

March 13, 2006

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520
FAX: 202-647-2283

Dear Secretary Rice:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA), I write to express our very grave concern regarding the United States government's blanket denial of visas to fifty-five Cuban scholars scheduled to participate in the Latin American Studies Association's (LASA) International Congress, to be held on March 15-18, in San Juan, Puerto Rico. We urge you to reverse the State Department's decision, which seriously interferes with the higher education community's capacity to fulfill our core mission and represents a serious threat to academic freedom.

MESA is committed to fostering the free exchange of knowledge as a human right and to inhibit infringements on that right by government restrictions on scholars. The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights provide the principal standards by which human rights violations are identified today. Those rights include the right to education and work, freedom of movement and residence, and freedom of association and assembly. Infringements include governmental refusal to allow scholars to conduct scholarly research, publish their findings, deliver academic lectures, and travel to international scholarly meetings. We believe that the denial of visas to these academics represents just such an infringement.

We urge you to reconsider the recent decision to deny visas to the Cuban scholars scheduled to participate in the XXVI International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association. Intellectual exchange and scholarly collaboration across national borders is essential for our community. It is critical for foreign

scholars to have freedom of access to our academic meetings—and just as critical for American scholars to be free to engage in scholarly argument about significant contested issues in our fields. These activities only benefit us all.

Sincerely,

Amy W. Newhall, PhD
Executive Director
MESA