

November 10, 2006

Honorable Nouri Kamal al-Maliki
Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq
c/o The Embassy of Iraq
1801 P Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036 USA
Fax: (202) 462-5066

Dear Prime Minister al-Maliki:

We write to you on behalf of The Middle East Studies Association (MESA) and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to express our grave concern over the killing of two of Iraq's most prominent academics: Isam al-Rawi, a professor in the Department of Geology at the University of Baghdad and president of the Union of University Professors, and Jassim al-Asadi, Dean of the University of Baghdad's School of Administration and Economics.

Professor al-Rawi was killed by unknown gunmen on October 30, 2006, on his way to work. Then, on November 2, 2006, in an act which many observers see as revenge for the earlier killing, unknown gunmen murdered Professor al-Asadi, his wife and son as they passed by car through the neighborhood of al-Adhamiyya.

Their murder highlights the startling fact that over 180 university professionals in Iraq have been killed since the 2003 US-led occupation and thousands of academics, teachers, clinicians, writers and artists have fled your country. We note that entire academic departments at Baghdad University and on other campuses have been forced to close down and are no longer able to fulfill their educational and research missions.

As we have previously noted, 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 resolutely 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.

We ask your Excellency to recognize that the destruction of Iraq's intellectual and academic class through murder and mass exodus is a profound challenge to the future of Iraq and that you take immediate action to:

- 1) Secure the campuses in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq;
- 2) Affirm the independence of Iraq's system of higher education, immunize it against sectarian politics as far as possible and provide for it a budget that is institutionally protected from partisan or sectarian pressures; and
- 3) Identify the murderers of Professors al-Rawi and al-Asadi and bring them to justice.

Please know that we remain ready 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 resolutely address this disturbing situation.

Sincerely,

Juan R.I. Cole
MESA President

Roger W. Bowen
AAUP General Secretary

Cc: Ambassador Samir Sumaidaie
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The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2600 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.

The mission of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) is to advance academic freedom and shared governance, to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education, and to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good. Founded in 1915, the AAUP has helped to shape American higher education by developing the standards and procedures that maintain quality in education and academic freedom in this country's colleges and universities.