



Middle East Studies Association of North America

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10 June 1991

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 wrote to you on December 19, 1990, regarding the detention of Syrian university faculty members. A copy of the letter is attached. The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2300 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and 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 of our peers in universities throughout the region.

Information that we have subsequently received indicates that several of the detainees we inquired about -- Mahmum al-Adhama, Muhammad Muhammad Aludat, Muhammad Nizar al-Daqr, and Abd al-Rauf Ubaid -- have been released. However, all of these were dismissed from their academic jobs and have been unable, it seems, to reassume their university positions. Mere incarceration, without charges or fair trials leading to convictions of criminal offenses, cannot justify such dismissals. If the dismissals of these academics were for reasons unrelated to their job performance and occasioned ultimately by their beliefs and associations, the dismissals would constitute a serious breach of the principle of academic freedom and related human rights provisions. We respectfully request that any and all academics dismissed from their universities solely by reason of their beliefs and associations be reinstated.

We remain anxious about the well-being of the other detainees mentioned in our December letter -- Mayy al-Hafiz, Asif Khaddam, Jalal Khanji, Nidar Mradni, Jihad Nisouti, and Muhammad Nabil Salim. We are particularly concerned about the health of Mayy al-Hafiz, who is suffering from sickle cell anemia, and Muhammad Nabil Salim, who suffers from a peptic ulcer. We ask you to permit all detainees to have access to adequate medical care.

We have learned that other academics have been detained. The following cases have come to our attention:

Ghassan Kassis, assistant in the department of civil engineering, University of Damascus, arrested in 1987 and detained at Fir Falastin.

Haroun al-Khayr, assistant in the faculty of dentistry, Tishrin University, arrested in 1987.

Ghassan Khoury, assistant in the department of architecture, University of Damascus, arrested in 1987 and detained at Sednaya Prison.

We have learned of distressing allegations of incidents of torture resulting in serious injury to the detainees Ghassan Kassis and Nizar Mradni. We respectfully bring to your attention that the absolute prohibition of torture is one of the most fundamental principles of modern human rights law, permitting no exceptions under any circumstances. We urge you to investigate these allegations and to take all measures necessary to ensure that none of these detained academics be subjected to treatment that violates Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

We respectfully request that your government investigate the grounds for detention of all academics presently incarcerated and release all those who have not been charged, tried, and convicted of criminal offenses in a manner that conforms to the principles of international human rights law. We also ask that all detainees be allowed regular family visits, effective legal assistance, and adequate medical care.

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