



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

1219 N Santa Rita Ave
The University of Arizona
Tucson AZ 85721 USA

520 621-5850
520 626-9095 fax
sbs-mesa@email.arizona.edu
www.mesana.org



August 30, 2013

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu
Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni
Minister of Education Shai Piron
Ambassador Michael Oren

Dear Ministers and Ambassador:

I write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our concern regarding the treatment of Albaraa Kefaya, a recent graduate in Engineering from Bir Zeit University who has been detained by the Israeli authorities and prevented from taking up the internship he was offered in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of California at Berkeley.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on 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 of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Mr. Kefaya graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Engineering this past spring. He prepared to leave the country to pursue his studies abroad, first in California, where he had been awarded a 3-month internship (June-August) at Berkeley, and then in Turkey where he had received admission into a language program beginning in September. However, his efforts to carry out these plans have been repeatedly obstructed. In May 2013, when he attempted to leave the West Bank and enter Jordan, from where he would fly to the United States, the Israeli authorities detained him on the allegation that he was a political activist working against the Government of Israel. After repeated meetings and the intervention of his lawyer and an Israeli Human Rights group, HaMoked, Mr. Kefaya was eventually allowed to leave. However, the permission was conditioned on his agreeing not to return to the Occupied Palestinian Territories – his home -- for a period of three years.

Then, when Mr. Kefaya entered Jordan in June, he was detained by the Jordanian authorities and required to appear at an office of the General Intelligence Directorate in Amman four days later. Following a lengthy interrogation, that caused him to miss his flight out of the country, Mr. Kefaya was escorted back to the border crossing with Israel and handed over to Israeli authorities. Subsequently, at an obligatory meeting on July 8 in the West Bank with the Israel Security Agency ('Shin Bet'), the Israeli officer who met with Mr. Kefaya suggested that his Agency had asked the Jordanians to send him back. Moreover, Mr. Kefaya was told that if he would not work as an informant for the Israelis, it would be a very long time before he would be allowed to leave the Palestinian Territories and pursue his studies abroad.

It may be that Mr. Kefaya's ordeal is the consequence of his having been falsely accused of illegal political activity in 2007 and 2011. (Indeed, he was held at those times, but he was not formally charged or tried, and was eventually released). If this is the case, then these attempts to prevent Mr. Kefaya from pursuing his education abroad are instances of extrajudicial punishment for activities he has neither engaged in, nor been found guilty of engaging in, and for refusing to become involved in illegal activities on behalf of the

30 August 2013

Re: Bir Zeit University graduate Albaraa Kefaya

Page 2

Israeli government. We strongly urge the Israeli authorities to cease to obstruct Albaraa Kefaya's academic pursuits, and allow him to exit the country, without further delay, to continue his studies abroad, and without the grossly unfair condition of not returning home for several years.

The International Convention of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Israel is a signatory, states that no one shall be prevented arbitrarily from leaving his/her country. Furthermore, the right to education is enshrined in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and Articles 13 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Israel is a signatory, as well. As a committee of MESA charged with monitoring infringements on academic freedom, we have written in the past and on several occasions to express dismay and disapproval about the various travel bans and restrictions to education imposed by the Israeli government on Palestinian students. These ongoing practices, preventing Palestinian students of the Territories from pursuing their education, constitute blatant discrimination; moreover, they violate the right to equality enshrined in the human rights conventions that Israel claims to support. These practices are by no means justifiable, not even in terms of Israel's national security interests; rather, they simply humiliate and subjugate the individuals in question.

We call upon the Government of Israel to review the case of Albaraa Kefaya with no further delay and allow him to travel abroad, without conditions, to pursue his education. We await a prompt response to our letter and the concerns we have expressed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Sluglett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Peter" and last name "Sluglett" clearly distinguishable.

Peter Sluglett

MESA President

Visiting Research Professor, Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore

cc: Israel Security Agency ('Shin Bet')