



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

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March 29, 2004

Prince Nayif bin Abd al-Aziz
Ministry of the Interior
PO Box 2933
Airport Road
Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Your Highness:

I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, and its Committee on Academic Freedom, in order to express our grave concern about the recent arrests of a number of Saudi university professors and former professors. These include Dr. Matrouk Al Faleh, Dr. Tawfiq Al Qusair, Dr. Abdullah Al Hamed, Dr. Khalid Al Humaid, and Dr. Adnan Al Shakhs. According to media reports, they were arrested for criticizing what they saw as the lack of independence of the National Committee on Human Rights recently formed by the government and for requesting a license to establish an independent human rights organization.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) comprises 2500 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa, and is the preeminent professional association in the field. The association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression in the region and in connection with the study of the Middle East and North Africa.

The arrested academics were among a group of thirteen Saudi citizens detained in recent weeks solely for peacefully expressing views critical of government policies. Dr. Matrouk Al Faleh is a professor of international relations at King Saud University who wrote a widely read study of Saudi Arabia after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, calling for fundamental political reforms in the kingdom. Dr. Khalid Al Humaid is a political science professor at King Saud University; Dr. Al Humaid was apprehended in front of students, while he was teaching a class. Dr. Adnan Al Shakhs is a professor of mathematics at King Fahd University who has participated in many of the reform activities in recent years. Both Dr. Tawfiq Al Qusair and Dr. Abdallah Al Hamed are former university professors who lost their positions in the early 1990s for peaceful political activity. As of March 24, 2004 Dr. Matrouk Al Faleh, Dr. Abdallah Al Hamed and Dr. Tawfiq Al Qusair were still in custody.

These arrests are an affront to international standards of academic freedom and freedom of expression generally, which guarantee that university faculty have the freedom to discuss issues of public concern without fear of official retribution. No evidence has

been presented that those arrested did anything but express their opinions in a peaceful manner. There is no evidence that they took actions that violate laws of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or that threaten public order.

We also strongly object to the fact that a number of those arrested were reportedly released only on the condition that they pledge not to sign petitions or comment publicly on political issues. Such obvious infringement on the right to freedom of expression and the right to impart and receive information is unacceptable, and reinforces our impression that these arrests were nothing but a blatant attempt at political intimidation.

We have grave doubts that these arrests are legal within the Saudi judicial system. Article 36 of the Saudi Basic Law guarantees that no citizen may be detained without due process of law. As of yet, there is no evidence that due process of law has been followed in this case. No formal charges have been filed, to our knowledge. Nor, to our knowledge, have those still detained been given the right to consult legal counsel.

These arrests also call into question the sincerity of the Saudi government in pursuing the recently launched reform process. The hopes generated by the National Dialogue process and by the announcement of municipal elections for a new atmosphere of free discussion and debate in the Kingdom cannot be sustained in the face of such repressive measures.

We urge that the government release immediately and without condition all university faculty members and former faculty members as well as others still in custody solely for making statements critical of government policy. We call upon the government to allow all those faculty members arrested to resume their professional responsibilities without conditions or limitations upon their academic freedom, and without professional sanction or penalty.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Amy W. Newhall
Executive Director

cc: His Excellency Ambassador Bandar bin Sultan bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud, Ambassador to the
United States
Khalid bin Muhammad Al Anqari, Minister of Higher Education