

Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

The University of Arizona · 1232 North Cherry Avenue · Tucson, Arizona 85721

September 7, 1995

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

Your Royal Majesty:

On behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, we write to express our concern about the imprisonment of several academics from King Saud University: Professor Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hudhaif, Professor Muhsin Hussain al-'Awaji, and Sultan 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Khamis, a lecturer. We understand that all three have been convicted and given prison sentences -- fifteen years in the cases of the two professors and three years in the case of the lecturer, in prosecutions based on an attack by one 'Abdullah 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hudhaif on a security officer.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2400 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.

We understand that the accused assailant was convicted based on confessions extracted in a trial conducted without benefit of due process. Further, it seems that the academics and others convicted were implicated in a presumed conspiracy based on these confessions. If this is so, the convictions result from unfair procedures in the assailant's trial. Doubts about the grounds for conviction are especially strong in the case of the two professors, already held in detention when they were accused of involvement in a conspiracy. The situation is further complicated because one of the academics is a brother of the assailant, and because all those convicted have ties to the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights.

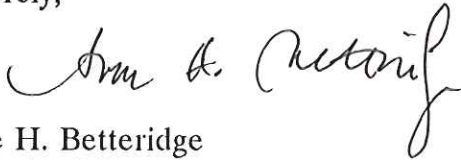
The secret beheading of the accused assailant after proceedings void of due process is in and of itself a breach of human rights norms. However, we are most directly concerned by indications that there is a political coloration to the prosecutions of the three academics and other opposition figures, because issues of academic freedom are involved, and because peaceable expression of political dissent is protected under international law. We are troubled that the connections of the accused to the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights seem to have been taken as evidence of

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criminal guilt and that membership in the CDLR has been declared heresy, a capital crime. Academics, like all other people, enjoy the right to advocate respect for international human rights principles. Connections to independent human rights organizations should not be treated as security offenses.

We respectfully request a thoroughgoing reconsideration of the cases of these three academics and the immediate release of persons imprisoned on the basis of their political opinions or their support for the cause of human rights. We also respectfully call for an end to all prosecutions of academics and other persons for their advocacy of respect for human rights.

Sincerely,



Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: Crown Prince Abdallah ibn Abdel Aziz al-Saud
Prince Naif bin 'Abdul-'Aziz, The Minister of the Interior
Prince Saud al-Faisal bin 'Abdul-'Aziz, 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