



**Middle  
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26 October 2021

His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud  
King of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the two Holy Mosques  
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His Royal Highness Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud  
Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia  
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His Royal Highness Prince Abdulaziz bin Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz  
Minister of Interior, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
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His Excellency Waleed bin Mohammad Al Samaani  
Minister of Justice, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
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Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellency:

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our concern regarding the reported dismissals of Yemeni scholars, physicians and other professionals from their positions at universities in the southern provinces of al-Baha, Asir, Jazan and Najran. According to media reports, state authorities directed these universities to terminate all contracts with Yemeni citizens, starting in July 2021. Reports suggest that while Yemeni professionals in sectors other than education have been given the opportunity to seek employment elsewhere in the Kingdom, those working in education have understood that they must leave the country or risk being deported.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has over 2,700 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

There are approximately two million Yemeni citizens working in Saudi Arabia. Thousands of them have higher education qualifications and have been working – in many cases, for decades -- in different institutions across the country. Starting in July 2021, public higher education institutions in the southern provinces began to terminate, or decline to renew, the contracts of Yemeni nationals employed as academics, medical professionals, and other staff. Najran University alone has terminated the contracts of 106 Yemeni scholars, many of whom had recently been approved for the renewal of their contracts. According to available reports, these scholars were not provided with a reason for their termination.

The mass dismissals of Yemeni scholars from their positions at universities deprives their students and colleagues – and the broader scholarly community

– of the benefits of their research and teaching. In addition, terminating their employment creates hardship not only for the individual scholar, but for family members as well. Moreover, as many Yemenis living abroad support family members back home, the loss of their jobs in Saudi Arabia will further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

We urge you to reverse these dismissals, and ensure that all scholars in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are able to carry out their academic work without fear of arbitrary dismissal or deportation.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Dina Rizk Khoury

MESA President

Professor, George Washington University



Laurie Brand

Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

His Excellency, Dr. Hamad bin Mohammed Al Sheikh

Minister of Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

His Excellency, Dr. Awwad bin Saleh Al Awwad

President, Human Rights Commission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

His Royal Highness, Prince Hossam bin Saud bin Abdulaziz

Governor of Al-Baha Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

His Royal Highness, Prince Turki bin Talal bin Abdulaziz

Governor of Asir Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

His Royal Highness, Prince Mohammed bin Nasser Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

Governor of Jazan Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

His Royal Highness, Prince Gallawi bin Abdulaziz bin Mosaed

Governor of Najran Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

HE Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan Al Saud

c/o Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington, DC

The Honorable Verónica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights



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Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer for the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament

Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Joey Hood, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Department of State, United States Government