

May 30, 2007

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Dear Dr. Touqan:

We are writing on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our deep concern about the dismissal of sixteen university professors from Al-Zarqa al-Ahliyyah University for political reasons unrelated to their academic performance.

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 2700 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.

According to press reports in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Al-Jazirah* of 12 May 2007, informed sources in the Al-Zarqa al-Ahliyyah University president's office indicated that security instructions from outside the university--not work-related concerns--triggered the decision not to renew the contracts of the sixteen professors, ten of whom are members of the Islamic Action Front (IAF). Indeed, although Al-Zarqa al-Ahliyyah is a private institution, the decision, which amounts to the dismissal of these faculty members, appears to be part of a larger set of on-going confrontations between the government of the Hashemite Kingdom and members of the IAF.

We have learned that the National Center for Human Rights and the Arab World Center for Democracy and Human Rights have previously received complaints regarding obstacles to the employment or the non-renewal of contracts of IAF members based on directives from the General Intelligence Department. Many of these complaints were from Ph.D. holders who had applied to Jordanian universities.

Chapter 2 of the Jordanian Constitution ensures equality of opportunity through employment to all Jordanians, just as it protects freedom of opinion. Moreover, in 2006, the Government published five international Human Rights-related instruments in *Al-Jaridah al-Rasmiyyah*, rendering the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic,

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Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), part and parcel of the Jordanian legal system. In the ICCPR, article 19 guarantees freedom of expression, article 22 protects the right to freedom of association, and article 25 stipulates equality before the law in matters of political or other opinion. The ICESCR recognizes the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work.

Academic freedom, which is the foundation of a strong and vibrant educational environment, requires that faculty members be evaluated on the basis of their scholarship and teaching. Their membership in legal political bodies or organizations should play no role in decisions made about their hiring or dismissal.

As a committee of MESA charged with monitoring infringements on academic freedom, the Committee on Academic Freedom is deeply concerned by these developments. We urge you to reverse the non-reappointment decision and ensure that no further actions are taken against faculty members who have fulfilled their academic contractual obligations and who violated no laws through membership in legal political parties.

Sincerely,

Zachary Lockman
President

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