



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

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November 4, 2007

Father Dennis Dease, President
Mail AQU 100
University of St. Thomas
2115 Summit Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55205

Dear Father Dease,

I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) first to express our appreciation for your decision on October 10 to invite Archbishop Desmond Tutu to speak at the University. We commend you for your candid admission that your earlier decision to withhold the invitation on the basis of incomplete information on Tutu's positions on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was a mistake. However, in view of your commitment to academic freedom at St. Thomas, we also wish to express our concern about another aspect of this case: The removal of Dr. Cris Toffolo as director of the Justice and Peace Studies Program by the university administration.

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 ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Dr. Toffolo in a public statement admitted that she and a priest-colleague in the program sent a letter to Archbishop Tutu informing him that the university had decided not to invite him to speak on campus as part of a program sponsored by PeaceJam International. Dr. Toffolo believes that she was removed from her position because of her resistance to this decision and the action she took to inform Archbishop Tutu and others of the university's position. In the August 1 letter dismissing her from her position, the university's executive vice president for academic affairs, Dr. Tom Rochon, said Dr. Toffolo was being dismissed "for cause" for four reasons including the letter that she wrote to Tutu with copies sent to the executive director of PeaceJam International, the Episcopalian Justice office that deals with Christian-Jewish dialogue and three retired senior clergy whom she and her colleague had consulted for advice. Dr. Rochon later told the student newspaper that Dr. Toffolo was removed for lapses of ethics and competence in the performance of her job, charges that Dr. Toffolo adamantly denies. A petition signed by faculty and staff asks that the university reinstate Dr. Toffolo as director of the Justice and Peace Studies Program and apologize for the punitive actions taken against her.

The university's commitment to academic freedom should protect a faculty member such as Dr. Toffolo from reprisals when speaking or writing in opposition to a decision made by

the university administration. Archbishop Tutu has stated that he will not speak at St. Thomas unless Dr. Toffolo is re-instated in her position, which would in effect nullify your decision to invite him to speak on campus. Unless the removal of Dr. Toffolo is reversed, the university's actions will have a chilling effect on free speech at St. Thomas University.

Therefore, we call on you and the university administration to uphold the university's commitment to academic freedom and re-instate Dr. Toffolo in her position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Zachary Lockman". The signature is written in black ink and has a fluid, connected style.

Zachary Lockman
MESA President