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September 15, 2017

Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
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Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain
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Your Majesty,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) regarding the imprisonment of Khalil al-Halwachi, a Bahraini scholar and activist. We wrote to you on 6 April 2017 to protest his 23 March 2017 sentencing to ten years in prison for possession of a weapon following a pre-trial detention period of more than two years.

MESA was founded in 1966 to support scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association 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.

Mr. al-Halwachi's conviction was part of a disturbing crackdown on freedom of expression and political opposition in your country since 2011, and in our 6 April letter we expressed our concern regarding the apparent lack of due process that marked his detention and trial. During 2016, Mr. al-Halwachi's trial at the Fifth High Criminal Court was adjourned twice – on 30 June and 12 December – after witnesses for the prosecution failed to appear in court. When Mr. al-Halwachi spoke out about the judicial proceedings against him at a hearing in November 2016, he was additionally charged with “insulting the judiciary.” He refused to attend his sentencing on 23 March 2017 in person after sending multiple letters to the presiding judge, Ebrahim al-Zayed, that drew attention to improper practices and ill-treatment during his trial and detention.

We now understand that Mr. Halwachi has appealed his conviction and sentencing and will appear in court on 18 September 2017.

We therefore call upon Your Majesty to intervene at this critical juncture to secure Mr. al-Halwachi's release, and ensure that any charges against him that stem from his peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of association are dropped, that his appeal proceeds in a manner consistent with Bahrain's obligations under international law, and that until

he is released from detention he receives humane treatment, including access to medical care, legal counsel and his family.

Sincerely,



Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York



Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director

cc:

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