

**Middle
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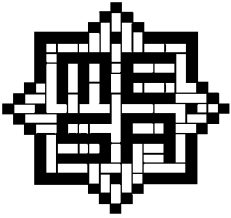
July 23, 2010

H.E. Abdel Aziz Bouteflika
President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
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Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), to express our deep concern about a set of directives, outlined in an announcement, dated 18 May 2010, from the Secretary-General of the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS) to the heads of Algerian institutions of higher education and research. In this document, which we have read with great care, the Ministry lays out a new set of procedures for the participation of Algerian scholars in conferences, colloquia, seminars, and workshops held outside the country. On the pretext that topics linked to Algeria's national interest and/or foreign policy could be addressed at such meetings, the document permits Algerian scholars henceforth to accept invitations to attend such meetings only with the prior approval of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS). Moreover, according to the new directives, international gatherings to be held in Algeria, whether organized by Algerian nationals or by a foreign entity, must also receive prior approval from the Ministry. These new measures, especially affecting scholars in the social sciences and humanities, contravene the fundamental rights of citizens as outlined in Algeria's constitution. [See Article 38 which states that freedom of intellectual, artistic, and scientific innovation is guaranteed to the citizen; and Article 44 which states that the right of entry and exit from the national territory is guaranteed.] These measures represent, as well, a grave infringement upon the very essence of the university as a space for the free exchange of ideas, information, analysis, and perspectives. Scholarly exchange and debate do not require the imprimatur of, nor should they be overseen by government bodies. We urge you, Your Excellency, to reject and rescind these directives that are so deeply prejudicial for academic freedom. And we call upon you to work toward promoting ever freer and more open exchange among peoples so as to enhance understanding and enrich lives.

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 and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.



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It appears to us, committee members, that the reasoning invoked by the Algerian MESRS in its directive of 18 May 2010 – namely, that free exchange may negatively affect the national interests or foreign policy concerns of the Algerian state – serves only to limit the scholarly activities of Algerian academics. To take but one example, scholars wanting to hold an international meeting in Algeria are required to submit a complete file with all the details to the MESRS at least 6 months prior to the proposed meeting, and await the decision of the MESRS as to whether or not the meeting can take place. Furthermore, a list of the names of invited guests to Algeria must be submitted for approval in advance to an office in the MESRS that specializes in inter-university cooperation and exchanges. With these directives, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the aim is to oversee and control the movements of scholars so as to limit their interactions and manage their speech. This must not be tolerated.

Your Excellency, we appeal to you to revoke the directives in the document addressed to the Heads of Institutions of Higher Education and Research, promulgated by the Office of the Secretary General of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and dated 18 May 2010. Not only do they represent a clear violation of academic freedom, but their implementation will also tarnish the image of Algeria abroad – an image the Office of the Secretary-General claims to want to protect by insisting on these new procedures. Furthermore, we entreat you to use your good offices to promote free dialogue and exchange among peoples both inside Algeria and abroad.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully,

Roger M.A. Allen
MESA President
Professor of Arabic and Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania

cc:

Rachid Haraoubia, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research