

April 18, 2006

President Bashar Al-Asad  
c/o His Excellency Imad Moustapha  
The Embassy of Syria  
2215 Wyoming Ave. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20008  
Fax: 202-265-4585

Dear President Al-Asad:

I write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America to protest in the strongest possible terms the continued unlawful imprisonment of our colleague Professor Arif Dalila and to encourage you to use your good offices to secure his release, to ensure that he receives adequate medical care and that his family not be subject to any further harassment or ill treatment.

The Middle East Studies Association of North American (MESA) was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the international the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2600 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

We have been following the case of Professor Dalila for several years since his arrest in September of 2001 and have written to you before on his account (11 January 2002). As you are aware, he was arrested after having founded the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society, a nongovernmental organization. In addition to his participation in civic forums, Professor Dalila was one of ninety-nine intellectuals who signed the Intellectuals' Manifesto of September 2000, also known as the "Statement of the 99," a document that is widely regarded as having paved the way for the emergence of civic forums in Syria. He subsequently helped organize a petition signed by 1,000 Syrian citizens demanding freedom of expression, pluralism, strengthening the role of women in public life, freedom of press, and the restoration of civil society.

In November 2002, MESA awarded Professor Dalila one of our highest honors, the Academic Freedom Award, recognizing him: "For his courageous advocacy of democratic rights and civil liberties as an academic and in his professional field of economics, and his commitment as a public intellectual in Syria to the principles of free expression and the free exchange of information and ideas..."

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and in recognition of his endurance of persecution and harassment by the government of Syria on account of his advocacy of fundamental rights and liberties for all Syrians.”

Since our first letter, we have received credible reports that Professor Dalila has been subjected to torture and ill-treatment and denied access to medical care. The authorities have harassed his family and persons believed to be agents of the government attacked and seriously wounded his son Shadi. Calls for his release by intellectuals and academics throughout the Arab world and beyond have gone unheeded.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights since 1969, Syria is obliged to respect and protect the exercise of those rights enumerated in Articles 18, 19, and 21 namely the right to freedom of thought, expression, and opinion. The Covenant also prohibits torture and inhuman treatment (Article 7) as well as arbitrary arrest and deprivation of liberty, except under legally established procedures (Article 9).

The Covenant also requires that anyone arrested should be treated with respect and dignity (Article 10) and that they be informed of the nature of the charges against him/her (Article 14). We therefore urge you to take the steps necessary to end the multiple infringements of Professor Dalila’s fundamental human rights.

We also urge you to affirm the right of professors and intellectuals as well as others to organize social, political and cultural clubs and civil society organizations free from unnecessary governmental interference. If necessary, the government should revise legislation governing the right of association to comply with international standards.

President Al-Asad, we urge you to secure the immediate release of Professor Dalila on humanitarian grounds and to make certain he be given appropriate medical attention.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Juan R.I. Cole  
MESA President