

**Middle
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21 April 2011

Your Excellency Dr. Majid bin Ali Al-Naimi
Minister of Education
President, Board of Trustees of the University of Bahrain
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Dear Dr. Al-Naimi,

I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our deep concern over the widespread, on-going intimidation of the educational sector in Bahrain. The current atmosphere of dismissals, firings and threats to professors' and staff members' employment as well as students' continuing matriculation undermines the intellectual vibrancy of the academy not to mention the educational future of the next generation of citizens.

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.

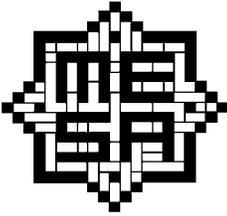
As examples of the ongoing intimidation of the professorate we note first the case of Professor Masoud Jahromi, Chair of the Department of Engineering at Ahlia University, who was arrested at his home on the night of April 14, 2011. His whereabouts are unknown. His students describe him as a "role model who taught us to respect and be kind to all people and to share knowledge." We ask that you ensure Professor Jahromi be granted full access to his lawyer and that due process of law be upheld in this case. If he is charged with an offense, we ask that he be tried before a court that meets fair international standards. If he is not charged, we urge that he be released promptly, accorded his full right to self-expression, and allowed to resume his professional responsibilities without conditions or limitations on his academic freedom, and without professional sanction or penalty.

In another case, on April 6, 2011, some 19 faculty members from Bahrain University were summarily fired from their teaching and research positions in various departments; 25 administrators were dismissed; 62 students expelled and 8 others suspended for a year.

Third, 111 civil servants were summarily fired from the Ministry of Education on April 17 and are threatened with legal action. Again, such a massive dismissal raises serious questions about cause. Each of these government employees deserves to have notification of the reasons behind their firing.

Such a broad wave of firings and dismissals is unprecedented and appears to be motivated by political, not academic, concerns. We ask that you adhere to generally acknowledged standards of employment in academic institutions and, where warranted, issue official letters that state explicit reasons for the dismissal or expulsion of each.

Finally, in the United Kingdom, Bahraini students who are pursuing university education were photographed while participating in peaceful demonstrations to support democracy. It has been reported in *The Guardian* that the Bahraini government subsequently harassed their families in Bahrain, and that the stipends of nine of students were withdrawn.



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21 April 2011
Re: Intimidation of the educational sector in Bahrain
Page 2

Taken together, these activities appear to constitute a serious assault on the system of higher education in Bahrain—its faculty, staff and students. It is through education that a productive, vibrant national future is ensured; indeed, a quality system of education is a precious national asset. As noted explicitly in Article 7 of the Bahraini Constitution, “The State guarantees the inviolability of the places of learning.” We therefore respectfully request that you reexamine the cases of all those who have been arrested, fired, or expelled. If legitimate cause exists for such action, it should be conveyed to each individual through formal channels. If not, we urge you to respect the bases of academic freedom and to reinstate all the students, faculty, civil servants and administrators who have been unfairly dismissed as well as to address the arrest of Professor Jahromi according to recognized international legal standards.

We look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,

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