



**Middle
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January 19, 2016

His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
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His Excellency Sameh Shoukry
Minister of Foreign Affairs
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Major-General Magdy Abdul Ghaffar
Minister of the Interior
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Your Excellencies President al-Sisi, Major-General Abdul Ghaffar, and Mr. Shoukry:

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to protest the denial of the right of Dr. Amel Grami to enter Egypt, and her subsequent detention in the Cairo airport for 16 hours, on January 3 and 4, 2016. Dr. Grami is a professor at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in University of Manouba, Tunis. She had been invited to participate in an international conference at the Library of Alexandria titled "The Production of Extremism: Examining Measures for Intellectual Confrontation" attended by scholars from 18 Arab countries and from Europe. Despite having a valid visa, she was denied entry and was told by one of her interrogators that she was a threat to Egyptian national security. In the absence of any proof to support such an allegation from the Egyptian authorities, we view this as a severe violation of Dr. Grami's academic freedom.

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 International Journal of Middle East Studies and has nearly 3,000 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 elsewhere.

Dr. Grami is an internationally known scholar of Islamic and women's studies who has participated in several previous events at the Library of Alexandria. She was scheduled to present a paper titled "Evaluation of Methods for Researching Extremism and Terrorism: Outcomes and Suggestions" at the "Production of Extremism" conference. She arrived at Cairo Airport on the afternoon of Sunday, January 3, with a valid entry visa--on which she had entered Egypt only one month earlier--as well as a letter of invitation from the Library of Alexandria. Upon her arrival, Dr. Grami was summoned from the international arrivals line to a separate area where she was made to wait for over an hour, before being

interrogated and told to surrender her mobile phone and computer. She responded that since she was being treated as if she were accused of a crime, she demanded the right of an accused person to make a single phone call, which she used to inform the Library of Alexandria of her situation. Security officials tried to hold Dr. Grami in a small, dirty room with other detainees, and when she physically resisted being forced into the room they allowed her to sit with members of the security forces in a vacant employees' room, from which she was summoned approximately every 1.5 hours for interrogation, each time being asked routine questions such as why she had come to Egypt and what type of paper she would present at the conference. Efforts by an official of the Library of Alexandria who traveled to the Cairo Airport to secure Dr. Grami's admission into Egypt failed, and finally the official informed her that they would have to wait until morning to call the Minister of the Interior to see if he would personally authorize her entry. At that point Dr. Grami stated that she was not willing to enter Egypt through the intervention of the Minister and requested that arrangements be made for her return to Tunisia. She left at 8: 30 the next morning.

Dr. Grami was treated in a disrespectful and degrading manner throughout her 16 hours of detention in Cairo Airport, as well as on her return flight to Tunisia. In Cairo she was unable to inform friends or colleagues of her situation once her phone was taken. She was not offered any food or drink, managing to get food only after she paid a member of the janitorial staff to purchase it for her. Every time she used the bathroom she was accompanied by a security official who waited for her outside the door, and to add insult to injury, an Egyptian security official accompanied Dr. Grami on the return flight to Tunisia and would not leave until Tunisian security forces in Carthage International Airport had signed a form attesting that they had "received the detainee."

Dr. Grami reports that her repeated questions about why she was not being allowed to enter Egypt were ignored until she threatened that if she was not given an explanation, upon her deportation to Tunisia she would return directly to Egypt at her own expense and try to enter again. Her interrogator responded that she would not return to Egypt again as she was a "threat to national security." The Egyptian government has provided no proof of this allegation, and it seems highly ironic that an internationally known scholar who has participated repeatedly in academic activities at the Library of Alexandria, and who was contributing to an intellectual effort bringing together scholars from around the Arab world to fight terrorism and extremism, would be treated as if she herself were a dangerous individual. Dr. Grami has written weekly columns in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Shorouq* since November 2012 and she has speculated that the content of her December 2015 columns may have angered the Egyptian authorities, which may be the case given that she had entered Egypt very recently without any problem.

We respectfully request that the relevant Egyptian authorities clarify why Dr. Grami was denied entry and apologize for the deplorable treatment to which she was subjected. Her case is just the most recent in a series of acts violating academic freedom about which we have written to you over the past several years. We therefore once again ask that your government work to end state



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intervention in matters related to the free exchange of scholarly expertise and ensure that the principles of academic freedom are protected.

We await the honor of your reply.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Laurie A. Brand'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laurie A. Brand
CAF Chair
Professor, University of Southern California

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy W. Newhall'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director
Associate Professor, University of Arizona

Cc:

The Honorable Yasser Reda, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the
United States