

Destruction of Student Organization in the Occupied West Bank

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Criminalized by 'Israel', executed by the PA While An Najah looks away

West Bank – Over 80 days ago, Mohammad Shantour, a student from Beit Safafa in occupied Al-Quds, was abducted from his university dorm room by PA (Palestinian Authority) security forces, along with his classmate, Amro Qawariq, the elected president of the student council at An Najah University. Their crime? Participating in student union activities fully permitted under university regulations. They have been held in PA (Palestinian Authority) and Israeli custody subsequently, ever since.

The Student Council, achieved a significant victory in the student union council elections at An Najah National University in May 2023, securing 40 out of 81 seats. Beating the PA (Palestinian Authority) endorsed Shabiba bloc. This marks the Student Council's first major



win since 2006. With no general Palestinian elections on the horizon, student polls are seen as a test for measuring public opinion in Palestine. Reflecting the dwindling support for the Palestinian Authority.

But the repression did not stop with the arrest of students. When Mohammad Shantour's father organized a peaceful sit-in and hunger strike on campus grounds to demand his son's release, the university responded not with solidarity, but violence, dispatching private security guards to physically assault him. Rather than protect its students and abide by its obligation to provide legal representation to it's students, An Najah University chose to protect its relationship with those enforcing the crackdown.



Mohammad Shantour and Amro Qawariq are not alone. They are two among dozens of young Palestinians being systematically targeted, not for resistance, but for organizing, speaking, and building community through student unions and civil platforms. Their arrests are not isolated incidents, but emblematic of a larger strategy.

The recent students' arrests from An Najah National University include: Ameer Hijazi, Yahya Al-Quqa, Ahmed Obeid, Saeed Khafash, Jihad Ahmed, and Imad Al-Baz, who was later released. At Birzeit University, students Suhaib Oweidat and Saed Al-Amleh were arrested.

“Rather than protect its students ... An Najah University chose to protect its relationship with the PA”

What is unfolding in the West Bank is a calculated campaign, led by Israel and enforced through its coordination with the PA, to dismantle every form of independent Palestinian organization. The goal is clear: to crush all structures not aligned with or submissive to the occupation's political architecture.

While Israeli repression often draws headlines, the enabling role of the PA, and the complicity of local institutions, like universities, remain under examined.

The war on non-collaborative actors

In the West Bank, resistance is not crushed based on whether it's violent or non-violent. It is crushed based on whether it collaborates or challenges the Israeli-imposed order.

Any civil service or organization in the West Bank that does not collaborate with the occupation, is targeted. That's why even apolitical or humanitarian institutions or student unions are under attack: their refusal to operate under Israeli political conditions has made them unacceptable in the eyes of the occupier.

Meanwhile **collaborative structures**, like the PA's security forces, are preserved and even strengthened, regardless of their legitimacy among Palestinians themselves.

Why 'Israel' prefers the PA (Palestinian Authority)

The PA governs areas of the West Bank not through democratic consent, but through a combination of international funding by states and NGOs, and Israeli protection. The PA's dependency is exploited by 'Israel' to serve the occupation.

'Israel' has no interest in dismantling the PA, not out of belief in Palestinian self-governance, but because the PA fulfills a critical function. Chief among these: suppressing any emerging political alternatives.

Any form of autonomous organizing is swiftly shut down before it can take root. This includes student unions, independent journalists reporting on abuses by both the PA and Israeli forces, local human rights monitors documenting detention and torture, and even apolitical civil society initiatives providing community support or legal aid, all of which are seen as threats if they refuse to align with either the PA or the Israeli occupation.

Aforementioned students' arrests and detentions by the PA, followed by Israeli arrests and detentions further exposes the coordinated repression shared by both authorities.

Political rivalry, not national interest

The tragedy is that the PA's repression isn't just about pressure from 'Israel', it's also about **political rivalry**. With its legitimacy plummeting and elections indefinitely postponed, the PA views any opposition, as a direct challenge to its fragile hold on power in the West Bank.

Instead of building national unity or defending its people, it **crushes opposition** to secure its position. The result is a situation where Palestinians are **politically suffocated from both sides**: by Israeli occupation and by a collaborationist regime too afraid to allow genuine dissent. Instead of standing against this oppression and defending their students, the university actively collaborates with the PA and 'israel' in their oppression.

Stand with arrested

Students in the West Bank

The violent repression of students, organizers, and activists in the West Bank

—by both the PA and Israeli authorities—

continues to

systematically undermine efforts toward

independent Palestinian

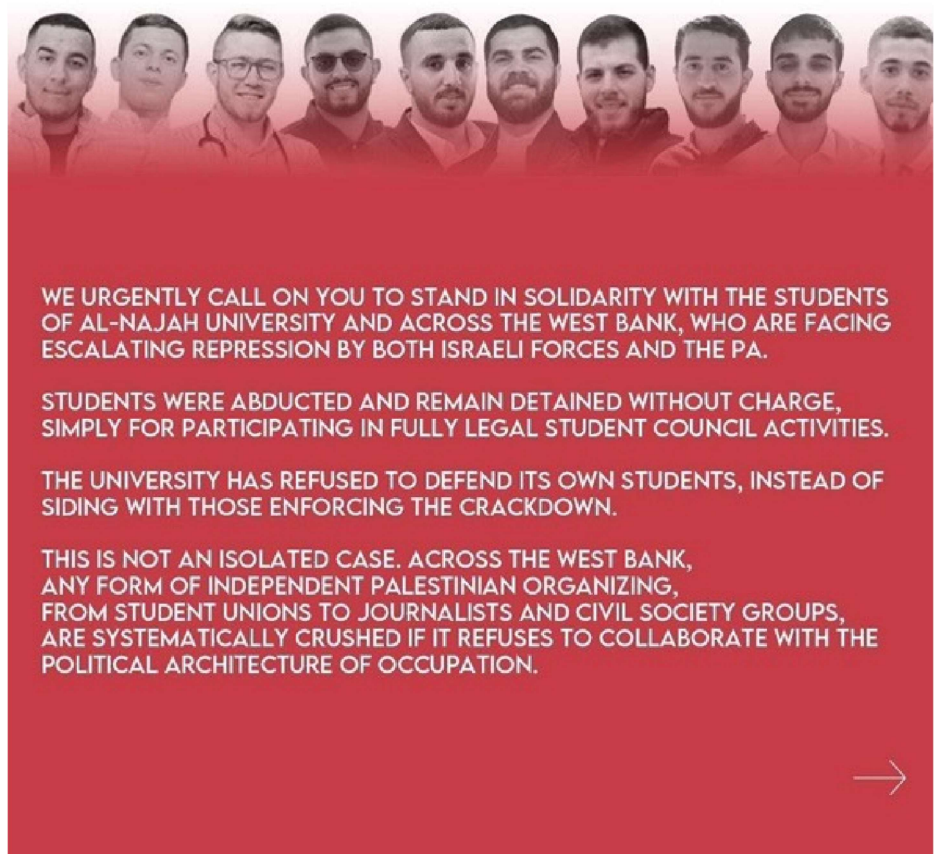
self-organization. In this

climate of fear and

silencing, institutions

such as An Najah National

University must be held accountable for their role and responsibility. The university must stand by its students, defend their right to organize, and refuse complicity in the political suppression of Palestinian life.



We call on all relevant actors to take immediate and concrete action:

1. To the administration of An Najah National University:

We demand that An Najah fulfills its responsibilities by providing detained students with access to legal assistance from independent human rights lawyers. Furthermore, we urge to publicly advocate for their immediate release and join calls for accountability from the PA. The university must not serve political interests at the expense of its students' safety. An Najah should be a sanctuary of learning and resistance—free from fear, repression, and abuse, including by its own security personnel.



2. To the Palestinian Authority (PA):

We call on the PA to respect the outcome of the democratic student council elections at An Najah University. The ongoing campaign of arrests, intimidation, and threats against student representatives, faculty, and politically active youth must end immediately. Suppressing dissent and student organizing only

deepens the crisis of legitimacy and alienation among the Palestinian people.

3. To the international community and human rights organizations:

We urge you to put meaningful pressure on Israel to end its targeting of Palestinian students, universities, and civil society organizers. The criminalization of student activism and education must be confronted as a violation of international human rights and humanitarian law.



4. To allies and human rights advocates globally:

We encourage you to write open letters or public statements addressed to Israeli human rights organizations such as *B'Tselem*, condemning the coordinated repression of Palestinian students by both the PA and Israeli forces. Joint action is needed to highlight and challenge this dual system of oppression.

Consider donating (<https://pay.sumup.com/b2c/QTEB4RN7>) to Stichting Handala (<https://stichtinghandala.nl/>) for legal support for activists in the West Bank.

Author



Stichting Handala (<https://whispering.media/author/handala/>)

Stichting Handala is a volunteer-run non-profit committed to supporting Palestinian communities through health care, education, legal aid, and cultural resilience. From providing direct relief and medical care to empowering students — from Gaza to the Netherlands — we work to build a future rooted in justice, dignity, and self-determination.

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