



October 12, 2018

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We are writing to you to express our concern regarding the rights of Lara Alqasem, a 22 year old recent graduate from the University of Florida. Alqasem, an American of Palestinian descent, was recently accepted into a Master's program in Human Rights and Transnational Justice at the Hebrew University. As she prepared to start her studies, she obtained a valid visa to attend the Hebrew University and stay in Jerusalem. On October 2, as she made her way through Ben-Gurion Airport security, Alqasem was detained.¹

As you may know, Arab Americans have been systematically targeted and subjected to unjust screening, harassment, detention, and deportation when attempting to enter Israel and/or Palestine for decades. Since our founding, AAI has received a pattern of complaints from Arab Americans harassed, detained, or turned away by Israeli officials.²

Only three years ago, the U.S. Department of State expressed concern regarding the “unequal treatment that Palestinian-Americans and other Arab-Americans receive at Israel’s borders and checkpoints.”³ The State Department has also noted that Israel has “continued to deny entry into the country some foreign nationals (including U.S. citizens) affiliated with certain organizations that the Israeli government viewed as anti-Israel.”⁴

¹ *Israel must lift its bar on US student Lara Alqasem*, Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/10/israel-must-lift-its-bar-on-us-student-lara-alqasem>

² *Snapshots: American Citizens Discriminated Against at the Israeli Border*, Arab American Insistute: <http://www.aaiusa.org/snapshots-american-citizens-discriminated-against-at-israeli-border>

³ *U.S. Citizens at Israeli Ports of Entry*, U.S. Department of State: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/08/246170.htm>

⁴ *Israel, the West Bank and Gaza*, U.S. Department of State: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/IsraeltheWestBankandGaza.html?wcmode=disabled>

Upon arrival, Alqasem was held in detention pending a court ruling on her appeal to enter and study in Israel. On Friday, October 12, the Tel Aviv District Court rejected her appeal, making Alqasem subject to imminent deportation.⁵

Lara Alqasem's case is the latest example of discrimination against Arab Americans at the Israeli border. We have previously alerted the U.S. Government of numerous incidents in violation of Article II, section 2 of the 1951 Treaty of Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation Between the United States of America and Israel.⁶ Furthermore, these incidents ignore the request from the Secretary of State which appears in every U.S. passport asking authorities to allow the bearer "to pass without delay or hindrance." We urge your Department to use all available diplomatic leverage to ensure all Americans visiting Israel receive the same treatment that Israeli citizens receive when they visit the United States.

If the U.S. Government is to ensure the safety of citizens traveling abroad, it must do so impartially, and ensure an equal right to travel for all Americans. This is not only a central American value, but also a Constitutional requirement under the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause,⁷ requiring the U.S. Government to protect the fundamental right of travel irrespective of race, ethnicity, or national origin.

For these reasons, AAI requests immediate action on this pressing issue.

Respectfully,



Maya Berry
Executive Director



Dr. James Zogby
President

⁵ *Israeli court upholds ban on entry by U.S. student*, Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-usa-student/israeli-court-upholds-ban-on-entry-by-u-s-student-idUSKCN1MM1Z3>

⁶ *Israel Friendship, Commerce, and Navigation Treaty*, United States Department of Commerce, Enforcement and Compliance: https://tcc.export.gov/Trade_Agreements/All_Trade_Agreements/exp_005440.asp

⁷ *Bolling v. Sharpe*, 347 U.S. 497 (1954).