



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

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June 22, 2005

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud

Royal Court
Riyadh 11111
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Your Highness:

I write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America in order to express our grave concern over the six year prison sentence handed down on May 15, 2005 against Professor Matrouk Al-Faleh of King Saud University. I have enclosed a copy of our letter of March 29, 2004 to Interior Minister Prince Nayif, in which we protested the arbitrary arrest of a number of Saudi academics, including Prof. Al-Faleh.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) comprises 2600 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.

Prof. Al-Faleh was convicted of the most specious of charges, including sowing disorder in society, disobeying the authorities and issuing declarations to public opinion inside and outside the country (as quoted in *al-Hayat*, May 16, 2005, p. 1). None of these charges involve acts of violence or threats of violence against the government or any persons. In fact, Prof. Al-Faleh has been convicted of exercising his universally-acknowledged right to freedom of speech. His conviction not only contravenes global standards of academic freedom, it also runs counter to international and Arab covenants to which Saudi Arabia is a party.

Ali al-Dumaini, a co-defendant of Prof. Al-Faleh who was himself sentenced to nine years in prison, pointed out in his open letter to the court (www.rezgar.com/debat/show.art.asp?aid=37023) that their conviction runs directly counter to obligations which the Saudi government itself took on when it signed the Arab Covenant for Human Rights, an amended version of which was agreed to at the Arab summit of May 23, 2004. Among the provisions of that covenant which were contravened in this case are: the right to political activity, the right to peacefully assemble with others, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to disseminate political writings. The court proceedings

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also ran counter to a number of the rights included in the Covenant, including the right of the accused to a public trial without undue delay. It is also clear that the trial did not meet international fair trial standards.

We call upon you to take appropriate steps to ensure that this unjust ruling is voided and that Prof. Al-Faleh is able to return to his academic position at King Saud University without delay and without prejudice.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ALIBANUAZIZI' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ali Banuazizi

President, Middle East Studies Association
Professor, Boston College

cc: Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz, *Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the United States*

AB/sp