



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
Association**  
of North America, Inc.

**1219 N Santa Rita Ave  
The University of Arizona  
Tucson AZ 85721 USA**

**520 621-5850  
520 626-9095 fax  
sbs-mesa@email.arizona.edu  
www.mesana.org**



6 April 2012

His Excellency Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa  
Minister of Justice  
Kingdom of Bahrain

via fax +9731753-1284

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), I write to register grave concern about the ongoing state prosecution and harassment of university faculty, staff, and students in the Kingdom of Bahrain. I urge you to intervene personally to put an immediate halt to these abuses of power.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. It is the preeminent organization in the field. The Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3,000 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.

CAF began following events in Bahrain closely in the spring of 2011. The committee has written to Bahraini officials three times since then to protest the rash of arrests, suspensions, dismissals, and other arbitrary punishments of faculty, staff, and students at Bahraini institutions of higher education. My colleagues and I were heartened to hear that on March 19, 2012 Dr. Masaud Jahromi was reinstated to his position at Ahlia University. Many other injustices, however, remain to be redressed.

All of these matters were addressed in the November 2011 report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), whose recommendations His Majesty King Hamad promised to follow. On March 20, 2012 the National Commission tasked with carrying out these recommendations said that subsequent reforms had “touched all aspects of Bahraini life.” Yet it is clear to us that people working in the domain of higher education remain subject to abuse by the state.

We have learned, for instance, that six university students have been sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment and hefty fines despite the BICI’s finding that their “confessions” were obtained under torture. Even if the guilty verdicts were warranted, which we highly doubt, these sentences are grossly disproportionate to the alleged offenses and rob these students of their peak productive years in adulthood.

It has been reported as well that 141 other university students were tried on ambiguous security-related charges and received fines of different amounts and jail sentences of varying duration. We particularly deplore the fact that none of these students knew the identity of the witnesses against them or the nature of the state’s purported evidence of wrongdoing. At the least, there were serious infringements upon due process in these proceedings. And indeed, we find there is ample reason for skepticism of the state’s case in toto: The BICI said in its report that it “did not see any photo-

His Excellency Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa

6 April 2012

Re: Prosecution and harassment of university faculty, staff, and students

Page | 2

graphs in the university's investigative files that established that a particular student had participated in a violent, criminal, or disruptive act on the university campus." In addition, the court has told the students that it would suspend their convictions for a "bail" payment of 500 Bahraini dinars, a measure that sounds oddly like this particular court's judgments are for sale.

The appalling maltreatment of these university personnel is part of what we are forced to conclude has been an orchestrated campaign of assaults upon academic freedom in the course of the past year in Bahrain. In 2011, numerous academics from the University of Bahrain and other institutions were arrested for exercising their right of free expression, including at least nine who were rousted from their homes by masked police. Several staffers at the University of Bahrain were also arrested and remain suspended from their jobs. Twelve professors at the University of Bahrain, who had been arbitrarily suspended from their jobs, were told to go back to work in February, only to find that administrators had placed draconian "final warnings" in their personnel files, the last disciplinary measure before termination. Contrary to the BICI's recommendation that all faculty members be reinstated in full, some professors have been assigned to lower-ranking jobs. None of the reinstated professors have received the back pay they missed while under suspension.

It appears, meanwhile, that the government intends to subject university faculty to ongoing intimidation. In June 2011, the Ministry of Education issued five amendments to university bylaws that contravene the 1997 UNESCO principles regarding treatment of higher education personnel, in addition to flouting the basic protections laid out in the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Bahrain ratified in 2006. Among the deeply disturbing aspects of these amendments are the ban on "political" activity by professors; the restriction of professors' freedom of association on campus; and the prohibition of "any act that is prejudicial to national principles, standing of the State or University, the Bahraini community or the faculty member himself, whether inside or outside the University." The wording of this last measure is so vague as to license completely arbitrary, if not capricious, discipline and harassment of faculty by the authorities. We hear reports that university campuses are under intense surveillance by security agents.

We note as well that article 52 of the university bylaws continues to block the possibility of promotion, research grants or professional accolades to faculty members "against whom a disciplinary decision has been made." In view of the amendments above, it seems that Bahraini faculty may be denied future opportunities for professional advancement simply for running afoul of the government. Finally, the government of Bahrain itself violated article 49 of the bylaws, which provides for due notice by registered mail to faculty referred to the Disciplinary Council. The faculty members who were suspended in 2011 were not so informed.

We stand with our brave colleagues in Bahraini institutions of higher education in demanding an end to these state intrusions into their lives and livelihoods.

His Excellency Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa

6 April 2012

Re: Prosecution and harassment of university faculty, staff, and students

Page | 3

At its 2011 annual meeting, MESA was deeply proud to give its Academic Freedom Award to all faculty, students, and staff of Bahraini institutions of higher education who had documented and spoken out against state abuses in the course of the preceding year and resisted various attacks upon the autonomy and integrity of those institutions. We were honored to welcome Nabeel Rajab, the distinguished director of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, who accepted this award on behalf of his fellow citizens. Lately, we have learned that he, too, faces trial on transparently political charges.

We now call on the government of Bahrain to undertake a prompt review of all the sentences imposed on the students, to revise the university bylaws in accordance with international norms, to remove the “final warnings” from faculty members’ files, and to reinstate all these people at their respective institutions without penalty or further harassment. We further encourage the government of Bahrain to dismiss the charges against Rajab and to order thorough investigations of the very serious allegations of torture and other violations of human rights that have come to light as a result of the BICI inquiry and the work of Bahraini civil society organizations. All of these measures, in fact, are required so that the government of Bahrain may uphold its own laws and respect its obligations under international law.

Sincerely,



Fred M. Donner

MESA President

Professor of Near Eastern History, University of Chicago

cc:

Dr. Majid bin Ali Al-Naimi, Minister of Education, President, Board of Trustees of the University of Bahrain

Dr. Ebrahim Mohammed Janahi, President of the University of Bahrain

Dr. Abdullah Yousif Al-Hawaj, President of Ahlia University

Her Excellency Houda Ezra Ebrahim Nonoo, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United States

His Excellency Sheikh Khalifa Bin Ali Al-Khalifa, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United Kingdom

Dr. Yousif Al-Bastaki, Vice President for Administrative Affairs, Finance and Information Technology of the University of Bahrain

Prof. M. Cherif Bassiouni, Distinguished Research Professor of Law, De Paul University School of Law