



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

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20 November 2023

Professor Yifat Bitton,
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Professor Pinchas Dahan,
Vice President for Academic Affairs
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Dr. Eti Grobgeld,
CEO, Achva Academic College
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Dear President, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Chief Executive Officer,

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to object to your administration's egregious mistreatment of Dr. Uri Horesh. A senior lecturer of Arabic linguistics at Achva Academic College until he was terminated on 12 November 2023, Dr. Horesh was fired because of views he expressed about the war on Gaza on social media. Moreover, he was subjected to defamatory accusations that were made and spread, most inappropriately, by a faculty union leader whose job it is to represent and protect faculty. We call on you to acknowledge the wrong that was done to Dr. Horesh and apologize unequivocally to him.

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 prestigious *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 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 outside of North America.

We understand that on 15 October, while attending an academic conference in New York where he was representing your institution, Dr. Horesh received a letter from you, the President and Vice President for Academic Affairs. In that letter he was informed that because of several of his social media posts, he was suspended from teaching at the College pending a disciplinary hearing. When he contacted the chairperson of the senior faculty union at the College to inform them of this development, they responded, in full violation of a faculty union's mandate, that they would not intervene on his behalf as they were in agreement with the administration and its decision. That chairperson then also proceeded to incite Dr. Horesh's colleagues against him: they wrote to all



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union members libelously claiming that in his social media posts, Dr. Horesh expressed support for Hamas and the attacks perpetrated on 7 October.

We understand, further, that by 24 October, without prior notification and in contravention of due process and fair procedure, Dr. Horesh had been blocked from access to the College's digital information systems, including his institutional email. On 8 November, a meeting of the college tenure and promotions committee was held to discuss and decide on his case. Then, on 12 November, he was informed via email that his employment at the College had been terminated.

In this fraught environment, university leaders have a heightened responsibility to protect the freedom of speech and academic freedom of their faculty and students even when views may be considered contentious. However challenging this may be, guarding the right to free speech is the hallmark of the academy and the duty of institutions of higher learning at all times. For a country that insists upon its own democratic credentials, vigorously protecting free speech, as well as the security and safety of proponents of different views, should be what it stands for.

We therefore call upon you to immediately rescind the allegations made against Uri Horesh and issue a public apology to him. Additionally, we urge you to commit to upholding the academic freedom of all your faculty, staff, and students during this terrible period of war.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asli Ü. Bâli', written in a cursive style.

Aslı Ü. Bâli
MESA President
Professor, Yale Law School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', written in a cursive style.

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California



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cc:

Josep Borrell-Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer - Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), European Parliament

Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories

Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories

James Heenan, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ramallah

UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, MENA section

Noha Bawazir, Head of Office and UNESCO Representative, UNESCO Liaison Office, Ramallah, Palestinian delegation to UNESCO

The Honorable Veronica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression