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February 13, 2006

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

We are writing on behalf of the American Historical Association to express our intense concern over the plight of Dr. Waskar Ari, who has been prevented from taking up his post as Assistant Professor of History and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln because he has been placed on a list of individuals under “conspicuous revision”—that is, he is being subjected to extensive background checks due to alleged security concerns. The American Historical Association is a non-profit membership organization founded in 1884 and incorporated by the congress in 1889 for the promotion of historical studies and the dissemination of historical research. It is the oldest and largest professional historical organization in the United States, bringing together nearly 5,000 institutions, 118 affiliated societies, and more than 14,000 individuals, including college and university faculty, public historians, independent scholars, archivists, librarians, and secondary school teachers.

Dr. Ari, who earned his Ph.D. in history at Georgetown University in the Fall of 2004, is a member of the Aymara indigenous people of Bolivia and is an authority on religious beliefs and political activism among indigenous Bolivians. He has served as a consultant on social and economic issues confronting the Aymara community with various organizations (the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank) in the Washington area, and has also been a visiting assistant professor at Western Michigan University and a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Texas. Upon completion of his doctoral degree, he was offered the position in History and Ethnic Studies at Nebraska, which paid extra fees to the USCIS to have its request for an H-1B visa fast-tracked (case number LIN0519355292, date: June 13, 2005) so that he could begin teaching in the fall of 2005. However, Dr. Ari, in Bolivia over the summer, was astonished to learn that not only was his H-1B visa being held up, but also that the United States Embassy in La Paz had been told by the State Department to cancel all existing visas. Apparently, because he is under “conspicuous revision,” he must be cleared by all US intelligence agencies in order to get the necessary visa. Furthermore, under the Patriot Act, there is no time limit on this approval process; in effect, these agencies could hold up the granting of the H-1B visa indefinitely.


We recognize that there may be individuals who pose a genuine security risk and for whom there are legitimate reasons to delay the granting of an H-1B visa. However, in Dr. Ari’s case we feel that there are no perceptible grounds for such treatment. Within the Aymara community of Bolivia he is widely recognized as a voice of moderation and as someone with no relationship to any sort of extremist group that might be construed as threatening to US interests, no matter how broadly defined. In the absence of

any connection to extremist groups, we fear Dr. Ari is being subjected to “conspicuous revision” solely due to his indigenous identity. Rather than being a question of national security, this appears to be a case of racial profiling.

The American Historical Association is profoundly concerned about Dr. Ari’s situation not only because, as an organization, it is committed to fostering historical research and instruction unencumbered by government restrictions that could infringe on academic freedom and intellectual exchange, but also because we are strongly committed to the principle of equality in the historical profession. Dr. Ari is the first scholar from the Aymara community to earn a history Ph.D. in the United States and to win a position in a leading US university. His presence on the Nebraska campus would add significantly to the study of indigenous peoples of the Americas and to the presence of Native Americans in academia. Indeed, students have already come to Nebraska hoping to work with Dr. Ari only to be disappointed by the news of his involuntary absence from the position. We are deeply disturbed by the possibility that ethnicity might form the basis for excluding members of our profession from gainful employment.

Again, the problem appears to be two-fold: not only does the request to grant Dr. Ari an H-1B Visa have to be cleared by all the US intelligence agencies, but those agencies also have no time limit within which to act on his case. Under such circumstances, a fine scholar whose only apparent offense is his indigenous identity could be permanently excluded from US academia. We therefore appeal to you to reconsider the decision to subject Dr. Ari to conspicuous revision, and ask that you grant him the visa requested by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Sincerely yours,



Linda K. Kerber
President



Barbara Weinstein
President-Elect



James Sheehan
Immediate Past President

Cc: The Honorable Thomas A. Shannon, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
The Honorable Michael Chertoff, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Michael P. Jackson, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry, U.S. Representative, Nebraska 1st District
The Honorable Ben Nelson, U.S. Senator, Nebraska
The Honorable Chuck Hagel, U.S. Senator, Nebraska