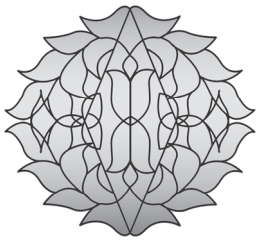


**Middle
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MESA '09

19 June 2009

Professor Mamdouh Shoukri, President
S949 Ross Building
York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3 Canada

Dear Professor Shoukri,

On behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), I am writing to you to express our strong support for resisting calls to cancel the international academic conference entitled "Israel/Palestine: Mapping Models of Statehood and Paths to Peace" to be held at York University next week. CAF applauds your defence of the principles of academic freedom and university autonomy in the context of a general campaign of intimidation and interference by pro-Israel groups and federal politicians against your and other institutions of higher education in Canada.

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, including 133 members at universities across Canada. 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.

The conference program contains an extraordinary slate of Israeli and Palestinian, North American and European scholars, many of whom are leaders in their fields of study and others of whom are promising younger scholars. In spite of the organizers' unequivocal commitment to ensuring that "neither anti-Semitism, nor any other form of racism, has any place in this forum" and that it "will inform both the conference and all aspects of its planning process," pro-Israel groups have alleged that the conference statement of purpose is smoke-screen for anti-Semitism and hate. CAF commends you for refusing to be intimidated by such baseless fear-mongering and for upholding the integrity of academia.

We have written to Minister Goodyear asking him to retract his call for a second peer review which we view as an inappropriate intervention in Canadian academic affairs, and to SSHRC Professor Chad Gaffield for commitment to the independence of the peer review process and the holding of the conference.

Sincerely,

Virginia H. Aksan
MESA President
Professor, McMaster University