



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

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Friday, 05 November 2004

Dr. Lee Bollinger
President
Columbia University
New York, NY 10027

Dear Dr. Bollinger,

I write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern regarding numerous public calls for Columbia University to suppress or infringe upon academic freedom. Recently these pressures have extended to demands for the dismissal of a professor in the Department of Middle East and Asian Language and Culture (MEALAC). We are heartened that the university administration has insisted on upholding the fundamental right of free expression in the university community. In this you have our unconditional support, and our encouragement to persevere.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) comprises 2600 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa, and is the preeminent professional association in the field. The association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression in the region and in connection with the study of the Middle East and North Africa.

The latest salvo against academic freedom at Columbia has come in reports of a film by a Boston-based organization containing allegations against Professor Joseph Massad. According to these allegations, Dr. Massad had expressed views of Israel that were tantamount to anti-Semitism, and had intimidated students who did not share his views. The film has not, as of this writing, been available for public viewing. Its allegations have nonetheless received prominent notice in several New York-area tabloids, assisted by a letter to you, dated October 21, from Representative Anthony D. Weiner, a Brooklyn Congressman, publicly calling on you to "fire" Dr. Massad. Rep. Weiner's letter also invoked earlier campaigns against Columbia's appointment of Professor Rashid I. Khalidi to an endowed chair, and the appointment of former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson as Professor in the Practice of Public Affairs.

In the most thorough journalistic account of the controversy over Dr. Massad, in the November 2 issue of *The Jewish Week*, staff writer Liel Leibovitz interviewed four of the seven students who reportedly appear in the film, and several dozens others who have attended MEALAC classes over the last five years. According to the article, those who took classes with Dr. Massad, including Jewish and Israeli students, were strikingly positive about their experience.

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We understand that you have asked the Provost of the university to look into the matter. This is certainly an appropriate step if there are any genuine grounds for concern regarding these allegations. Such a response, however, because it has been made public, may also suggest that the university is open to politicized pressure from the outside to silence debate and dissent on Columbia University's campus. We therefore urge you to take every appropriate opportunity to reassert that Columbia University will continue to uphold the fundamental values of freedom of expression and the free exchange of ideas, and that the campaign of defamation against Dr. Massad will find no resonance within your administration. We assure you of our full support in this endeavor.

Sincerely,



Laurie Brand
President, Middle East Studies Association

Joe Stork
Human Rights Watch, Middle East

Azzedine Layachi
St. John's University

Lisa Anderson
Columbia University

A. R. Norton
Boston University

Sheila Carapico
University of Richmond

Marsha Pripstein Posusney
Bryant College

Kaveh Ehsani
University of Illinois at Chicago

Donald Reid
Georgia State University

Gregory Gause
University of Vermont

Glenn Robinson
Naval Postgraduate School

cc: Rep. Anthony D. Weiner, Member of Congress