

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

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May 16, 2013

Dr. Mohammad Qayoumi
President
San José State University
Office of the President
Tower Hall 207, One Washington Square
San Jose, CA 95192
via fax 408-924-1199

Dear President Qayoumi:

We are writing on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express concern about the response of San José State University to the ongoing controversy surrounding the April 19, 2013 workshop for high school teachers and community college faculty on teaching the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that was organized by Professor Persis Karim, a member of your university's faculty.

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 3000 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.

The workshop in question, "Peacebuilding, Nonviolence, and Approaches to Teaching the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," was organized by Professor Persis Karim of the Department of English and Comparative Literature with funding from the United States Institute of Peace. The workshop was organized to provide high school and community college educators the opportunity to explore ways of working with students that would help them understand this conflict more fully.

It is our understanding that even before the workshop took place, Professor Karim was subjected to a campaign of harassment and intimidation by individuals and organizations, mostly based outside San José State, who objected to the workshop's content and participants. This campaign has continued even after the workshop, most recently by means of the circulation of a fabricated statement falsely attributed to Professor Karim and intended to damage her reputation, but also in the form of a request under the California Public Records Act that Professor Karim make available all documents and correspondence related to the workshop and its funding.

We are concerned that these attacks on Professor Karim and on the workshop have created an atmosphere of intimidation that threatens her academic freedom but that may also have a chilling effect on the free exchange of ideas at San José State. We are, moreover, concerned that your administration has thus far failed to defend Professor Karim's academic freedom rights, and denounce the campaign against her, in a vigorous, unqualified and public manner.

Dr. Mohammad Qayoumi, President of San José State University

16 May 2013

Re: Dr. Persis Karim and Teacher Workshop

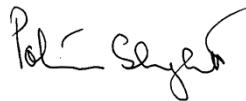
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As you are no doubt aware, the principles of academic freedom require that the right of faculty at institutions of higher education to engage in research, teaching, and public presentations be vigorously protected, even when some people may deem their views on issues of public interest to be controversial. We would also point out that no single public event sponsored by San José State or any other university can be expected, or should be required, to represent all possible perspectives on a particular conflict. Rather, universities must encourage and protect the expression of many different viewpoints, in different formats and on different occasions, in order to foster the full and free exchange of ideas and opinions.

We understand that the university must comply with all legitimate requests made under the California Public Records Act, but we are concerned that the information this particular request may yield could be used to harass and intimidate individuals involved in the workshop, whether as organizers or as participants. More broadly, we feel that such requests should not be used to further the political agenda of individuals or groups who do not share the perspectives expressed at a university-sponsored event of this kind.

We urge you to issue a strong and clear public statement expressing the university's support for academic freedom in general and that of Professor Karim in particular, and its firm condemnation of the smear campaign being waged against her. Professor Karim and all those involved with the workshop, as well as your university's faculty and students, need to know that San José State is fully committed to defending its faculty against efforts to harass and intimidate them when they share their expertise and their informed perspectives, in the classroom and beyond.

Sincerely,



Peter Sluglett

MESA President

Visiting Research Professor, Middle East Institute, National University of Singapore