

ANNEX I – Affidavit from student who was pepper-sprayed for accidentally stepping forward in a queue, 2007.

Name: Ayman Qawariq

Year of birth: 1986

Place of residence: Huwwara village

Course of study: Mathematics

Year of study: 3rd year

Institution: An-Najah National University

Date of Testimony: March 2008

Testimony collected by: Right to Education Campaign, An-Najah University.

After committing and being obliged to tell the truth, the following statement is my testimony:

This incident happened over a year ago in 2007. I finished my day at the university and then headed to the checkpoint at Huwwarra. This checkpoint represents the suffering for all people in Palestine. I waited in line and as usual there was a lot of pushing especially on this day because it was a Thursday, the day students finish for the week. What a lot of people at the checkpoint. It felt like every Palestinian on earth was waiting to pass through.

The pushing continued and I was jammed in the middle of the crowd. Two hours later I reached the turnstile and the place where the soldiers check your ID. At the soldier's command, my turn came, at last. Of course plenty of time had been wasted and of course I could not study at this time, but what was most important was that I had finally reached the checking area.

I was thinking – finally, I am going home, away from the stinky smell of the cigarettes. Away from here. One cigarette here and another one there. People here smoke a lot because they want to kill the time even though they are damaging their health.

My turn had arrived and the turnstile was unlocked so I could pass through. But it got stuck just after I exited from it. I stood in front of it waiting to give my ID to the soldier who was talking to a female soldier and ignoring everything else, as though he was having fun. More people were coming through the turnstile by then, so I was pushed forward. The soldier saw me and tried to attack me and push me away to the back of the line. All I could think about was going home.

I tried to explain that I had been waiting for two hours and I that I had done nothing wrong, but he wasn't listening. Rather he started to push me hard, but I refused to go back. Then another three soldiers came and asked me to put my hands behind my back so they could handcuff me with the plastic bands. But my hands were hurting because of an injury the previous day. I told them this, but they didn't listen. They gathered around me and started to beat me. Every time they grabbed one hand I pulled the other one out of the handcuffs.

After a while, one of them turned on me and stood facing me. Then he sprayed a substance into my face. I felt like my face was on fire and that fire was much cooler than this feeling. My eyes were in unbearable pain. My face was almost melting from the heat.

While blinded by the pain they put me into a booth, like a lock-up, and it was very dark. They left me in this little prison fighting this tremendously painful feeling. It lasted for about 30 minutes.

Half an hour later, it started to ease off, but the pain was still in my eyes. I tried to the emergency number at Rafidia Hospital in Nablus. I told them what happened to me and asked them to give me advice on how to reduce the pain. Unfortunately they could not give me any advice, but they insisted that I should go to the hospital when I was released.

An hour and half or two hours later I was given back my ID which had been taken earlier. They told me to go to the back of the line. By then it was 9pm. I took my ID and went back to Nablus to the hospital where they gave me eye drops.

I headed to the checkpoint again, which by then was empty. I passed through easily and went home, arriving at about 11pm. Of course I had to walk home from the checkpoint because by that time there were no taxis, so I walked.

[Slip from Rafidia Hospital showing eye treatment was given as evidence.]