



الكلية اليمنية لدراسات الشرق الأوسط
YEMEN COLLEGE OF MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

Dear students, parents & professors,

October 1, 2010

My name is Steven Caton, and I am the Advisory Dean of the Yemen College of Middle East Studies.

I have been involved with Yemen for over thirty years, first as a doctoral student in anthropology in the late 1970s until now, as I work with a talented and dedicated staff to build and sustain an intellectually rigorous program in Arabic language and contemporary regional studies. Never before in our history has there been a more urgent need for young Americans and Europeans to know the language, history, politics and cultures of the region, and what better way to learn it than by studying and living in a country like Yemen?

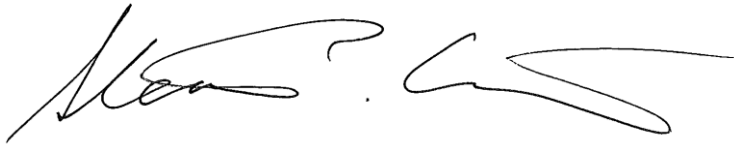
That said, I realize you might be concerned about the country's security situation, and how it might affect the safety of YCMES students. Indeed, several times in the past anxious parents and students from Harvard University, where I teach, have contacted me about travel to Yemen and have asked me for advice. I take this opportunity to share that advice with you. Only once have I said, "Do not go to Yemen now." This is not one of those times. Sana'a remains a safe environment for foreigners and Yemenis alike.

Please be aware that the College pays close attention to the security situation in Yemen and is working closely with Yemeni security to watch and protect the premises. It is taking other non-obtrusive precautionary measures to protect students and staff (hiring and training its own guards, traveling in its own vehicles, etc.). Moreover, college buildings blend in with their urban surroundings and are next door to neighbors with whom it maintains cordial relations.

Travel outside the capital is safe as long as it is confined to the Red Sea coastal area known as the Tihama and the central, mountainous spine of the country from the capital to the southern city of Taiz. I know you read in the press that the Yemeni Government does not control the countryside outside the capital but that is a gross exaggeration. Student outings are confined to these areas, and whenever a trip is planned, the College consults with Yemeni Security in advance to determine whether the security situation has changed in them. In the summer of 2009, I taught a five-week summer course at the College and travelled weekly with students to different parts of the country they were reading about in class. Not once did I or the students feel threatened or unsafe.

The best way to allay your concerns, if this letter does not persuade you, is to contact me personally, and if need be, on the phone. I would not make this offer (I work for the College pro bono) were I not convinced that study abroad in Yemen, and at YCMES in particular, is a unique and possibly unparalleled experience that should not be missed.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Caton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Steve Caton

Advisory Dean, Yemen College of Middle Eastern Studies