



BETHLEHEM
UNIVERSITY

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Office of the Vice Chancellor
مكتب نائب الرئيس الأعلى

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Greetings. It is with sadness that I write to inform you that the ravages of war have touched Bethlehem University, with one of our third-year students, Khaled Al-Muhtasib, being shot and killed in Jerusalem last night. Please keep him and his grieving family and friends in your prayers. The details of what happened are still unclear.

Today, Friday, there is a call for protests across Palestine after the Muslim prayer in the middle of the day to protest Israel's siege of Gaza. We pray that those protests will not result in further deaths

The situation in Gaza is very bad. I was down there a few months back to discuss ways in which Bethlehem University has been supporting young people with online courses and exploring options for further such courses. These courses would enable these young people to take a recognized qualification to an NGO to possibly get employment. I was very impressed with the young people with whom I engaged but appalled at the conditions under which they were living then. So much has changed since then and things have got so much worse. There are many people there who do not support Hamas, both Christians and Muslims. Bethlehem University has some 400 graduates from Gaza and we are deeply concerned about them. It was Hamas who orchestrated the attack on Israel, not all the people in Gaza! Yet despite that, Israel has cut off all water, power, medical, food and other essential supplies to all people there. This collective punishment of all people in Gaza is having a devastating impact.

Since last weekend Israel has closed all checkpoints into Jerusalem and around Bethlehem. This means the 40% of our students from East Jerusalem are unable to get to campus. In addition, there are Israeli "flying" checkpoints south of Bethlehem making it impossible for students from Hebron and villages around it to get to campus. As a result, Bethlehem University has moved to online classes in the meantime. How long this will last is uncertain.

Here on campus things are quiet without any students here and all the Brothers and other employees here are safe. However, the situation here is tense and unpredictable with a heightened Israeli military presence in and around Bethlehem. The language that is being used by both sides dehumanizes people with the result that everyone on the other side is enemy. Here at Bethlehem University we are pursuing a position that the Church in the Holy Land has consistently taken of speaking about justice, peace, reconciliation, respect and a search for equality. It is an uphill task against the dominant words of hate and revenge!

Please keep us in your prayers as we navigate our way into this unpredictable future.

Best wishes and thanks for your ongoing interest and support.

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Vice Chancellor

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