



**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
caf@mesana.org
www.mesana.org



Committee on
Academic Freedom

February 24, 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2
Canada
E-mail: justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Rona Ambrose
Acting Leader of the Opposition
900 Valour Building
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Canada
E-mail: rona.ambrose@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Thomas Muclair
Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Canada
E-mail: thomas.muclair@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Elizabeth May
Leader of the Green Party of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Canada
E-mail: elizabeth.may@parl.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, Ms. Ambrose, Mr. Mulcair, and Ms. May:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom to indicate our concern over the passing of a motion introduced by Mr. Tony Clement (Parry Sound-Muskoka) concerning the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in the Parliament of Canada on February 22, 2016. The motion, which passed by a vote of 229 to 51, reads as follows: "That, given Canada and Israel share a long history of friendship as well as economic and diplomatic relations, the House reject the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which promotes the demonization and delegitimization of the State of Israel, and call upon the government to condemn any and all attempts by Canadian organizations, groups or individuals to promote the BDS movement, both here at home and abroad." We are troubled by the motion's call on the government to condemn free political organization and advocacy by Canadians on a vitally important subject of international interest – organization and advocacy that is explicitly protected under Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote 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.

Section 2 of the Charter lists as fundamental freedoms of Canadians the following: “(a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association.” The motion passed in Parliament on February 22 represents a clear challenge to the fundamental freedoms enumerated in Section 2 of the Charter, insofar as it calls on the government to condemn those who choose to invoke, freely and peacefully, their protected freedoms of conscience, thought, belief, opinion, expression, communication, assembly, and association on behalf of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

We are particularly disturbed by the potential implications of the motion for those students and faculty members engaged in the free exercise of their Charter rights on university campuses across Canada. The protection of the rights enumerated in Section 2 of the Charter are of particular significance for those engaged in academic discourse on university campuses. The hostility that the motion expresses towards those exercising their Charter rights in advocating for the BDS movement threatens the principles of academic freedom and cannot but cast a shadow over Canada’s international reputation for the protection of human rights.

We trust that you will take action forthwith to withdraw the threat that the motion poses to Canadians freely exercising rights protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and perhaps especially to scholars, teachers and students at Canadian universities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'B. Baron' followed by a horizontal flourish.

Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy W. Newhall' in a cursive style.

Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director
Associate Professor, University of Arizona