

**Middle
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14 August 2019

His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
President, Arab Republic of Egypt
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Dr. Khaled Abdel Ghaffar
Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Fax: +20-2-2794-1005

Your Excellencies President al-Sisi and Dr. Abdel Ghaffar:

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to request that the Egyptian government end all probationary measures placed on Walid Khalil el-Sayed Salem, a University of Washington Ph.D. student arrested in May 2018 while conducting dissertation research. Mr. Salem was released from detention on 11 December 2018; while he was not formally charged with any crime, significant restrictions have been placed on his activities, including a ban on leaving Egypt. This travel ban has prevented Mr. Salem from seeing his 11-year old daughter, who lives with her mother in Poland, and has seriously compromised his ability to complete his Ph.D. and continue his professional life.

MESA was founded in 1966 to support 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 over 2500 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.

Mr. Salem is writing a Ph.D. dissertation in political science on the topic of the Egyptian judiciary. He began his dissertation fieldwork in Cairo in September 2017 and was affiliated with the American University in Cairo as a research fellow during this period. He disappeared on 23 May 2018. On 27 May, Mr. Salem appeared before the Supreme State Security Court, at which point he was ordered detained for 15 days. His detention was continually renewed until his release on 11 December 2018.

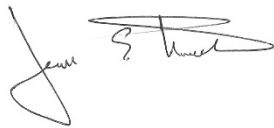
Mr. Salem has not been formally charged with any crime, but since his release he has been subjected to several probationary measures. He is required to report to both a police station twice a week for two hours and a state security office once each week. He was also told that he was not allowed to leave the country. As Mr. Salem had been living outside of Egypt for twelve years before his September 2017 return to conduct fieldwork, legal restrictions requiring him to remain in Egypt constitute a severe disruption to his life. Most urgently, the travel ban prevents him from seeing his daughter; it also hinders his ability to complete his Ph.D. and pursue an academic career.

The Egyptian government has provided no evidence that Mr. Salem has committed a crime; rather, it appears that suspicions about the nature and purpose of his research on the judiciary prompted his arrest and detention. We first wrote to you about Mr. Salem on [6 July 2018](#) to request that he be released from detention. In that letter we explained that Mr. Salem's research, and particularly the conduct of interviews to inform his conclusions, are standard academic practice that should not arouse suspicion. As we noted:

“Mr. Salem's research examines how judges and lawyers in Egypt interact with each other and with other state offices...(it is) based on interviews with judges and lawyers as well as coverage of their activities in the media and examination of relevant archives. Such methods are essential for a scholar to achieve an accurate understanding of how judges and lawyers behave. ...(such) interviews (are) a central part of most doctoral and post-doctoral research conducted in universities throughout the world. Students in universities in the United States and Europe are encouraged to learn directly from the countries they study rather than rely on sources outside that country. There is no motivation for Mr. Salem's work other than conducting research of the highest accuracy and quality that will shed light on the development of the Egyptian judiciary.”

Mr. Salem's work on the Egyptian judiciary is in keeping with a long tradition of scholarship on the subject that goes back decades, by both Egyptian and non-Egyptian scholars. It constitutes no threat to Egypt's interests; on the contrary, it is likely to draw further scholarly attention to the pre-eminent role of Egyptian legal thought and institutions in the development of jurisprudence throughout the Arab world. We request that you remove all probationary measures on Mr. Salem and allow him to freely work and travel in and outside of Egypt.

We await your response,



Judith E. Tucker
MESA President
Professor, Georgetown University



Re: End probationary measures on PhD student Walid Salem

14 August 2019

Page 3

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', is written in a cursive style.

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor, University of Southern California

cc:

Ambassador Frank Ricciardone, President of the American University of
Cairo (president@aucegypt.edu)

Dr. Ehab Abdel-Rahman, Provost of the American University in Cairo
(provost@aucegypt.edu)

The Honorable Yasser Reda, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt
to the United States (fax # 202-244-4319)

His Excellency Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees, Permanent
Representative of Egypt to the United Nations (fax # 212-949-5999)