



## Middle East Studies Association of North America

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January 14, 1991

His Royal Majesty King Fahd ibn Abdel Aziz al-Saud  
Custodian of the Council of Ministers  
President of the Council of Ministers  
The Council of Ministers  
Saudi Arabia

Your Royal Majesty:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association is concerned about the reported dismissal of six women professors from the University of Riyadh for participating in the demonstration in Riyadh on 6 November 1990 that protested restraints on women driving. The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2200 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*. The association is committed to ensuring respect for academic freedom throughout the region.

If the women professors were dismissed from the university for participating in a non-violent protest, there would be a serious breach of basic principles of international human rights law, notably equal protection of the law and the right of freedom of movement. Both principles are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The latter states in Article 26 that "all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." Reports indicate that the women all had international drivers licenses, which your government recognizes, and that their conduct did not threaten public safety or violate any criminal laws. It appears that the women were engaging in conduct for which no male citizen would be punished. Dismissal from an academic position for driving, for which no male professor would be disciplined or dismissed, would violate the guarantee of equality before the law.

Moreover, their dismissal would breach basic principles of academic freedom. The freedom to express ideas, either individually or in association with others, without fear of punishment or loss of employment is central to the academic enterprise. In addition, freedom of movement is essential for academics in order to maintain contact with colleagues, perform research and teaching functions, and carry out the mission of advancing and sharing

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knowledge. To deny freedom of movement to members of one segment of the academic community handicaps them in the performance of their professional responsibilities.

We respectfully request that you inform us if any women professors were dismissed from their positions as a result of participating in the protest drive. We further request that, if such participation occasioned their dismissal, they be reinstated in their former university positions.

We urge that the university and government not dismiss faculty members for the non-violent expression of support for the principles of international human rights. We respectfully call on the government to take all necessary steps to ensure that the principle of equal protection of the law is observed and that the human rights of all citizens are guaranteed.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Anne H. Betteridge  
Executive Director

AHB/nd

cc:

Crown Prince Abdallah ibn Abdel Aziz al-Saud  
Prince Nayef ibn Abdel Aziz al-Saud, The Minister of the Interior  
Prince Saud al-Faisal, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Prince Bandar ibn Sultan, Ambassador to the US  
Dr. Abdel Aziz al-Khauwaiter, Minister of Higher Education  
Dr. Ahmed al-Dhubaib, President, King Saud University