



Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

The University of Arizona · 1232 North Cherry Avenue · Tucson, Arizona 85721

6 October 1994

General 'Ali Abdullah Saleh
Chairman of the Presidential Council
Sana'a
The Republic of Yemen

Your Excellency:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association is concerned about news suggesting that the principle of academic freedom is being seriously compromised, with adverse effects on professors and researchers at Sanaa University. The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2300 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The association publishes the respected International Journal of Middle East Studies and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

According to our information, pressures have recently been exerted on professors and departments not to hold seminars that touch on political issues. Moreover, we understand that professors are being given to understand that they are not to discuss politics either in the classroom or with students. An atmosphere hostile to free academic discussion and inquiry has been created, which has apparently led a number of professors to decide they must leave Sanaa and pursue their careers abroad. Other academics, who are currently abroad, will not, we suspect, want to return to Yemen until conditions of academic freedom are reestablished.

In addition, we have learned of the arrest of Dr. Abd al-Aziz al-Sakkaf, an economics professor and the editor of "The Yemen Times," who was apparently arrested and beaten. His arrest came only one day after his holding a seminar, the other participants in which were also detained. The detained included an academician-researcher from the Yemen Center for Research and Studies, Muhammad Al-Mikhlaifi, who was held for six days. The timing of the arrests suggests that an attempt was being made to intimidate the academics involved and to chill the expression of ideas. These arrests and the beating of Dr. Abd al-Aziz al-Sakkaf appear to be flagrant violations of international human rights norms, which protect freedom of expression and prohibit arrests and punishments for the exercise of that freedom.

We respectfully request the government of Yemen to take appropriate measures to correct what appears to be a deteriorating situation at the university and to communicate to the relevant officials that respect for academic freedom is essential. We also respectfully ask that measures be taken to ensure that our Yemeni colleagues are not subjected to any further mistreatment or intimidation for carrying out their mission as academics and researchers.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: Ambassador Mohsin A. Alaini
Ambassador Arthur H. Hughes