



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

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17 March 2021

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202-390-1998

Prime Solicitor-General Khaled Diauddin
Supreme State Security Prosecution in the Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202-2638-1956

Public Prosecutor, Hamada El-Sawy
Office of the Public Prosecutor
Fax: +202-2577-4716
Twitter: @EgyptJustice

Dear President al-Sisi, Prime Solicitor-General Diauddin, and Public
Prosecutor El-Sawy:

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America to express our profound concern regarding the intimidation of Egyptian activists living abroad by targeting their Egypt-based family members. Among the escalating number of such cases, that of Taqadum Al-Khatib is especially disturbing. Al-Khatib, who served in the National Association for Change in Egypt from 2010 to 2013, was a doctoral student at the Free University of Berlin from 2014 until 2019 and a post-doctoral scholar at the same university between 2019 and 2020. In Berlin, Al-Khatib has encountered harassment and intimidation by representatives of the Egyptian government on several occasions. Recently, his family's home in Egypt was raided and his father, questioned.

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 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.

In a public statement dated 10 February 2021, Al-Khatib revealed that National Security Agency officers raided his family home in Egypt's Luxor governorate at dawn on that day. During the raid, officers asked his parents a variety of questions related to his work, activities and address in Germany, and his visits to Egypt. After questioning Al-Khatib's elderly father, the ranking officer seized his phone, took photos of his parents' identification documents, and confiscated various documents and photographs belonging to Al-Khatib and his parents. Until now, the police have neither apologized for the incident, nor returned the items taken from Al-Khatib's family residence.

As Egyptian government repression of students, scholars and rights activists intensifies at an alarming rate, we are especially troubled by what appears as a worsening trend, reflected in Taqadum al-Khatib's case, whereby Egyptian authorities target Egyptian scholars abroad and retaliate against their families at home in an effort to intimidate and thereby repress academic freedom and



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freedom of expression. We have written to you repeatedly over the past several years regarding cases involving Egyptian scholars working or studying in academic institutions in the U.S. and Europe who were detained during visits to Egypt [see, among others, [22 February 2021](#), [18 February 2021](#), [4 November 2020](#), [25 February 2020](#), [14 August 2019](#), [6 July 2018](#)]. A recent [statement](#) published by Human Rights Watch and signed by 22 international human rights organizations recognizes that same trend more broadly. Since August 2020, the statement reports, Egyptian authorities have targeted the families of four activists who reside in the United States, and at least one activist in each of the following countries: Turkey, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

The pressures to which Taqadum Al-Khatib has been subjected through the pursuit of his family are a violation of the 2014 Egyptian Constitution's Article 65, which guarantees freedom of speech and freedom in all means of expression and publications, and of Article 23, which provides for the freedom of scientific research. We call on the Egyptian authorities to investigate the recent harassment of Dr. Al-Khatib's family members in Egypt. We urge you, as well, to investigate other similar cases of harassment abroad of Egyptian scholars and students and intimidation of their families in Egypt, and put an immediate stop to such unjust practices.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter. We look forward to receiving 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:

Motaz Zahran, Ambassador, Embassy of Egypt, Washington, D.C.
Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees, Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations
The Honorable Verónica Michelle Bachelet Jeria, The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
The Honorable Mary Lawlor, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders



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Maria Arena, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer for the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament

Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Irene Khan, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Joey Hood, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Department of State, United States Government

Philip McDaniel, Foreign Policy Advisor: Congressman Tom Malinowski (NJ-7), Member of Egypt Human Rights Caucus

Nancy Chen, Legislative Fellow: Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA), Member of Egypt Human Rights Caucus