



**Middle
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Your Highnesses, Your Excellency,

We write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern about what appears to be an increasingly hostile climate in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with regards to academic freedom. Although Prof. Abdelkhaleq Abdallah has been released, we are dismayed that over the past several months, scholars and students have been detained for innocuous tweets, placed on blacklists (shared with other GCC members) and/or denied entry to the country, while other scholars, such as Prof. Nasser bin Ghaith, remain in detention for months with repeated trial postponements. The recent crackdown launched by the Emirati authorities on scholars and students violates the rights of freedom of opinion and freedom of conscience of these individuals.

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.

The cases of Nasser bin Ghaith and Kristina Bogos, about whom we have written to you before – see our letters dated August 21, 2015, August 22, 2016, January 4, 2017 -- as well as the most recent detention of Abdelkhaleq Abdallah reflect a trend in the UAE that seeks to silence academics and public intellectuals. Indeed, scholars working in and on the UAE have found their ability to express themselves and conduct their research significantly constrained.

We remain deeply concerned about the ongoing detention of Nasser bin Ghaith. Following an eight-month-long incarceration incommunicado, he has, since June 2016, appeared in Supreme Court on numerous occasions; his most recent appearance – on January 18, 2017 – before the Abu Dhabi Appeal Court, resulted in yet another postponement of his trial. We are troubled not only by the unacceptable conditions of his continued incarceration, but also by news of Professor bin Ghaith's declining health. We understand that he does not have consistent access to his blood

pressure medication, and has had dental problems and other medical issues that have gone untreated for long periods. Professor bin Ghaith continues to be held simply for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

As for Abdelkhaleq Abdallah, eminent professor of political science at United Arab Emirates University and long-time advisor to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, we are pleased that he was released on January 26, after 11 days in detention. However, we object to his having been arrested – apparently on account of his activity on social media and criticism of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi – as well as to the conditions of his detention: he was held without any indication of his whereabouts and without a clear explanation of the reasons for his arrest.

In addition to Emirati scholars' facing severe constraints, a number of foreign scholars wishing to conduct research in and about the UAE have been prevented from doing so. Professor Andrew Ross of New York University was denied entry to Abu Dhabi in spring 2015 (see our letter of March 25, 2015), and Kristina Bogos, a Masters candidate at Georgetown's Doha campus, was denied a student visa from the Qatari authorities apparently at the recommendation of the UAE which had placed her on a 'blacklist'. Both individuals work on labor issues in the Gulf. These, however, are not isolated cases. Numerous academics who work on the UAE report canceling research and speaking trips to the Emirates out of fear of arrest or deportation.

On grounds of protecting the freedom of speech as well as international law pertaining to the movement of persons and rights to expression, we appeal to you to consider the deteriorating climate for scholarship and free expression in your country. We urge you to uphold international norms of due process and affirm your commitment to respecting academic freedom.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York



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

cc:

HE Youssef Al Otaiba, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the United States
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