



**Middle
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January 4, 2017

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Your Highnesses, Your Excellencies,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to strongly protest the decision of the Qatari Ministry of Interior, apparently on the basis of information provided by the government of the United Arab Emirates, to deny a student visa to Kristina Bogos and place her on a GCC-wide blacklist. Ms. Bogos is currently a graduate student at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and formerly an undergraduate student at New York University (NYU), who had spent a semester at NYU Abu Dhabi.

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.

Ms. Bogos studies labor and migration, with a special focus on the treatment of migrant workers in states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. She had planned to conduct research in Qatar for her Master's thesis during the fall 2016 semester, while based at Georgetown University's Doha campus as an official matriculated

student. When she arrived at the Doha airport in June 2016, she was initially denied entry but was eventually granted a 30-day tourist visa. In August, however, her application for a student visa was denied. There appears to be good reason to suspect that Ms. Bogos was placed on a GCC blacklist because of her proposed research topic and because, while studying abroad as an undergraduate student at NYU Abu Dhabi in fall 2013 and winter 2014, she had voiced criticism of the conditions to which workers involved in building that institution's new campus on Saadiyat Island were being subjected. Furthermore, Ms. Bogos' personal email account was hacked in April 2016, after which she received unsigned email messages informing her that UAE authorities had "warned" the Qatari authorities about her. As Ms. Bogos put it in an op-ed piece published in the *New York Times* on December 15, 2016, "Qatari immigration officers informed me that my name appeared on a 'blacklist' maintained by member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council because I had 'made trouble' in the U.A.E. Later, Emirati officials told the State Department that they had placed me on the blacklist for unspecified 'security-related reasons.'"

Refusal to provide Ms. Bogos a student visa, apparently on the grounds of her research topic and/or positions she has taken regarding labor and migration in the Gulf, is a clear violation of academic freedom. Furthermore, that this decision was taken on the basis of information provided by the United Arab Emirates suggests that there is regional coordination to blacklist certain individuals from pursuing their scholarship on and in GCC states. We regard such refusals to grant visas to scholars and students, and the compilation and use of blacklists apparently shared among the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as blatant violations of the principles of academic freedom. Equally troubling are practices such as regional coordination to follow individuals and/or enforce denial of entry to certain individuals, as well as cyberspying and bullying.

Moreover, this is, unfortunately, not the first time that an infringement upon the academic freedom of a foreign scholar pursuing research in the GCC has been reported. Indeed, we wrote to the UAE Minister of the Interior (March 25, 2015) when Professor Andrew Ross of New York University was denied entry into Abu Dhabi.

We are, therefore, extremely concerned that these actions on the part of the Qatari and Emirati governments relative to Ms. Kristina Bogos, following upon the earlier treatment by the UAE authorities of Professor Andrew Ross, suggest a new, and dangerous pattern -- one that threatens not only the universal human right to freedom of movement as stated in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also academic freedom. Academic institutions are built on a foundation upholding academic freedom and protecting scholarly inquiry. To attack this foundation is to threaten the entire enterprise of universities in the Gulf. We are worried about the future of research in Qatar and the UAE that may be deemed critical or controversial.

In order to protect the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech, and to uphold international law pertaining to the movement of persons and freedom of mobility, we appeal to you to rescind the Interior Ministry's decision to deny a visa to Kristina Bogos and lift the ban on her visits to and work in Qatar. We further call



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upon you to desist -- both independently and collectively -- from creating blacklists of students and scholars who are to be denied entry to Qatar, the UAE (and presumably other GCC states) for political reasons. More broadly, we urge you to affirm your commitment to academic freedom and the freedom of students and scholars to pursue their scholarship in your countries without impediments or harassment of any type.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'B. Baron' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy W. Newhall' in a cursive style.

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

cc:

HE Mohammed bin Jaham Al-Kuwari, Ambassador of Qatar to the United States
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HE Yusef Al Otaiba, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the United States
(fax 202-243-2432)