



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
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3 June 2020

Chancellor Rebecca Blank
University of Wisconsin, Madison
chancellor@wisc.edu

Dear Chancellor Blank:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern about the scurrilous and defamatory attack that the David Horowitz Freedom Center (DHFC) has directed against one of your faculty members, Associate Professor of Community and Environmental Sociology Samer N. Alatout, by including him in its list of "The Top Ten Jew-Hating and Terror-Promoting Professors." We consider the DHFC's "report" on Professor Alatout as an effort by that notorious organization to harass and muzzle faculty members who express opinions about Israel, Palestine and the Middle East with which it disagrees.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has over 2,500 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

The David Horowitz Freedom Center has a long and shameful record of circulating false and inflammatory charges targeting college and university faculty and students, and railing against "political correctness" at institutions of higher education in the United States. For example, in 2004 the DHFC's predecessor, then known as the Center for the Study of Popular Culture, published a booklet entitled "Campus Support for Terrorism" absurdly suggesting that the Middle East Studies Association of North America, several university centers for Middle East studies and a number of individual faculty members "openly sympathize with al-Qaeda and oppose American values." In a study entitled "Facts Count," Free Exchange on Campus, a coalition of ten groups including the American Association of University Professors, [criticized](#) Horowitz's 2006 McCarthyite book *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*. "Facts Count" concluded that "Horowitz's research is sloppy in the extreme" and rife with "inaccuracies, distortions and manipulations of fact." We note as well that, according to the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), "Under Horowitz's direction, the Freedom Center has launched a network of projects giving anti-Muslim voices and radical ideologies a platform to project hate and misinformation."

Now the DHFC is falsely accusing Professor Alatout, without providing any evidence whatsoever, of "Jew hatred." More broadly, this organization criticizes Professor Alatout for allegedly making statements and holding opinions which, even if they are correctly quoted, clearly fall within the constitutionally protected boundaries of free speech and cannot reasonably be construed as hate speech. In so doing the David Horowitz Freedom Center once again demonstrates that it is a thoroughly disreputable outfit whose claims and mode of operation are rejected by the great majority of scholars at this country's institutions of higher education.



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Given this, we urge you and your administration to vigorously denounce this politically motivated assault on Professor Alatout and defend not only his free speech rights and academic freedom but those of all members of the University of Wisconsin-Madison community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dina Rizk Khoury', with a long, sweeping underline.

Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', with a stylized, cursive script.

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor, University of Southern California