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Media Release

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Professors' Associations Decry Violence Against Academic Colleagues in Iraq

Washington, D.C., and Tucson, Arizona — The Middle East Studies Association and the American Association of University Professors jointly released the following statement, titled "Iraq: Higher Education and Academic Freedom in Danger," on July 5.

The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) express continuing concern about the dangers facing academic life in Iraq today.

Virtually every Iraqi institution of higher education is at risk. Universities, colleges, and research institutions operate under severe political duress and without adequate resources, transparent funding mechanisms, or the civil and legal protections needed to nurture and promote a vibrant intellectual climate and civil society.

Iraq's intellectual and academic community, long oppressed by the highly restrictive and paranoid policies of Saddam Hussein's government, have been unable to recover in the pervasive atmosphere of lawlessness and political violence that has followed the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of the country. All campuses and scientific institutions suffered heavily from the months of looting that followed the collapse of the former régime.

The present government of Iraq has done little to ensure the safety of academics since it took office. A significant portion of the current violence against academics has been perpetrated by sectarian militias affiliated with the ruling political coalitions. Professors have been threatened, harmed, kidnapped, and assassinated because of their actual or alleged political affiliations, or because they failed to respond positively to demands of students for special treatment. Communities of students are becoming politicized in a way that threatens the institutionalization of tolerance and the protection of intellectual diversity.

Moreover, the continuing generalized insecurity in the country has forced thousands of Iraq's best-educated academics, doctors, and professionals to flee, taking with them the intellectual capital for building a stable, democratic, and free nation.

With this statement, we register our profound alarm at this state of affairs. With it, we also pledge our collective determination to take steps, together and with sister organizations, to promote programs and policies in Iraq and on behalf of the international community of scholars and researchers that will positively address this disturbing situation.

The American Association of University Professors is a nonprofit charitable and educational organization that promotes academic freedom by supporting tenure, academic due process, and standards of quality in higher education. The AAUP has about 45,000 members at colleges and universities throughout the United States.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America 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 more than 2,600 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.

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