



Middle East Studies Association of North America

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December 19, 1990

His Excellency President Hafiz al-As'ad
Presidential Palace
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Your Excellency:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America wishes to express its concern to you regarding the detention of a number of Syrian university faculty members. The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2200 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa, and it also publishes the respected *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. The Association is committed to strive to ensure respect for the principles of academic freedom and to defend the human rights of our peers in universities throughout the region.

The Committee on Academic Freedom is contacting you in the hope that you will intervene to obtain the release of any Syrian academics currently being detained in violation of the principles of academic freedom and international human rights. The information available to us leads us to believe that many academics are currently being held without charge or trial. The list of detained academics may include the following individuals.

Mahmun al-Adhma, professor of urology, faculty of medicine, University of Damascus, arrested in 1980, and possibly still in detention.

Muhammad Muhammad Aludat, professor of botany, faculty of science, University of Damascus.

Muhammad Nizar al-Daqr, professor of dermatology from Damascus, arrested in 1980.

Mayy al-Hafiz, assistant in the department of civil engineering, University of Damascus, arrested in 1987.

Asif Khaddam, professor of political economy, Tishreen University, Latakia, arrested in 1981.

Jalal Khanji, an engineer and lecturer at the University of Aleppo, arrested in 1980 and detained in Adra Civil Prison.

Nidar Mradni, assistant professor, faculty of civil engineering, University of Damascus, arrested in 1987.

Jihad Nisouti, professor of mechanical and electrical engineering, University of Damascus, arrested in March 1980.

Muhammad Nabil Salim, engineer and lecturer at the University of Aleppo, arrested in March 1980 and detained at Adra Civil Prison.

Abd al-Rauf Ubaid, professor of neurology, faculty of medicine, University of Aleppo, arrested in April 1980.

We respectfully request that your government look into the cases of these academics, some of whom appear to have been incarcerated for many years. We ask you to permit the detainees to have regular visits with family members and urge that they be provided with legal representation and access to adequate medical care. We also ask for information regarding the present status of these cases. We request that the Syrian government either charge the detainees with offenses that are recognized as criminal by international standards, affording the detainees prompt and public trials with an opportunity for them to defend themselves, or release them immediately.

We express our concern over information we have received suggesting that, in addition to suffering the penalty of incarceration, academics on our list have lost their university positions for reasons that appear to have no relationship to their qualifications or job performance. Academic freedom, a corollary of human rights and a basic requirement for the advancement of knowledge and the progress of civilization, is threatened when the faculty of the institutions of higher learning forfeit their positions simply because of their beliefs or associations. We would hope that academics who are released after a showing that they have been unjustifiably detained would be able to resume the positions that they previously held.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: His Excellency Khaled al-Ansari, Minister of Justice
Ms. Bushra Kanafani, Minister Counselor, Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic
Ambassador Edward Djerejian, Embassy of the United States of America
Mr. Daniel P. Moynihan, Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate
Syria Desk, US Department of State
Dr. Michael Van Dusen, Middle East Subcommittee, House Committee of
International Relations