



# Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

The University of Arizona • 1643 E. Helen Street • Tucson AZ 85721

15 June 1998

His Highness Shaikh 'Isa ibn Salman al-Khalifa  
The Emir of Bahrain  
The Amiri Court, Rifa'a Palace  
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Your Highness:

The Committee on Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa (CAF MENA) would like to express its profound concern about the deteriorating conditions of academic life in Bahrain. International reports and individual testimonies all indicate the continuation of an egregious violation of academic freedom. These excesses have reached intolerable proportions during the year 1997-1998, affecting both secondary school and university students.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2700 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The association publishes the respected *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and is committed to ensuring respect for principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

We recognize that Bahrain has been successful in training and preparing an impressive group of intellectuals and academics. It is unfortunate that many of them are subjected to a coercive policy that limits their academic freedom and their opportunities for employment and professional advancement. Of particular concern is what appears to be an officially sanctioned policy of intimidation and the selective application of restrictions on academics. Such persistent censorship stifles thought and discourages intellectual activities; it also inhibits free discussion of the severe problems that the current policy has created in the educational system. Continued police surveillance creates a terror-stricken environment hardly conducive to freedom of thought and dissemination of knowledge. Even outside academia, the policy has had a chilling impact on freedom of expression. One example is the dismissal of the elected Board of the Bar Association for inviting some well-known figures to give a public lecture. Other professional societies were also forced to place restrictions on their programs. Among those whose lectures were canceled were the ex-Minister of Education, Ali Fakhro, and the prominent entrepreneur Mohamad Jalal.

We have been particularly alarmed by the policy of ethnic-religious discrimination that is primarily directed against the Shia population. The impact of this policy is gravely felt at all levels of education, from school children to university students, from teachers to professors. We are especially concerned with the educational life of young students in high schools. It is unfortunate that the sanctity of school grounds and classrooms has been breached by the police. One

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report indicates that over one hundred young students have been targeted by such unlawful police action. We have been informed of the cases of students who, after being discharged from detention, have been prevented from resuming their studies or seeking gainful employment. For example, Usama Kadhim has not been able to resume his education or to find employment. Children's rights to education, protection and nurturing are protected under the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child, to which Bahrain is a signatory. These rights are also guaranteed by the Bahraini constitution.

The Shia faculty and personnel have been progressively purged from the University. This has reached an alarming proportion in some departments, including the School of Engineering. In other areas of University employment, the Shias have been subjected to a policy that seeks to demote and alienate them. This policy has been followed irrespective of academic qualification and in total disregard of fundamental principles of equity. According to our information, the Shia faculty and students feel strongly that their individual dignity and integrity have been violated. They resent being subjected to official discrimination and public obloquy.

We respectfully remind you of the Bahraini Constitution's Article 7(d) which provides for the inviolability of educational institutions and Article 23 which guarantees the right to freedom of speech and scientific research. It is clear to us that the recent measures adopted by your government contravene these articles. They also violate Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which endorses the right to freedom of opinion and expression. We urgently request your government to take all appropriate measures to put an end to these abuses and bring back the educational system of your country to a normal and healthy life, free from intimidation and anxiety.

Respectfully,



Anne H. Betteridge  
Executive Director

cc: His Excellency Shaikh Muhammad ibn Khalifa al-Khalifa, Prime Minister  
Ambassador Dr. Muhammed Abdel-Ghaffar, Ambassador to the United States  
Madelene Albright, United States Secretary of State  
Malcolm Rifkind, Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom