



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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4 November 2020

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +20-2-390-1998

Chancellor Hamada El-Sawy
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Fax: 20-2-25774716

Prime Solicitor-General Khaled Diauddin
Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +20-2-26381956

Dear President al-Sisi, Chancellor El-Sawy and Prime Solicitor-General Diauddin,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America to express our dismay at the ongoing constraints to which Walid Khalil el-Sayed Salem, a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Political Science at the University of Washington, has been subjected. Despite the cancellation last March of “probationary measures” imposed on him following his release from pre-trial detention in December 2018, Mr. Salem continues to be prevented from leaving Egypt.

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 more than 2800 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.

Our Committee wrote to you regarding Mr. Salem on two previous occasions: first, on 6 July 2018 to protest his arrest on 23 May 2018 and request that he be released from prison, and second, on 14 August 2019 to call for an end to the probationary measures imposed on him from the time of his release from pre-trial detention. We were pleased to learn, in March 2020, that those measures had been lifted. Indeed, Mr. Salem was never formally charged with a crime; and his dissertation supervisors – university professors of stature – attested to the academic rigor of his project and the related field research that he was conducting in Egypt.

It was, therefore, with some consternation that we learned that, despite the lifting of those probationary measures last winter, Mr. Salem was prevented from boarding a flight to the United States on 8 May 2020. At the airport in Cairo, after his passport had been stamped, he was asked to step aside. He was then informed that he would not be allowed to travel and his passport was confiscated. At a State Security office the following day, he was told to expect a telephone call to return to the office to pick up his passport. That call never came and now, almost six months later, he remains in Cairo, unable to travel.



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This *de facto* travel ban has had grave ramifications for Mr. Salem, both personally and professionally. For more than twelve years, he had been living outside Egypt, five of those years in the United States. His incarceration, followed by the probationary measures and the ongoing travel ban, have meant that he has not seen his daughter for almost three years! Furthermore, the extreme upset to his life from the time of his detention until today has negatively impacted his ability to conduct his doctoral research, complete his dissertation, and pursue his career.

While relations between the governments of the United States and Egypt have promoted scholarly exchange, including the conduct of research in Egypt by students and scholars affiliated with U.S.-based institutions, the mistreatment in recent years of several academics from American and European universities has discouraged the continuation of such exchange. Indeed, as long as foreign students and scholars face the threat of harassment and other forms of mistreatment, it is difficult for academic associations in the United States and elsewhere to promote research travel to Egypt. This situation is unfortunate for all those involved.

We appeal to you to restore to Walid Khalil el-Sayed Salem his right to his passport and to travel freely, and allow him to be reunited with his daughter, return to his doctoral program in Seattle, Washington and pursue his professional life.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter. We await your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dina Rizk Khoury', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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:

Yasser Reda, Ambassador, Embassy of Egypt, Washington, D.C.
David Schenker, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs,
Department of State, Washington, D.C.
Jonathan R, Cohen, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy, Cairo, Egypt