



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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March 4, 2003

His Excellency Samir Jisr
Minister of Justice
Palace of Justice
Sami Solh St
Beirut
Republic of Lebanon

By facsimile 961 1 422 957 or 961 1 427 975

Your Excellency:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom. We wish to convey to you our great concern regarding your ministry's investigation and interrogation of Dr. Adonis Akra, a professor of philosophy at the Lebanese University in Tripoli and author of a recent book describing his fifteen-day detention by the authorities in August 2001.

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 in North America and elsewhere.

According to information we have received, on February 11, 2003, Professor Akra was detained by the Investigations Department in the Ministry of Justice for about seven hours and compelled to cancel a February 15 event promoting his book. The authorities also reportedly interrogated his publisher, Bashir Daouq, and closed down his publishing company, Dar al-Tali'a.

Professor Akra is reportedly a member of the Free Patriotic Movement, which advocates an end to Syria's military presence and political hegemony in Lebanon. He was among some two hundred journalists, engineers, lawyers, and others arrested and jailed in early August 2001 in a crackdown by Lebanese security forces against persons the authorities said were insulting Syria and destabilizing Lebanon.

Professor Akra's book, *When My Name Became "16"*, reportedly is a day-by-day account of his fifteen-day detention, first in a cell at the Defense Ministry, and subsequently in a hospital where he was treated for cardiac problems. He told the Lebanese press that his interrogators accused him of "tarnishing the army, the authorities, the judiciary, and relations with Syria," charges that he denies.

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Re: Dr. Adonis Akra

It appears that Professor Akra is being harassed and punished solely for attempting to exercise his right to freedom of expression. We urge you to halt all such actions against Professor Akra, rescind the closure order against Dar al-Tali'a, and cease efforts to interfere with the distribution of his book.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy W. Newhall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy W. Newhall
Executive Director

cc: His Excellency Farid Abboud, Ambassador of Lebanon to the United States