

July 25, 2006

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert
3 Kaplan Street
Kiryat Ben Gurion
Jerusalem, ISRAEL
Fax: 972-2-566-4838

Dear Prime Minister Olmert:

On behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom, I am writing to express our concern over the recent arrest of Professor Ghazi Walid Falah, a dual Israeli-Canadian national working in the US with permanent resident alien status, and a respected associate professor of geography at the University of Akron, Ohio.

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.

Professor Falah traveled to Israel on July 4 from Toronto after hearing that his mother had been hospitalized with a brain tumor. On July 6, Professor Falah, an avid photographer whose photos have appeared on the cover of the *Arab World Geographer* and who also uses photographs for his teaching and research, went to Nahariya. Security personnel arrested him that day just north of Nahariya, where he was taking photographs. He was then taken to his brother's home, near Nazareth, to collect his belongings, and was then brought before a judge in Akko, who approved the security forces' requests to detain him without charge. He has been under arrest since July 8 and has been unable to see his lawyer or contact his family or consular officials. On Sunday July 16, his arrest was extended for another 15 days.

Because some of Professor Falah's past research projects have been critical of Israeli land policies, we are concerned, in the absence of formal charges against him, that his arrest may owe to his record of academic research and publishing. The fact that his family requested his home institution, the University of Akron, to send documents to US consular authorities vouching for his academic work heightens our concern that his arrest may be related to his research and publishing and therefore constitute a violation of his academic freedom.

MESA's Committee on Academic Freedom holds that the free exchange of ideas is among the basic human rights codified in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both of which Israel has ratified. We ask, on behalf of our organization, that you use your good offices to ensure that Professor Falah has access to his lawyer and his family, that he be released promptly or charged with a criminal offense, and if he is charged that he be tried before a court that meets international fair trial standards.

Sincerely,

Juan R.I. Cole
MESA President

Cc: Mr. Haim Ramon, Minister of Justice
Mr. Menachem Mazoz, Attorney General