

**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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January 18, 2011

G. Lincoln McCurdy
President, Turkish Coalition of America
1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036

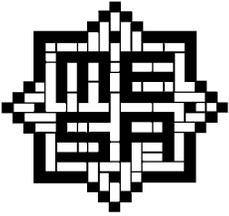
Dear Mr. McCurdy:

I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our grave concern about your decision to file a lawsuit in November 2010 against the University of Minnesota and its Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. According to press reports, your lawsuit was prompted by the Center's listing of your organization's website as an "unreliable" source with respect to the history of Armenians in the final years of the Ottoman Empire.

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.

Until recently, as part of its educational mission, the website of the University of Minnesota's Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies apparently included a section listing websites and web-based resources that scholars associated with the Center deemed to be "unreliable." Presumably, those scholars felt that assertions made on these websites and in these resources were not in keeping with accepted scholarly standards or the consensus among scholars and should therefore be treated with skepticism. We believe that the principles of academic freedom protect the right of the Center, and of scholars associated with it, to share their assessment of various perspectives with the public in this way. In any event, that section of the website was removed several days before your organization filed suit.

Your organization, and those who hold perspectives different from those expressed by scholars associated with the Center, certainly have the right to participate in open scholarly exchange on the history of the Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire or any other issue, by presenting their views at academic conferences, in the pages of peer-reviewed scholarly journals or by other means, thereby opening them up to debate and challenge. We are distressed that you instead chose to take legal action against the University of Minnesota and its Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, apparently for having at one point characterized views expressed on your website in a certain way. We fear that legal action of this kind may have a chilling effect on the ability of scholars and academic institutions to carry out their work freely and to have their work assessed on its merits, in conformity with standards and procedures long established in the world of scholarship. Your lawsuit may thus serve to stifle the free expression of ideas among scholars and academic institutions regarding the history of Armenians in the later Ottoman Empire, and thereby undermine the principles of academic freedom.



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We do not believe that disagreements about historical issues should be addressed by lawsuits. We therefore call on you to reconsider and withdraw the legal action you have initiated against the University of Minnesota and its Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and we urge you to instead devote your organization's energies to fostering scholarly debate and exchange on this as on all other issues, in a manner that conforms to the standards and procedures adhered to by scholars and academic institutions and that respects their academic freedom.

Sincerely,

Suad Joseph
MESA President
Professor of Anthropology & Women's Studies, University of California, Davis

cc:

Bruno Chaouat, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota