We will continue to support other innovative programs that allow students in the West Bank and Gaza to further their education both in the West Bank and Gaza as well as through studies in the United States. We will also continue to advocate that the Government of Israel enact policies that allow for greater access and movement by Palestinians, including access to education, consistent with Israel's security needs.

The Honorable

John D. Dingell,
House of Representatives.

We hope that this information is useful to you. If you have further questions regarding this issue or other matters, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Richard R. Verma

Richard R. Verma
Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs