PRESS RELEASE

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Middle East Scholars Give Academic Freedom Award to Bahraini Resistance


“To all faculty, students and staff of Bahraini institutions of higher education who, by speaking out, documenting abuses, and engaging in myriad other forms of resistance have struggled against a range of brutal assaults by the Bahraini government upon academic freedom and upon the autonomy and integrity of the country's educational institutions"

Since April 2011, MESA’s Committee on Academic Freedom has sent three letters to the Bahraini Minister of Education and other top university officials in Bahrain outlining our deep concerns over what has been nothing less than a massive assault against academic freedom at all levels since the peaceful protests of last February were countered with brutal, and in some cases lethal, force. Hundreds of students, faculty and staff have been dismissed, arrested, humiliated and tortured during detention; some have been required to sign loyalty oaths; others have had their scholarships withdrawn. Moreover, the abuses against members of the educational sector continue—against some for joining in peaceful protests, against others simply having the wrong last name.

The record of the past months is more than sufficient reason to focus on Bahrain for this year’s Academic Freedom award. However, an additional reason for highlighting the vicious assault on the educational sector—from a podium in Washington, D.C.—is to underline the complicity in the violence in Bahrain of the US government, through its failure to defend human rights in a country which hosts the base of the US Fifth fleet. As scholars of the region, we are angered by the treatment of our Bahraini colleagues. We are also outraged by the relative silence of the Obama administration.

Nabil Rajab, one of the founders of the human rights movement in Bahrain and who currently serves as the President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, accepted the award on behalf of his Bahraini colleagues. Rajab was in Washington D.C. to accept the Ion Ratiu Democracy Award, an honor bestowed annually by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and for which he was nominated by MESA.