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Your Excellencies:

We are contacting you to express our grave concern over the case of Professor Ahmad Al-Baghdadi of the political science department of Kuwait University. As you know, Prof. Al-Baghdadi was recently sentenced by the Kuwaiti court of appeals to a jail term of one year, suspended, a fine of 2,000 KD and probation for three years on the charge of slandering Islam. It is our understanding that this case arose from a newspaper column Prof. Al-Baghdadi wrote criticizing the content and teaching of the curriculum on Islam in Kuwaiti primary and secondary schools.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) comprises 2700 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa, and is the preeminent professional association in the field. The association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression in the region and in connection with the study of the Middle East and North Africa.

Prof. Al-Baghdadi is a prominent Kuwaiti public intellectual, and this specious judicial ruling represents a clear violation of his right to freedom of expression, and the chilling effect of the ruling represents a threat to academic freedom in Kuwait. We are encouraged that the University and the Ministry have not taken any actions against Prof. Al-Baghdadi in light of the court of appeals decision. However, we would urge that the University and the Ministry also undertake a vigorous public defense of Prof. Al-Baghdadi's right to freedom of expression.

This level of initiative is key, we think, to countering such assaults on academic freedom and freedom of expression more generally that can only result in great harm to our Kuwaiti colleagues and Kuwaiti society as well.

We therefore urge you to defend publicly and specifically Prof. Al-Baghdadi against these charges and to emphasize that you will take the steps necessary to shield your faculty members from such outside pressures against their academic freedom.

Yours sincerely,

Ali Banuazizi
President, Middle East Studies Association
Professor, Boston College

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