



american political science association

1527 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1206 • p: 202.483.2512 • f: 202.483.2657 • www.apsanet.org

September 24, 2004

The Honorable Colin Powell
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Tom Ridge
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Naval Security Station
Nebraska and Massachusetts Avenues, NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Powell and Secretary Ridge:

I write on behalf of the American Political Science Association, which represents more than 15,000 professors of political science in the U.S. and around the world. My objective is to encourage you to revisit your August 2004 decision to cancel the visa of Tariq Ramadan, a Muslim scholar in Switzerland. The visa, which had been previously granted in March, would have allowed him to accept a tenured professorship at the University of Notre Dame. Yet without providing any factual evidence, the State Department revoked the visa on the grounds that Professor Ramadan presented “public-safety or national-security risks” to the United States.

Given the complex nature of the situation, this letter is difficult to frame. First, in our post-September 11 world, no one can responsibly disregard issues of public safety or national security. Secondly, because I am not an Islamic scholar, there may be nuances to the reality of Muslims living in Western Europe and the United States of which I am unaware. That said, I have followed the debate over his denied visa with special interest, as it appears to address one issue on which I feel responsible for speaking out – the principle of academic freedom.

Professors, guided by a deep conviction of the worth and dignity of the advancement of knowledge, recognize the special responsibilities placed on them. As academics, their primary obligation is to seek and to state the truth as they see it. In turn, professors have responsibilities that derive from membership in a community of scholars. They respect and defend the free inquiry of associates. As citizens engaged in a profession that depends on freedom for its health and integrity, professors feel a particular duty to promote conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom. While these principles can be applied to any scholarly association, they are of critical

importance to political scientists who deal with the substance of our national governance.

In my reading of the Ramadan case, I am struck that one of Professor Ramadan's most important messages is his advice to Muslims in the West to make the West their home. For the United States, already home to a significant number of Muslims, one would think this was a welcome message. American life, with its belief in the individual and the equality of the sexes, should be fertile ground for a more tolerant Islam. By denying Tariq Ramadan his visa, we give the Muslim world this message: while we talk of bringing freedom there, we fear it at home.

As recently noted by Professor Alan Wolfe, Director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston University, in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: "Tariq Ramadan will no doubt go on with his work. It is too bad that Europe, which was not attacked on September 11, 2001, will be more directly engaged with his ideas than the United States, which was." This irony is all the more acute when Professor Ramadan, a theologian, is now prevented from taking up an academic position at the University of Notre Dame, one of our country's most prestigious faith-based institutions.

As a country, we are under the critical observation of the world and must be prepared to hold ourselves accountable to the high standards which represent the philosophic basis of our government. Among these are the pursuit of truth and the willingness to engage in open, peaceful debate, key tenets of the principle of academic freedom. In the absence of facts to the contrary, the denial of Professor Ramadan's visa seems to be in direct violation of those standards. On behalf of myself and the American Political Science Association, I hope that you will reconsider the decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Levi". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Margaret Levi, President
American Political Science Association