



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

**Headquarters & Secretariat**

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18 June 2024

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Dear President Ettinger and colleagues:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our grave concern about your decision to rescind the offer which the University of Minnesota (U of M) made to Dr. Raz Segal to assume the directorship of its Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (CHGS). This action, the result of your capitulation to political pressure from groups based outside the university which had attacked Dr. Segal for his assessment of Israel's war in Gaza, starkly contravenes your administration's avowed commitment to academic freedom and to respect for the integrity of the faculty hiring process.

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 prestigious *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 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 outside of North America.



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Dr. Segal, Associate Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies and Endowed Professor in the Study of Modern Genocide at Stockton University, is widely regarded as a leading scholar in the academic fields in which he works. After a thorough search conducted in full accord with U of M procedures and policies, he was deemed the most qualified candidate for the directorship of CHGS and offered the position. Two members of the CHGS board resigned in protest, citing an October 2023 [article](#) in which Dr. Segal had described Israel's actions in Gaza as "a textbook case of genocide." Organizations and media outlets based outside the university, including the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, then launched a campaign to block Dr. Segal's appointment.

Rather than defend academic freedom and the principle that faculty should make hiring decisions based exclusively on scholarly criteria, without interference by individuals or organizations pursuing their own political agenda, your administration first "paused" and then rescinded the offer to Dr. Segal. The video recording of President Ettinger's 14 June 2024 report to the Board of Regents explaining his decision, available [here](#) (starting at 19:23), clearly indicates that the university surrendered to the campaign against Dr. Segal.

We note the [statement](#) issued by the U of M chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) on 12 June 2024 expressing alarm at the withdrawal of the offer to Dr. Segal and declaring that "the central administration has rewarded the brinkmanship of two faculty members acting outside the norms of acceptable faculty conduct, overruled a comprehensive faculty-led process of evaluating candidates for this position, and violated established policy and precedent regarding collegiate hiring practices." The statement went on to characterize your action as "an appalling violation of academic freedom and a stain on the U's record. If it goes uncorrected it will have a chilling effect on academic freedom at this institution, not only for faculty but also students and staff, by showing that our central administration will side with outside groups when they demand actions that violate academic freedom." We also call your attention to the [open letter](#) signed by nearly a thousand faculty at universities across the United States and beyond, which noted that "[b]y overruling the faculty experts who selected Dr. Segal, the University of Minnesota's administrators have effectively issued a vote of no confidence in its own faculty. This move endangers the



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University's reputation as an internationally-renowned research institution.”

We must remind you of the statement on “Academic Freedom in Times of War” issued by the AAUP on 24 October 2023, which is directly relevant to the current circumstances:

It is in tumultuous times that colleges' and universities' stated commitments to protect academic freedom are most put to the test. As the Israel-Hamas war rages and campus protests proliferate, institutional authorities must refrain from sanctioning faculty members for expressing politically controversial views and should instead defend their right, under principles of academic freedom, to do so.

We therefore call on you to immediately reinstate the offer made to Dr. Segal and apologize to him for surrendering to the smear campaign against him. We further urge you to publicly and forcefully reaffirm your commitment to the principles of academic freedom and to the integrity and independence of your institution's faculty hiring process.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashi Ü. Bâli'.

Ashi Ü. Bâli  
MESA President  
Professor, Yale Law School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand'.

Laurie Brand  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California