

No education under occu

by Mazen Bouri

If you are a student at Bir Zeit University in occupied Palestine, you haven't been to class in the past three years.

Since the beginning of the popular Palestinian uprising known as the intifadeh, Palestinian education has been systematically disrupted by Israeli military authorities.

Schools, universities and colleges have been shut down for long periods during the uprising against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli government and military claim the closures of Palestinian educational institutions have been necessary to "preserve security" and that schools and universities are "centres of unrest." Yet even kindergartens have been shut.

Education was further impeded when the Israeli Defence Ministry outlawed Palestinian attempts to organize alternative schools and distribute home-study packets.

One of the biggest single educational shutdowns came in February 1988, when all six major degree-granting Palestinian universities were shut down "until further notice" by military order. Also affected by the closure were numerous community colleges and schools.

In one fell swoop, over 15,000 Palestinian students were deprived of their internationally recognized right to higher education.

The toll on students and teachers during the intifadeh has been staggering. In one instance, 200 of Bethlehem University's 1600 students were detained in the uprising's first eight months.

Members of the uni-versity's community have also been subject, without benefit of either charge or trial, to periods of renewable detention of up to a year.

In one sample of detainees, close to 20% were students.

An even more painful practice used by the military authorities has been the exile of 62 Palestinians during the uprising. These forced exiles have come despite the fact that the Geneva Convention prohibits "individual or mass transfers." Of the 62 deportees, 23 were educators and students, including



internationally renowned physicist Tagsir Aruri, who was deported two years ago.

Article 26 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares unequivocally that "everyone has the right to education... higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." Article 1 of the UN Convention Against Discrimination in Education, which Israel has ratified, prohibits "depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or level."

Almost two million Palestinians have long been deprived of the right to learn. Even before the uprising began in December 1987, the Israeli authorities had been trying to restrict the growth of the education sector in the territories and harassed teachers and students.

Palestinian students are prohibited from studying their own heritage, history and culture. The Israeli authorities have a list of 1000 books banned in the West Bank and Gaza. Further, it is illegal to possess any publication by a Palestinian without a permit.

Universities cannot get periodicals. Laboratory and educational equipment is taxed at up to 100 percent, while Israeli universities are tax exempt.

gulf war

The situation for Palestinian education worsened dramatically during the Gulf war. The occupied territories were subject to a strict 24-hour curfew for 46 consecutive days. This curfew, where an entire people were confined to their homes, paralysed every aspect of life in the West Bank and Gaza.

Furthermore, at the end of February this year the Israeli military authorities extended closure orders on the four largest Palestinian universities for a further three months. Together they serve over 80 percent of students currently enrolled in university.

"Israel should feel that it cannot get away with such stupid orders [as] closing schools and universities down on the

