

Al-Quds University

Jerusalem

President's Office



جامعة القدس

القدس

مكتب الرئيس

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Al Quds University

Al Quds University has been in existence as an academic institution in Jerusalem for over 30 years, during which time it has become the leading academic institution in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) - in fact, Al Quds ranks top in the entire Arab world in terms of the number of peer-reviewed publications per faculty member per year. Amongst its many faculties and departments are the first schools of law and medicine in the OPT, museums of mathematics, science and prisoner's affairs, research centers in nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and environmental sciences, centers for community action, legal aid clinics and an educational television station and media laboratory.¹ It employs approximately 1,300 staff who provide educational services for 13,000 students up to the MA level.

The main campus of Al Quds, which is within the governorate of Jerusalem at Abu Dies, has been split from the main administration and the colleges and centers within the Israeli-defined borders of East Jerusalem by the Separation Wall, leaving these in an increasingly precarious position, both legally and practically.

Although it is fully accredited and licensed by the relevant Palestinian authorities, and recognized worldwide, the Israeli occupation authorities in East Jerusalem have insisted that the university submit to Israeli accreditation or face closure (and arrest of its administration). For the last fifteen years, the university has attempted to comply with the Israeli authorities' requirements and to organize under Israeli law, without success. An arduous process which took several years was undertaken in order to complete the required application file in the face of constant demands for information, and never-ending new hurdles. Finally, the university was informed that it was actually simply impossible for it to apply, since it existed both under Israel's jurisdiction and outside of that jurisdiction (i.e., outside Israeli-defined East Jerusalem). It was therefore told to decide either to (i) apply as a foreign institution which wishes to accredit some programs it has in Israel; or (ii) as an Israeli institution which has programs which it runs "abroad"; or, (iii) finally, to treat itself as two separate, or unconnected institutions, and therefore to apply simply for accreditation of its East Jerusalem operations as a new Israeli college. (Paradoxically, the university was informed that Israeli law could not be extended to the West Bank, which was why it had to go along with having to treat this division between the two jurisdictions as final. The argument it made to be treated like the newly-recognized "Ariel University Center of Samaria" in the settlement of Ariel fell on deaf ears.)

¹ The University website, www.alquds.edu, provides more detail on the structure of the university and its activities.

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The university finally decided on option (iii) as the least damaging option for its students, i.e., to proceed with an application for accreditation of its East Jerusalem entities as an independent college inside Israel's jurisdiction, based on an informal understanding with the Israeli authorities that they would consequently retroactively recognize all of the degrees issued by Al Quds until now. This is a pressing problem: Israel's refusal to recognize Al Quds degrees means that graduates cannot work and make a life in Jerusalem. Unfortunately, it has recently become clear that, despite its best efforts - and despite hiring the pre-eminent Israeli lawyer in this field - the university now has little to no chance of succeeding in its latest application. It was recently informed that the file had been "transferred to the Prime Minister's Office", leaving no hope of a proper legal outcome. Meanwhile, the Israeli authorities have now reneged on their commitment to recognize past degrees awarded to students.

The university is now at the end of its legal recourses. It is perhaps superfluous to underline the importance of its survival; even the UN General Assembly in numerous Resolutions has continuously asserted the need for a university in Jerusalem, and repeatedly requested the Secretary-General to take all necessary measures for establishing the university of Jerusalem "Al-Quds". As a Palestinian institution headquartered in East Jerusalem, Al Quds University is once again under threat of closure, despite its best efforts to satisfy the (constantly changing) requirements of the Israeli occupation authorities. Meanwhile it is dying a slow death due to the lack of recognition of its graduates. Without a solution soon, it may well be too late.