



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

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MESA⁰⁷
November 17-20
Montréal

February 14, 2007

Christopher Nikoloff
Head of School
Harker School
500 Saratoga Ave.
San Jose, CA 95129
Fax: 408-984-2325

Dear Mr. Nikoloff:

On behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and the Committee on Academic Freedom, I am writing to express our profound concern about the abrupt decision of the Harker School administration to cancel a talk to its upper school students by Professor Joel Beinin, scheduled for January 19, 2007.

The Middle East Studies Association of North American (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 more than 2700 members worldwide. MESA is committed to defending academic freedom, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere. As you are aware, Professor Beinin is a former president of MESA. However, the Committee on Academic Freedom is sending you this letter in its own right.

It is our understanding that Professor Beinin was invited to present a talk to Harker's upper school students and faculty as part of its Distinguished Speaker Series. On January 18th, however, the Head of Harker Upper School contacted Professor Beinin and informed him that the school administration had revoked the invitation, citing pressures that threatened to undermine its financial position and public reputation. According to press reports in the San Francisco Chronicle and elsewhere, that pressure was exerted by a small group of individuals, including the executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Silicon Valley.

Your school's decision to cancel Professor Beinin's talk is a violation of academic freedom, a principle that is vital to the cultivation of democratic values and informed critical thinking, and which your school claims is central to its educational mission. The cancellation also deprives the students, faculty and staff of Harker of the opportunity to hear, and engage with, an important and highly informed voice on Middle East history and current politics, topics of supreme importance to American citizens today. Professor Joel Beinin is an eminent historian of the modern Middle East and of Jewish history. He has been a member of the faculty of Stanford University for more than a quarter century and is currently director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the American University in Cairo.

It is distressing that individuals and organizations purporting to speak for the American Jewish community seem to have been able to prevent your students and faculty from hearing the views of a respected scholar and teacher. This appears to be another success for various local and national organizations seeking to marginalize voices critical of U.S. foreign policy and the policies of the Israeli government.

We strongly urge you to resist such outside pressures and renew your school's invitation to Professor Beinlin. This would send an important signal to your students and to the community at large that Harker School remains committed to the principle of academic freedom and to freedom of speech more broadly.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Zachary Lockman".

Zachary Lockman
President

cc: Richard Hartzel
Head of Harker Upper School
500 Saratoga Avenue
San Jose, CA 95129
Fax: 408-984-2325

Diane Fisher
Executive Director
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