

Dr. Najah Abdallah
Dean, Jordan Media Institute
P.O.Box: 3387
Amman 11821
Jordan

8 April 2010

Dear Dr. Abdallah:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), an international human rights NGO that promotes foundational rights for democracy, to express concern about the fact that Mr. Yahia Shukkeir, a well-known journalist and media freedom advocate, has been barred from entering the Jordan Media Institute (JMI) where he is enrolled as a Masters student.

According to the information CLD has received, the barring was due to Mr. Shukkeir's refusal to submit his media articles to JMI officials for approval prior to publishing them. We understand that he was barred after refusing to submit his work for prior approval following a warning from you to this effect. This, in turn, followed his publication, on 18 February 2010, of an article in the *Al Arab Al Youm* newspaper.

Freedom of expression, as guaranteed by Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, is a fundamental right that belongs to students as it does to everyone. Indeed, respect for academic freedom of expression is particularly important to ensure that universities can serve their intended role as centres of learning and through, and crucibles of new and independent thinking. The JMI formally recognises this, stating, under the heading "Code of Ethics" on its website:

JMI takes inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notably Article 19

The sort of prior censorship that you seek to impose on Mr. Shukkeir is a breach of his right to freedom of expression and inconsistent with democratic values. Students in democracies around the world are free to pursue their academic or other interests, including by writing articles for

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The Centre for Law and Democracy is a non-profit human rights organisation working internationally to provide legal expertise on foundational rights for democracy

the media. Indeed, such extra-curricular activities are welcomed by most universities as they add depth and knowledge to the university experience.

I note that this is different from the context of an employee, and particularly a public official, where some limited contractual restrictions on freedom of expression may be appropriate as necessary to support the legitimate activities of the employer. No such interest on the part of JMI is engaged here.

I urge you to lift the bar on Mr. Shukkeir immediately and to make it clear to all students that they are free, within the limits of the law, to engage in expressive activities.

Yours truly,

Toby Mendel
Executive Director