



**Middle
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Studies
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Mr. Isma'il Haniyeh, Caretaker Prime Minister, Gaza
Dr. Ahmed Youssef, Advisor to the Caretaker Government for Foreign Policy
Ambassador Afif Safieh, Representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization

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Gentlemen,

I write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) regarding the deplorable burning of the YMCA library in Gaza City and the attack on the Al-Nur Baptist School in Gaza City, both incidents having occurred in the last two weeks. Last Spring – 22 May, 2007, to be exact – we also wrote to express our concern about similar kinds of brutal attacks on schools, libraries, and other educational facilities in Gaza. As then, so now, we would like to remind you that our organization has frequently protested to the government of Israel about its policies that restrict access to education in Palestine and that we are aware of the dreadful economic and security situation in Gaza fostered by Israeli actions and US compliance. We also wish to emphasize that we are equally aware of the responsibility all of you have to protect such educational institutions from these kinds of attacks. We therefore urge you as strongly as possible to work incessantly to prevent such attacks in the future.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (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 2700 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.

We are concerned that greater precautions were not taken to protect either the YMCA building and its contents or the Baptist school. Those of us familiar with Gaza and the YMCA Library are acutely aware of the important role it plays in providing a place where people, young and old, can come together to study and talk. This is precisely the kind of neutral meeting ground that needs the protection only your organizations can provide. We wish to encourage you to restore the YMCA library to its former state, and we fervently hope that there will be no future incidents of this kind in Gaza.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Mervat Hatem
MESA President