



Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.
University of Arizona
1232 North Cherry Avenue
Tucson, Arizona 85721

May 5, 1994

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

Your Royal Majesty:

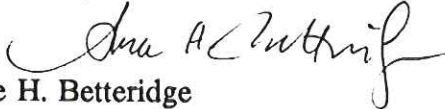
We are writing to express our concern about the statement issued by the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights in London on April 20 and the fate of its members. The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2300 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North 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.

It is our understanding that this independent human rights organization, originally established in May 1993, has members who are academics and scholars and that after the organization was dissolved, members were dismissed from their university posts, barred from travel, and imprisoned. There have also been reports of death threats and torture suffered by members of the group. Those imprisoned included the leader of the group, Dr. Muhammad al-Mas'ari, a professor of physics, who was finally released last November. From the statement issued in London, we gather that Dr. Mas'ari and others have had to flee Saudi Arabia in order to continue their peaceful advocacy of human rights. In its statement the group explained that it had been forced to relocate, because "Repressive measures had been intensified and every individual who made a criticism or called for reform or merely thought of doing so, was dealt with in a manner reminiscent of the methods that were pursued by the countries of the communist bloc."

We respectfully bring to your attention that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its Preamble states that "every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance." Moreover, Article 26 (2) says that education "shall be directed to... the strengthening of respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms." Stifling human rights advocacy, crushing associations with the mission of promoting human rights, and punishing advocates of human rights not only violate internationally guaranteed human rights of freedom of expression and association, but they also infringe the principle that part of the educational mission is to promote respect for human rights. As applied to academics and scholars advocating respect for human rights, such measures also constitute an egregious breach of the precepts of academic freedom.

We respectfully urge that this potentially serious breach of international human rights law be carefully investigated. We also urge that, if an impartial investigation establishes that peaceful human rights advocacy has been punished and censored as alleged, effective measures be promptly taken to eliminate these violations of international law and to ensure protection for academic freedom.

Respectfully,



Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

AHB/sp

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 United States of America
David Welch, Charge d'Affairs, Embassy of the United States of America
Dr. Abdel Aziz al-Khauwaiter, Minister of Higher Education
Dr. Ahmed al-Dhubaib, President, King Saud University
John Shattuck, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights