



Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

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31 July 1997

President Yasser Arafat
Palestinian Authority
Al-Muntada
Gaza, Palestinian Authority

Fax: 011 972 7 822 365

Dear President Arafat,

The Committee for Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa (CAF MENA) is writing to express grave concern over the arrest and detention of a Palestinian professor at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, Dr. Fathi Ahmed Subh. Both the arrest itself and Dr. Subh's treatment at the hands of the Preventive Security Service (PSS) warrant criticism for violating academic freedom and due process protections.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2600 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The association publishes the respected *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

According to reliable sources, Dr. Subh was arrested on July 2, 1997 and is still in detention. He was initially held incommunicado, and was not brought before a judge in the requisite 48 hours. We understand that he may still be held incommunicado. In addition, he was denied access to a lawyer, and visits from family members. Such practices violate rights set out in Palestinian law and international law. They also promote an atmosphere of fear and intimidation for others.

Dr. Subh, a prominent academic recognized for pioneering work in preschool and adult education, is a professor of education at al-Azhar. He was a Fulbright scholar to the United States in the 1994-95 academic year, during which he was affiliated with the University of Maryland. He also directs the Touffah Educational Development Center, a non-governmental organization that provides programs in leadership and vocational training for women, preschool teacher training, and literacy campaigns. Dr. Subh reportedly angered the authorities at both al-Azhar and the PA by asking several questions on a final exam about administrative practices in both institutions. If this is the basis for his arrest, it is a clear breach of academic freedom. Sources also suggest that the activities of the Touffah Center were under scrutiny by the authorities, like other independent NGOs deemed threatening to the powers of the PA. Until now, the PA has not provided any other explanations for the arrest or made public any information that would justify the incarceration on the grounds that he has violated any law.

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Given that Dr. Subh's arrest is not the first instance in which the PA has violated academic freedom or freedom of expression by arresting people who articulate critical political views, we are deeply concerned that the appropriate protections are being ignored for a political expediency that stifles criticism and constrains open exchange of ideas. We encourage you to use your power and influence over the security services to prevent any actions that infringe on academic freedom. As for the case of Dr. Subh, we await a public explanation for the arrest and, if he has violated no laws, his immediate release.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: Mr. Freih Abu Meddein, Minister of Justice, PA
Colonel Mohammed Dahlan, Palestinian Preventive Security Service
Dr. Riad al-Khoudari, Dean, Al-Azhar University, Gaza
Sa'eb Erekat, Minister of Local Government Affairs
Khaled al-Qidrah, Attorney General
Tawfiq al-Tarawi, Head of Security (Mukhabarat)
Iyad Al-Sarraj, Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights