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August 21, 2015

His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Ruler of Abu Dhabi and President of the United Arab Emirates
via fax +971 2 668 6622

Your Highness:

I write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our profound concern regarding the re-arrest of Emirati scholar and rights activist, Professor Nasser bin Ghaith. We have learned that Dr. bin Ghaith was detained by the UAE authorities in Abu Dhabi on 18 August 2015 and taken to an undisclosed location. He has not been heard from since and no information has been provided by the authorities about his arrest or whereabouts. We call upon the Abu Dhabi Government to release Dr. bin Ghaith with no further delay. If the authorities suspect him of criminal behavior, they must clarify immediately the charges against him and allow him to defend himself.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching of the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA 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.

Dr. bin Ghaith is a respected scholar who teaches economics at Abu Dhabi's branch of the French University, La Sorbonne. He is one of the five Emirati pro-democracy campaigners – the so-called UAE 5 – who were detained by Emirati authorities in April 2011 and incarcerated until their pardon and release in November 28, 2011. The UAE 5 were recognised by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience. At the time of his arrest in 2011, the Committee on Academic Freedom of MESA wrote to the Government of the UAE to protest Dr. bin Ghaith's detention (see our letter of 8 June 2011). In addition to demanding his release, we urged the authorities to lift all restrictions on free speech and respect academic freedom, in part because this would facilitate achieving the purported goals of the Government for social development and increased global competitiveness.

Despite the Government's silence on Dr. bin Ghaith's most recent arrest, we understand that before he was taken away at 8:00 p.m. on August 18, his office in Abu Dhabi and his home in Dubai were searched by police, and some articles were confiscated. As for the Government's motive, there are suggestions that comments Dr. bin Ghaith has made on his Twitter account about political developments in Egypt may be used as a pretext to punish him for protesting the clampdown on pro-democracy movements in the region and expressing criticism of some Arab leaders. Indeed, the UAE Government's passing, in July 2015, of Law No. 2 – referred to as the anti-discrimination law, combined with the cyber-crime and anti-terrorism laws already in place, can be selectively implemented to systematically suppress – and criminalize -- free and peaceful expression by Emirati nationals. We assume that the UAE Government aims to silence Dr. bin Ghaith through the selective interpretation and application of one or the other of these laws. Furthermore, given the unknowns about his detention, we fear for his health and safety.

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We emphatically reiterate what we expressed to the Emirati authorities in our letter of four years ago: release Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith promptly and restore to him his right to self-expression without conditions or limitations. Pending his earliest release, provide information about his whereabouts, guarantee his well-being, and allow him regular access to family and legal representation.

Thank you for your attention. We await your reply.

Yours sincerely,



Nathan J. Brown
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University

cc:

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