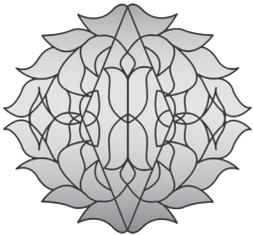


**Middle
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MESA '09

27 August 2009

Professor Rivka Carmi
President, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Israel

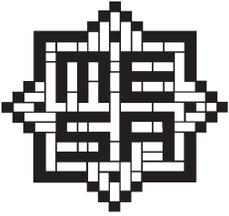
Fax: 972-8-6472991
president@bgu.ac.il

Dear Prof. Carmi:

On behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) I write to express our grave concern over your recent comments approving Ben-Gurion University's search for legal means to dismiss Senior Lecturer and Chair of the Government and Politics Department, Neve Gordon. These comments came in response to an opinion piece published by Dr. Gordon in the *Los Angeles Times* on 21 August, in which he called for a comprehensive boycott of his country as a means to pressure Israel to end its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The threat of dismissal against a tenured faculty member because of opinions he expresses on a subject of regular debate in his country flies in the face of academic freedom, a freedom that Ben-Gurion University has committed itself to uphold. We therefore urge you to publicly rescind this threat and to fulfill your primary duty as university president to affirm and protect the rights of all members of the university community to express their opinions without fear of censure or punishment.

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 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.

CAF does not challenge the right of you or anyone else at the university to disagree, even vehemently, with the views of another faculty member. But it is precisely in moments of political crisis that the principles of academic freedom are tested. In your public statements since August 22, you have added to the popular campaign of vilification mounted against Professor Gordon in the media by repeating, without contesting, the extremely damaging charge that his article amounts to treason against the state. Similarly, your reference to his views as "destructive" and an "abuse of the freedom of speech prevailing in Israel and at Ben-Gurion University," and your suggestion that academics with such views should "consider another professional and personal home" cast an alarming chill on the free exchange of ideas that is foundational to the academic enterprise and to democratic governance more generally. Indeed, Article 2 of BGU's own Academic Code affirms that the university "will not discriminate in its activities against any person for reasons of race, religion, nationality, gender, or political views [and] will act to protect academic freedom." Article 4c of your university's Code of Ethics further clarifies "in addition to their academic freedoms, researchers of the university enjoy all civic freedoms enjoyed by every citizen of the state, including freedoms of expression and organization... Researchers are authorized to express their political or religious opinions without incitement and are authorized to act to implement them using legal means."



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President Rivka Carmi
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Re: Neve Gordon
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In refusing to reiterate the university's obligation to protect Dr. Gordon's professional and civil freedoms and in failing to clarify that it will not be blackmailed into suspending the freedoms of particular faculty members that some donors do not like, your administration has given a green light to those attacking him and in some cases threatening his physical safety. We hope you will realize the importance of doing everything in your power to end the intimidation against Dr. Gordon by reaffirming his academic right to free expression as guaranteed by the by-laws of your university. In doing this you would be following the exemplary lead of your colleague Zvi Galil, the former president of Tel Aviv University, who in May 2009 rejected popular pressure to expel Omar Barghouti, an MA student in philosophy, because of his work with the international Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions movement against the Israeli occupation.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Virginia H. Aksan
MESA President
Professor of History, McMaster University