

## ISRAELI GROUP CALLS FOR GAZA INVESTIGATION AT LAUNCH OF NEW AP UNIVERSITY CHAPTER



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AdvocacyNet  
News Bulletin 192  
March 13, 2009  
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### Israeli Group Calls for Gaza Investigation at Launch of New AP University Chapter

South Hadley, Mass.: The leading Israeli human rights group B'Tselem is calling for an impartial investigation into Israel's recent military operation in the Gaza Strip, which claimed nearly 1,300 lives and displaced about 50,000 Palestinians.

Mitchell Plitnick, Director of US Outreach for [B'Tselem](#), made the announcement at a March 6 panel discussion at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. The event was the first to be organized by a newly-formed university chapter of The Advocacy Project (AP).

B'Tselem has petitioned the Israeli High Court of Justice to allow B'Tselem staff members to enter Gaza to assess the humanitarian situation. By barring human rights groups like B'Tselem, Mr Plitnick said, the Israeli authorities are undermining their own case and allowing possible violations by Hamas to go undocumented.

He insisted that opening any crossings into Gaza must take into account Israel's own legitimate security concerns, and called for a stronger and more realistic commitment to human rights in the Middle East by the United States.

"I left (the audience) with the message that we are living now in a time of change in terms of Middle East policy," Mr Plitnick said, "but change can't be effective and sustained unless Americans are advocating for a human rights policy that has real impact on the ground."

The new chapter at Mt. Holyoke represents an extension of AP's outreach efforts on behalf of community-based partners around the world, including the Middle East. AP has supported

Palestinian civil society since the start of the second intifada in September 2000, and is committed to helping Palestinian and Israeli civil society make the case for a just, two-state solution.

Last week's panel also featured [Willow Heske](#), a graduate student at Columbia University who served as a Peace Fellow at the [Democracy and Workers' Rights Center \(DWRC\)](#) in the West Bank in 2008. Ms Heske described how Palestinian civil society is working to hold both the Palestinian Authority and Israel accountable for human rights violations.

The Mt. Holyoke chapter was started in the fall of 2008 by Hibba Al-Adawy, who interned at the AP office in Washington last summer. So far, the chapter has about 10 active members, and Ms Al-Adawy said she is reaching out to professors about bringing AP guest speakers to classes. The chapter has already received coverage in campus news outlets.

"Even though it's a very new chapter, I think a lot of people have gotten to know Mt. Holyoke Advocacy Project," Ms Al-Adawy said.

The AP panel was part of a series of events, called "Salaam/Shalom: Paths Towards Peace and Justice in Israel and Palestine," organized by Mt. Holyoke student organizations to increase awareness about the conflict. About 50 students, as well as the Dean of the College, turned out for the AP panel and the discussion drew praise from participants and observers.

"I was very intrigued by the way B'Tselem approached the issue," wrote Emily Landau, a Mt. Holyoke student, in a Facebook message to the AP chapter. "Thank you for bringing them here. I, as well as many others, (am) very grateful."

Ms Heske agreed. "I was really impressed with the Mt. Holyoke students," she said. "Their questions... showed that they came to the event with a true sense of neutrality and they wanted to understand both sides of the conflict, and understand our best ways forward."

- Learn more about [AP's Mt. Holyoke College Chapter](#)
- Watch a slideshow from the event