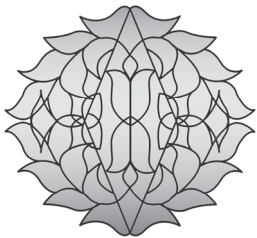


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MESA '09

May 27, 2009

Mr. Eli Yishai
Minister of the Interior
2 Kaplan Street, Kiryat Ben-Gurion
Israel

via fax 011-972-2-670-1628

Dear Minister Yishai,

I write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to inquire about the reasons why Dr. Nicola Pratt, Lecturer in Comparative Politics & International Relations in the School of Political, Social & International Studies at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK was refused entry into the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 22 April, 2009 at the Allenby Bridge Crossing.

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 more than 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.

According to information received from Dr. Pratt, she had been invited to the Institute for Women's Studies at Bir Zeit University so that she might visit with faculty, staff, and students and also conduct two seminars about her research on gender and conflict in the Middle East. She was in possession of a formal invitation from the director of the Institute for Women's Studies at Bir Zeit University, Prof. Islah Jad, as well as relevant contact information. Nonetheless, Dr. Pratt was forced to wait for 5 hours at Allenby Bridge and was then refused entry without explanation.

Moreover, Dr. Pratt's experience comes against the backdrop of a sharp rise in Israel's denial of tourist or work visas to visiting international faculty at West Bank Palestinian universities since 2006. Bir Zeit University has been particularly damaged by this practice: in 2006 alone one half of its foreign passport-holding staff were deported or denied re-entry.

As a committee of MESA charged with monitoring infringements on academic freedom, CAF is very troubled by the action taken against Dr. Pratt and concerned about what it may imply regarding Israeli policy toward academic freedom in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In that spirit, I urge you to investigate this incident and then either explain why the refusal to admit Dr. Pratt was warranted, or ensure that she will be allowed to visit Bir Zeit University in the near future.

I look forward to your response.

Virginia Aksan
President, Middle East Studies Association
Professor, McMaster University