

May 30, 2008

His Majesty King Abdullah Bin 'Abdul 'Azziz Al-Saud  
The Custodian of the two Holy Mosques  
Office of His Majesty The King  
Royal Court  
Riyadh  
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Your Majesty:

I write to you on behalf of more than 15,000 U.S. and international members of the American Political Science Association, the scholarly association which represents professors and students of political science.

It was with extreme concern and disappointment that we have read in press reports and notices by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch alleging that your government has arrested the prominent Saudi Arabian political scientist Dr. Matrouk al-Faleh of King Saud University in Riyadh, and reportedly has been holding two other human rights activist brothers Abdullah al-Hamid and 'Isa al-Hamid at Buraida General Prison for expressing support for a demonstration that took place there.

There is considerable irony in Dr. Matrouk al-Faleh's arrest because he was previously arrested in March 2004 after calling for political reform, and was sentenced to six years imprisonment in May 2005 on charges that included "sowing dissent and disobeying the ruler." At that time my predecessor as President of the American Political Science Association, Dr. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, wrote a letter asking for his release, and on August 8, 2005, you granted a royal pardon to Dr. al-Falih. Despite the differences in spelling, I assume this was the same individual about whom I am writing now. I am very hopeful that we could receive assurances that he is being held in safe and humane conditions, with access to his family and to medical and legal assistance; and that, in your wisdom, you will arrange for his immediate and unconditional release if he is being held solely for his human rights and scholarly work.

From the vantage point of the American Political Science Association, political scientists inherently have an interest in issues of governance which would also seem to make Dr. al-Faleh's arrest and detention an issue of academic freedom. His arrest and detention appears in violation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." In that regard, in May 2006, Saudi Arabia was elected to a three-year term on the United Nations Human Rights Council after pledging its "confirmed cooperation with international [human rights] organization." These are similar protections accorded by Article 32 of the Arab Charter of Human Rights, which Saudi Arabia signed in 2004, and which the Shura Council ratified in March 2008, which guarantees the freedom of opinion and expression and "the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers."

Your Majesty, we live in a world where the resolution of political differences is increasingly pursued through violence. We earnestly hope that your government would be at the forefront of illustrating that issues are capable of being resolved by a peaceful expression and exchange of differences, rather than arbitrary arrest and detention. There is a level of transparency in today's world by which governments are inevitably held to account in the court of public opinion. The arrest and detention of Dr. Matrouk al-Faleh appears to be a case of his being held solely for the non-violent exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association. If this is the case, we urge that he receive an unconditional and immediate release.

Sincerely,



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