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PRESS RELEASE

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The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) has awarded its annual Academic Freedom Award for 2013 to the Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF) and the Scholars at Risk (SAR) program in recognition of their efforts in support of Syrian higher education institutions and faculty in the context of the on-going civil war. The award was made at a public ceremony on October 11, 2013 during MESA's annual meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the International Journal of Middle East Studies and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

MESA bestows its Academic Freedom Award each year on an individual or organization in recognition of a particularly noteworthy contribution to the defense of academic freedom, either in the Middle East and North Africa or in North America. Recent awardees include: for 2012, the Initiative for Solidarity with Detained Students, Tutuklu Öğrencilerle Dayanışma İnisiyatifi (TÖDİ). TÖDİ is an organization that was created for the purpose of offering support, legal assistance and advocacy on behalf of the hundreds of students (both undergraduate and graduate) who have been arrested by the Turkish government on the basis of their academic research or exercise of their rights of free speech and association; and for 2011, the faculty, students, and staff of Bahraini institutions of higher education who 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.

The first awardee for 2013, IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund, was created in 2002 to respond to the humanitarian and academic needs of scholars whose lives and academic work are under

threat for their research, identity, or beliefs or due to events in their home countries. The yearlong fellowships offered by IIE-SRF permit professors, researchers and public intellectuals to find temporary refuge at universities, colleges and research centers anywhere in the world, enabling them to pursue their academic work in safety until conditions improve in their countries so that they can return to help rebuild higher education and civil societies. Through September of 2013, IIE-SRF had awarded nearly 40 fellowships to Syrian scholars whose fields range from neuroscience to gender studies and whose scholarship has been threatened as a result of factors ranging from political involvement to membership of a minority community. The program has arranged temporary academic positions for these scholars at over 20 institutions in 5 countries.

The second awardee, Scholars at Risk (SAR), is an international network of over 320 higher education institutions in 35 countries dedicated to protecting scholars, preventing attacks on higher education and promoting academic freedom. Scholars at Risk (SAR) protects scholars suffering grave threats to their lives, liberty and well-being, primarily by arranging positions of sanctuary at network-member institutions for those forced to flee. SAR's Scholars-in-Prison project campaigns for intellectuals facing unjust prosecution or imprisonment, and SAR's new Academic Freedom MONITOR project works to combat impunity for violent attacks on higher education communities worldwide. Scholars at Risk is currently working with 28 pending candidates from Syria seeking host campuses and other assistance, including many still in Syria and others displaced in Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. SAR has been able to successfully place Syrian scholars at universities in the US and in Europe, with specialties ranging from computer engineering to theater studies.

Receiving the award on behalf of IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund is Ms. Martha Bloem, Assistant Director of SRF, and Ms. Lauren Crain, Acting Director of Protection on behalf of SAR.