



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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February 28, 2013

His Excellency Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Minister of Foreign Affairs
United Arab Emirates
via fax +971 02 444 7766

Your Excellency,

I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) to register shock and deep dismay at the denial of entry into the United Arab Emirates of Dr. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen. Dr. Coates Ulrichsen is Co-Director of the Kuwait Research Programme at the London School of Economics (LSE) and an internationally recognized scholar of Gulf Arab politics. On February 22, he was on his way to a scholarly conference at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) that was jointly organized with the Middle East Centre at the LSE. The theme of the meeting was “The New Middle East: Transition in the Arab World.” His paper was entitled “Bahrain’s Uprising: Domestic Implications and Regional International Perspectives.” Immigration officials at the Dubai Airport detained him for 45 minutes while they scrutinized his passport in detail. He was then informed that he was “blacklisted.” A representative of Emirates Air told him that he was denied entry and being sent back to London.

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 Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3,000 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.

On February 25, the official news agency of the UAE confirmed that Dr. Coates Ulrichsen had been denied entry because of views he has espoused in the course of his scholarly and educational work. An official statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was quoted which acknowledged that Dr. Coates Ulrichsen was denied entry because he had “consistently propagated views de-legitimizing the Bahraini monarchy.” Further, the Ministry explained, “The UAE took the view that at this extremely sensitive juncture in Bahrain’s national dialogue it would be unhelpful to allow non-constructive views on the situation in Bahrain to be expressed from within another GCC state.”

Subsequently, on February 26, the police chief of Dubai, Dhahi Khalfan Tamim, told the *al-Riyadh* newspaper: “Kristian is not welcome here. We blocked him from entering the country to protect its security and stability from his evil ideas.” With comments such as these, the United Arab Emirates is on record as condoning the flagrant violation of basic principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression.

The provost of the AUS informed the LSE on February 21 that he had received orders from the ruler’s office that no discussion of Bahrain was permissible at the upcoming meeting. The LSE issued a statement on February 22 that announced it was calling off its participation in the meeting that it helped to organize due to “restrictions imposed on the intellectual content of the event that threatened academic freedom.” Many of the participants, including Dr. Coates Ulrichsen, were already in transit as the academic conference collapsed.



The implications of this incident are serious and far-reaching. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated, “This decision [to bar the scholar’s entry] in no way reflects the strong ties with both the AUS and LSE and their academic excellence.” Academic freedom is integral to—indeed, inseparable from—academic excellence. State intervention to silence scholarly interchange is anathema to academic freedom and, in the long run, corrosive of the overall environment for education at universities.

We ask that Dr. Coates Ulrichsen be removed from the “black list” and for assurances that he will be able to travel to the UAE free from restrictions based on the content of his scholarship. We request that you disavow the incendiary remarks of the Dubai police chief as well as the defamatory comments that are being repeated in numerous state-run outlets. We further call upon you to allow all academic conferences to proceed unhindered, whatever their topic or theme. Finally, we encourage you to pledge that no further state interference in scholarly discussion and debate will be tolerated at any university in the United Arab Emirates. These steps are necessary to quell the growing doubts in the international scholarly community about the integrity of the UAE’s numerous partnerships with foreign academic institutions to promote higher education in the Gulf.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Sluglett'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Peter' being more prominent than the last name 'Sluglett'.

Peter Sluglett
MESA President
Visiting Research Professor, Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore

cc:

- His Highness Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President, Prime Minister, and Co-Chair of the Higher National Security Council (fax +971 04 353 1974)
- His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research (fax +971 02 631 3778-Abu Dhabi; +971 04 299 4535-Dubai)
- His Excellency Lt. General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Interior (fax +971 04 398 1119)
- His Excellency Humaid Mohammed Obeid al Qattami, Minister of Education (fax +971 03 7611198)
- His Excellency Abdulrahman Ghanem Almutaiwee, Ambassador of the UAE to the UK (Fax +44 207 581 9616)
- Ambassador Dominic Jerney, Ambassador of the UK to the UAE (fax in Dubai Consul +971 4 309 4301; phone in Abu Dhabi Embassy +971 2 610 100)
- Dr. Peter Heath, Chancellor, American University of Sharjah (pheath@ aus.edu)
- Dr. Mark Rush, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, American University of Sharjah (mrush@ aus.edu)
- Dr. Craig Calhoun, Director, London School of Economics (c.calhoun@ lse.ac.uk)
- Dr. George Gaskell, Pro-Director, Resources and Planning, London School of Economics (g.gaskell@ lse.ac.uk)
- Dr. Fawaz Gerges, Director Middle East Center, London School of Economics (f.gerges@ lse.ac.uk)
- His Excellency Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bahrain (phone +973 1722 7555)
- Ursula Lindsey, Middle East Correspondent, *Chronicle of Higher Education* (ulindsey@ mac.com)