

Oct. 7, 1999

Dr. Walid Ma'ani
President
University of Jordan
Amman, Jordan
By Facsimile: 962 6 535 5533

Dear President Ma'ani:

The Committee on Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa (CAF MENA) and the Human Rights Watch Academic Freedom Committee are writing to express our concern over the ouster of Dr. Mustafa Hamarneh as director of the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan. In the absence of any academic justification for his removal, we call upon you to reinstate Dr. Hamarneh promptly as the Centre's director.

CAF MENA works on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, which comprises 2,700 scholars and teachers worldwide, to promote respect for the principle of academic freedom throughout the region. Human Rights Watch monitors human rights violations around the world. The Academic Freedom Committee promotes the right of scholars and students to express their views as citizens and to study, research, teach, and publish without political interference.

According to information we have received, Dr. Hamarneh submitted his resignation to you on July 14, 1999 after being told that if he did not resign the Centre would be closed and its activities, including support for a number of Jordanians studying abroad, would be terminated. It is our understanding that in the period prior to this ultimatum, senior government officials including Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf Rawabdeh and Samih al-Battikhi, chief of the General Intelligence Directorate, urged you to secure Dr. Hamarneh's removal as head of the Centre. Upon Dr. Hamarneh's resignation, Dr. Salah Bashir, a member of the law faculty, was appointed as his successor. In keeping with Dr. Hamarneh's contract with the university, he initially continued his association with the Centre as a researcher. We understand that on or around August 23 Dr. Bashir dismissed him from that position as well.

No adequate explanation of these developments has been offered by yourself or any other party. To our knowledge, no significant academic concerns were brought to Dr. Hamarneh's attention at the time he was pressured to resign.

Our understanding is that research conducted by the Centre during Professor Hamarneh's tenure as director, as well as critical comments he has made as an independent political commentator and in his capacity as a private citizen, led government authorities to pressure the University to remove him. Dr. Hamarneh's ouster thus appears to have been based on political rather than academic criteria.

At the time of his resignation, Professor Hamarneh had served as director of the Centre for Strategic Studies for seven years. Under his leadership, the Centre attained regional and international recognition for its research on policy issues in the Arab world, and for its use of scientific opinion polling and social survey research in Jordan. Several of the Centre's reports generated controversial findings, including a survey released on June 20 showing a decline in the popularity of the government of Prime Minister Rawabdeh; a 1997 report placing unemployment levels at 27 percent, ten points higher than official estimate at that time of 17 percent; and a 1998 study on public perceptions of Jordanian-Palestinian

relations. In addition, Professor Hamarneh himself had acquired recognition as a specialist on Jordanian and Arab affairs, and his comments to the international media — at least once misrepresented in local papers as insulting the dignity of King Abdallah — are also believed to have contributed to pressures for his removal.

We are gravely concerned that Dr. Hamarneh's exercise of his basic right to freedom of expression and his success in turning the Centre for Strategic Studies into an independent research and training facility — one of the very few in the Arab world — became the basis for his forced removal from office. As set forth in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Jordan is a State Party, freedom of expression "shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers." Apparently, and unfortunately, it was just such activities that led to Dr. Hamarneh's removal.

We find it profoundly disturbing that university officials apparently capitulated to government pressures and participated in Dr. Hamarneh's ouster. University autonomy is a precondition of academic excellence. In this instance we must concur with the views of a Jordanian legislator, who reportedly called this case "a major blow to democracy, independent research, and academic integrity in Jordan."

For the above reasons, we respectfully urge you to reappoint Dr. Hamarneh to his post as director of the Centre of Strategic Studies; to continue the University's support for the Centre, its work, and the students affiliated with the Centre; and to uphold the principles of academic freedom and university autonomy.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. We await your response.

Respectfully yours,

Jonathan F. Fanton
Co-Chair, Human Rights Watch Academic Freedom Committee

Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director, Middle East Studies Association of North America

CC: King Abdallah
Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf Rawabdeh
Ambassador Marwan Muasher, Washington, DC