



**Middle
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11 February 2020

His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
President, Arab Republic of Egypt
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His Excellency Sameh Shoukry
Minister of Foreign Affairs
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Major-General Mahmoud Tawfik
Minister of the Interior
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Your Excellencies President al-Sisi and Minister Shoukry, and Major-General Tawfik:

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to urge you to cooperate with the newly-announced Italian parliamentary investigation of the kidnapping, torture, and killing of Italian graduate student Giulio Regeni in Cairo in February 2016. It is hoped that this investigation will finally bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice. The leaders of the Italian parliament, joined by a large segment of the Italian media and public, have insisted that 2020 should be the year when the identities of those responsible for Regeni's murder, as well as the details leading up to and surrounding the crime, are made clear.

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 over 2,700 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.

The circumstances of Giulio Regeni's ordeal are well-known. A D.Phil. candidate at the University of Cambridge, he was engaged in research for his dissertation on Egyptian trade unions. His research included oral interviews with Egyptian labor activists. He disappeared from Cairo's Dokki neighborhood on 25 January 2016; nine days later, on 4 February 2016, his body was found on the side of the Cairo-Alexandria highway, showing signs of extensive and prolonged torture.

From the time that investigation of Mr. Regeni's murder commenced, in February 2016, Egyptian authorities have failed to cooperate with their Italian counterparts

and obstructed a thorough and transparent inquiry. Egyptian forensics experts performed an autopsy on Mr. Regeni's body with no Italian officials present. In March 2016, the Egyptian government attempted to place blame for the murder on civilian criminal gangs. In September 2016, however, Egypt's then-Attorney General revealed that Mr. Regeni had been placed under police surveillance in the weeks before his death after a police informant relayed suspicions to the security forces that Mr. Regeni was a spy. In May 2018, after failing for months to respond to Italian requests for closed-circuit television footage of the Cairo metro on the night Mr. Regeni disappeared, Egyptian authorities released footage that inexplicably contained significant gaps.

In November 2018, Italian authorities named five members of the Egyptian security forces whom they suspected of involvement in the murder and launched an official investigation of these men; Egypt's state information service rejected the investigation and claimed not to recognize "the record of suspects." In May 2019, the Italian authorities obtained new evidence of the Egyptian security forces' involvement in Regeni's murder: an unidentified source testified that he had overheard an Egyptian intelligence agent explaining that the security forces kidnapped Regeni because they believed him to be a British spy. Although Italian authorities reported this finding to the Egyptian government, the Italian prosecution team never received a response to their disclosure.

We wrote to you on 10 July 2019 urging you to investigate both these pieces of new information related to the Regeni case, yet never received a response. On the contrary, the Egyptian government has continued to obstruct a transparent investigation. Indeed, the Non-Governmental Organization known as the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, whose lawyers serve as the legal counsel in Egypt for the Regeni family, reports that its offices have been repeatedly raided and members of its staff detained by Egyptian security forces. The Egyptian authorities' unresponsiveness, obstruction, and intimidation obviously constitute an obstacle to the conduct of a thorough investigation and increase the possibility that the true perpetrators of this crime will never be identified and brought to justice.

The Committee on Academic Freedom notes that the Regeni murder has had a chilling effect on the efforts of both Egyptian and foreign scholars who seek to conduct research in Egypt, particularly on modern and contemporary subjects, such as labor activism, that have present-day political implications. Thus, the Egyptian government's refusal, over the past four years, to cooperate with this investigation constitutes a violation of the academic freedom of scholars currently conducting research in Egypt or hoping to do so in the future.

In recent months, the European Parliament has taken up the Regeni case. On 23 October 2019, the Parliament passed a resolution condemning the "lack of a credible investigation" into the Regeni case by the Egyptian government. Roberto



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Fico, president of the lower house of the Italian parliament, also asked his counterparts in Germany and the United Kingdom to support a new Italian investigation.

We note that in the wake of a visit to Cairo by Italian investigators last month, Egyptian Attorney General Hamada al-Sawi authorized the formation of a new team to oversee Egypt's investigation of the Regeni case. We urge the Egyptian authorities to cooperate fully with the Italian authorities in bringing the full truth about this horrific tragedy to light as soon as possible. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dina Rizk Khoury', with a long, sweeping underline.

Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', with a stylized, cursive script.

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

cc: Dr. Khaled Abdel Ghaffar, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research