



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

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Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah Bin Muhammad Al-Saud
Minister of Higher Education, Saudi Arabia
via email media@mobe.gov.sa; dmea@mobe.gov.sa

Dear Sirs,

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 sustained interruption of study for four medical students at King Faisal University in Dammam, Saudi Arabia.

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.

A travel ban was imposed on Zainab Makloog, Aalaa Sayed and Zahra Zabar effectively preventing them from going to school. All were on full scholarships based on exemplary performance in high school. We understand that they were arrested by Saudi Arabian authorities and extradited to Bahrain where they were accused of inciting hatred towards the Bahraini regime and criticizing government symbols, and detained for about three weeks.

Although they were acquitted in June due to lack of evidence, they have not been allowed to resume their studies. Two of the students were in their final semester of a six year program of study. The other was in her fifth year of study. King Faisal University will neither confirm nor deny their expulsion, but they are no longer allowed into Saudi Arabia. They have contacted authorities in both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia to no avail. Further, they are unable to obtain university transcripts. With no access to these documents, they are effectively barred from resuming their education anywhere else. Other universities have informed the students that they would be required to repeat at least three years of study if they were to enroll.

Zahra was recognized as the best student in the northern governorate of Bahrain, won a physics competition, won best project for an Autism in Health Education competition, and represented Bahrain in the Arabic World Speech competition. Zainab has volunteered her skills and energy in a health care center. Aalaa's grade point average is 4.09 out of 5. She was previously nominated for participation in the Crown Prince Outstanding Leadership and Development Foundation. All three have worked very hard to pursue their goal of becoming physicians.

We are also concerned about a fourth medical student at King Faisal University, Mahmood Habib. Also in his final year of study, he was prohibited from taking his final exam by the university

administration without explanation. He learned later during a university investigation that he had been accused of “inciting hatred towards the Bahraini regime.” He was not given the opportunity to prove otherwise. He has been informed that he is permanently expelled from the university though he was never charged with any offense.

We ask that you allow these four students to complete their university medical education and receive their medical degrees, that you protect their scholarships, lift the travel ban and ensure that they are not hindered in any way as a result of these events in their quest for professional employment.

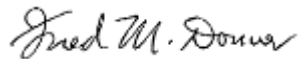
Education is integral to national development. Both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have expressed their commitment to nurture young citizens who are capable of nation building and contributing to the community. King Abdullah has repeatedly said that giving young people a better education is at the heart of his plan to build a modern state. He stated, “Undoubtedly, scientific centers that embrace all peoples are the first line of defense against extremists.” The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Higher Education “seeks to fulfill the potential of the greatest resource – people.”

Bahrain’s commitment to education is explicit in its Constitution, which affirms that “The State guarantees the inviolability of places of learning.” King Hamad recently confirmed this stance when he called education “the cornerstone of national development.”

These four students have all proven their professional credentials and are future leaders in a critical field of national development. We urge you to ensure their access to academic programs and to support them so that they may fulfill their academic and societal potentials.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Fred M. Donner
MESA President
Professor of Near Eastern History, University of Chicago

cc:

H.E. Sheikh Humoud Bin Abdullah Bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Bahraini Ambassador to Saudi Arabia
H.E. Ambassador Houda Ezra Nonoo, Bahraini Ambassador to US
Dr. Abdulmohsen Fahad Almarek, Ambassador Saudi Arabian Ambassador to Bahrain
H.E. Adel A. Al-Jubeir, Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the US
Prince Mohammed bin Fahd, Governor of the Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia