

# Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

The University of Arizona • PO Box 210410 • Tucson AZ 85721-0410

31 July 1997

President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali  
President of the Republic  
Palais Presidentiel  
Tunis, Tunisia

Your Excellency:

The Committee on Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa (CAF MENA) of the Middle East Studies Association is writing to protest the treatment of Dr. Moncef Ben Salem, a founder of the Department of Mathematics at the University of Sfax and a former visiting professor at the University of Maryland and the University of Michigan.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2600 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North 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 throughout the region.

For nearly a decade, Dr. Ben Salem has paid a high personal and professional price for his political convictions. In November 1987, Dr. Ben Salem was arrested and held in detention for nearly a year and a half, accused by the Tunisian government of being active in the outlawed organization Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique. No formal charges were brought against him. Although he was released in May 1989, he was not allowed to resume his duties as professor. In April 1990, Dr. Ben Salem was arrested again, this time for giving an interview to an Algerian newspaper in which he criticized the Tunisian government for human rights abuses and for what he viewed as the government's hostility to Islam. Charged with "disseminating false information," Dr. Ben Salem was sentenced to three years in prison.

Since his release in 1993, Dr. Ben Salem has lived under virtual house arrest. He has been the target of a coordinated government campaign of harassment and isolation. Police are stationed permanently outside his door and follow him, his wife and his children wherever they go. Acquaintances, he says, are discouraged from visiting because of identification checks carried out by the police posted outside his residence. Dr. Salem reports that his mail service is irregular and unreliable, and that he has been denied a passport. Dr. Ben Salem continues to be prevented from resuming his duties at the university, and, indeed, has been forbidden even from entering the campus to retrieve his books and papers from his office.


As members of the academic community concerned with the Middle East and North Africa, we deplore the continuing restrictions on Dr. Ben Salem's liberty. The restrictions on

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Dr. Ben Salem violate a number of fundamental international human rights standards, including the right to travel abroad, guaranteed by article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the right to freedom of opinion and expression, guaranteed by article 19 of the UDHR and article 19 of the ICCPR.

Accordingly, we respectfully request a statement of the specific reasons for Dr. Ben Salem's virtual house arrest and an explanation of the basis under Tunisian law for the government's actions. We urge you to use your good offices to ensure that all harassment of Dr. Ben Salem cease and that his professional and personal liberties, including his right to travel freely, be restored immediately and unconditionally.

Sincerely,



Anne H. Betteridge  
Executive Director

cc: M. Sadok Chaabane, Ministre de la Justice  
M. Habib Ben Yahia, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères  
M. Iadh Ouederni, Conseiller présidentiel pour les Droits de l'Homme  
Ambassador Ismail Khelil