

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

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April 7, 2005

The Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

By facsimile: 212 788 8123

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

I write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our grave concern regarding the recent decision by the Chancellor Joel I. Klein to exclude Professor Rashid Khalidi from any further participation in teacher development workshops. This decision violates the right to impart and exchange information, one of the basic tenets of academic freedom and an essential right for elementary and secondary school teachers as well as university professors.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) comprises 2700 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.

Chancellor Klein's decision, which was announced by his press secretary, Mr. Jerry Russo, was explained as a response to past statements made by Professor Khalidi that were critical of Israel. Mr. Russo is reported to have said, "Considering his past statements, Rashid Khalidi should not have been included in a program that provided professional development for DOE teachers and he won't be participating in the future." The suggestion that responsible criticism of Israel and its policies should disqualify Professor Khalidi or any other respected scholar from participating in a teachers' in-service training program undermines the values of free expression that we value in our society.

We had hoped that this letter would be unnecessary, given your demonstrated commitment to the fundamental values of freedom in our society, but we have been disappointed by your silence on this matter. We would like to emphasize that Professor Khalidi is a respected historian, a former President of this organization, and a highly regarded teacher. It is noteworthy that prior to his dismissal he offered two lectures on the Middle East as part of the teacher development workshops that elicited only praise. Moreover, many of Professor Khalidi's colleagues have heard him publicly criticize Palestinian political authorities. By Chancellor Klein's logic, Professor Khalidi would on these grounds also be disqualified from lecturing on either side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which would be absurd, as I am sure you agree.

This decision by the head of New York's Department of Education reflects poorly on a city renowned for its willingness to embrace a rich diversity of people and opinion, and especially on a school system justly revered for its bounty of fine graduates. Chancellor Klein's decision necessarily raises fundamental questions about freedom of speech in the New York City's schools when issues concerning the Middle East are concerned.

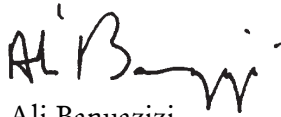
As you know, the New York Civil Liberties Union, in a letter to Chancellor Klein, dated March 2, 2005, stated that the Chancellor was violating Professor Khalidi's First Amendment right to free speech, and the Civil Liberties Union cited constitutional case law to that effect. Columbia's

President Bollinger called the decision, “wrong not only as a matter of constitutional law but as a matter of good policy and as a matter of the conduct of education.” He is reconsidering Columbia’s participation in any future teacher training programs.

We note that Chancellor Klein’s arbitrary decision was announced at a time when there appears to be a momentum toward a peaceful solution to the conflict that enjoys wide support among Israelis and Palestinians, not to mention many Americans. While public opinion should not be the criterion of free speech, it appears that the Chancellor of New York’s schools may have improperly allowed himself to be swayed by loud and unrepresentative voices of those determined to delegitimize and suppress any thoughtful discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that includes criticism of Israeli policies. In some cases these have been the voices of individuals seeking to gain political advantage by their posturing vis-à-vis Professor Khalidi and his colleagues at Columbia University.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you review the Chancellor’s decision with him, with a view to restoring, protecting, and advancing the free exchange of ideas to education in the City. We would also be grateful for a prompt public statement by you making clear that New York City’s teachers, and the children that they teach, will continue to be exposed to a diversity of perspectives in the classroom rather than merely to what the Chancellor may deem politically expedient or find personally comfortable.

Sincerely,



Ali Banuazizi
President, Middle East Studies Association
Professor, Boston College

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cc: Chancellor Joel I. Klein, Chancellor of the Department of Education