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**الأكاديمية تعهد ضد منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية يضع الحرية"  
اديوكيشن في خطر"، قصاصة من جريدة ذي استريليان هاير  
سليمنت، ١٦ آذار ١٩٨٣**

سليمنت، The Australian قصاصة من جريدة ذي استريليان هاير اديوكيشن  
الحكومة الإسرائيلية ، تتضمن خبراً حول توجهه Higher Education Supplement  
الفلسطينية في طلبات عام ١٩٨٣ نحو تضمين تعهد ضد منظمة التحرير  
جامعات الضفة الغربية. الأكاديميين الأجانب للحصول على تصريح عمل في

## Anti-PLO 'pledge' puts academic freedom at risk

THE anti-PLO pledges demanded by Israel of foreign academics at West Bank universities are seen by many to challenge academic freedom. Dr IRWIN HERRMAN, assistant director of the Footscray Institute of Technology has recently returned from a visit to the Middle East. He reports on the problems of one university at the centre of the controversy.

A DAY spent at Birzeit University near Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank was an experience in how a university survives under siege.

Unlike so many Western institutions, it is not a financial siege which has gripped the 1500-student campus.

Founded in 1924 as a school, Birzeit is one of four Palestinian universities (with al-Najah in Nablus, and Bethlehem and Hebron Universities) caught up in resistance to Israel's attempt to annex the West Bank. In the eyes of the occupying authorities it has become the university most active in that cause.

More than a decade ago Dr Hanna Nasser, Birzeit's president, was the first of two chief executives of West Bank universities to be expelled by the Israelis. He is a member of the PLO executive with responsibility for Palestinian higher education, and maintains an office in Amman, Jordan.

Birzeit has borne the brunt of what students and staff there see as a sustained campaign to destroy educational opportunity on the West Bank. They cite repeated interference in the running of courses, the blocking of funds, and official obstruction to much-needed building on a campus with a projected enrolment of 5000 by 1990.

They point to blockades of campus, harassment of students by detention and curfew as well as Israeli settler and military raids on students rooms and dormitories.

The 1981/82 academic year was a difficult one. The university was shut down by the military authorities for seven months. The present year may be no better.

One issue has been particularly critical for the past six months. The military govern-

ment has attempted to extract an anti-PLO pledge incorporated in work permit applications from the foreign academics who comprise about one-third of the faculty at West Bank universities.

This move was denounced by the American Secretary of State, Mr Shultz, himself a former academic, as smacking of the worst features of 1950s-style McCarthyism. So far, 26 lecturers have been expelled.

How does Birzeit, with limited resources, function in the face of such adversity? "It's the morale of all concerned," said Dr Gabi Baramki, acting chief executive, "and the nature of our programs".

Having earlier joined staff for lunch, I could appreciate the first point from the dining room clamor and its mixture of foreign staff attracted to Birzeit to assist Palestinian colleagues in defence of what they see as an assault on academic freedom.

Reference to the nature of the university's programs was equally understandable. Birzeit launched in 1973 a community work program which requires every student to complete at least 120 work hours in projects that benefit the community. The idea is for students to become involved with local councils and charitable societies and work with local residents.

A typical community project is helping farmers to harvest olives during the olive-picking season.

Another increasingly frequent student activity is the rebuilding of homes blown up by military authorities, as reprisal for demonstrations and stone throwing at soldiers.

Among the more far-reaching of Birzeit's community development activities is in the field of public health. When the university estab-

lished its own health service in 1978 it became linked to the Birzeit Women's Charitable Society, which for nearly a decade had pursued a health improvement program.

The result is an expanded curative and preventive health scheme for the university community and for surrounding area including 16 villages with about 25,000 people.

One of the more exciting products is the development of a model for health care and health maintenance which draws on experience in the Third World where resources are scarce and most people live in rural areas.

In that context centralised medicine (hospitals and medical complexes in urban areas) usually results in high costs with little impact on most people.

The integration of Western and traditional medicine with emphasis on rural health and preventive medicine is being encouraged by the Birzeit program, with hopes that it will be repeated throughout the West Bank and Gaza.

Dr Rita Gascaman of the Department of Biology and Biochemistry has become an authority on health conditions in the West Bank and Gaza.

In a paper delivered in Washington last year she traced 15 years of neglect and worse by the Israeli occupation authorities of the governmental health facilities previously administered by the Jordan Government, and from which the majority of the population received health care.

As a result the West Bank infant mortality rate, a key indicator of health, now approaches among the worst in the world. That alone is sufficient stimulus to Birzeit University's involvement in health care.