



P.O. Box 1822, Norwalk, CA 90651

Tel: 714-995-1943 • www.birzeitsociety.org • info@birzeitsociety.org

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May 17th, 2020

Mayor Ibrahim Saad

Birzeit, Palestine

Dear Mayor Saad,

I am writing on behalf of Birzeitis in the diaspora to address the Hot Blend Asphalt Plant being built in our beloved hometown, Birzeit. We are concerned that this project threatens the health and safety of a large segment of citizens in Birzeit and its vicinity. We feel strongly that this kind of project undermines the health, beauty, and long-term economic stability of Birzeit.

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the other existential issues that currently face the Palestinian people, we know that you are tirelessly working for the betterment of our people. We believe that you will continue to do what it takes to guide our people to a healthy and safe future. The timing of dealing with this Hot Blend Asphalt Plant issue is unfortunate, but the potential for long term and lasting hazards propel us to urgently request that the construction of the facility be halted, the licenses for the plant be revoked, and the zoning be changed from industrial to a zoning that matches the residential nature of the area.

We recognize that there was an oversight by the Birzeit Municipality to approve the licenses of the plant without consulting the people of Birzeit and the surrounding villages. However, we now ask that you do everything in your power to listen to the people of Birzeit by actively halting construction of the plant and revoking the plant's licenses. While we understand that various government officials approved the licenses, there is no one better capable of advocating for Birzeit and its people other than our Mayor. Our families and your families are the ones that will truly suffer from the harmful effects of having an asphalt plant in such close proximity to their residences.

We urge you to act promptly to halt the construction and revoke the licenses as we believe waiting for Birzeit University to complete its environmental study may prove to be detrimental. A robust body of scientific evidence at an international level already exists highlighting the detrimental impact of hot blend asphalt plants on workers, local residences, and the environment. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration in the United States as well as the Environmental Protection Agency report that emissions of toxic gases into the atmosphere from asphalt plants can be directly inhaled and indirectly deposited through rain and air/water gas exchanges. When people inhale or ingest these toxic chemicals it increases the risk for cancer, central nervous system problems, liver damage, headaches, skin rashes, asthma, fatigue, reduced appetite, throat and eye irritation and coughing. Animal studies indicate that ingestion of toxins from asphalt plants can also cause reproduction problems, birth defects, and may impact the immune system.

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These conditions require intensive and long-term health care interventions which are costly to both the individual and society. These conditions also greatly reduce quality of life and may result in premature death.

Furthermore, the few jobs that this type of plant might create in the local area do not justify the potential health costs to our people. The workers themselves are the first victims of the health hazards listed above. This will place a financial burden on local government agencies and the Ministry of Health as well as the people. This is a burden that the plant itself will not carry.

The creation of an asphalt plant in Birzeit will also negatively impact the local environment by polluting air and water, creating a foul odor that permeates local towns and villages, and reducing the health of local flora and fauna that make Birzeit such a beautiful place to live and visit. Presence of this odor could reduce the number of students willing to enroll at Birzeit University and the number of individuals who come to tour Birzeit for the museums, historical societies, and many cultural events. All of these would have a negative impact on Birzeit's current economic stability, culture, and character of the town, as well as surrounding areas.

As you can see, the negative impact of the asphalt plant on the local economy and the health of the town far outweighs the meager benefits. Birzeit has long been a bastion of higher education and technology in the West Bank. The opportunity to attract more university students and the promotion of advanced and clean technology companies would be a more economically sustainable way to create job opportunities that respect human health and the local environment.

For the above reasons, we again ask that the construction of the facility be halted, the licenses for the plant be revoked, and the zoning be changed from industrial to a zoning that matches the residential nature of the area. All future requests for similar industrial companies should be denied as Birzeit should focus on implementing clean business and high technology ventures. We appreciate all that you do for our beloved city of Birzeit, and we look forward to seeing a positive closure to this issue. We truly hope that with your assistance, we can start focusing on building a bright future for Birzeit.

Thank you for your time and consideration regarding this matter.

Most respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Maryland Ubaid".

Maryland Ubaid, Esq.

National President

Birzeit Society