



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

3542 N Geronimo Ave
Tucson AZ 85705 USA

tel 520-333-2577
fax 520-207-3166
caf@mesana.org
www.mesana.org



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Dr. John J. DeGioia
President, Georgetown University
via fax: (202) 687-6660

Dr. Andrew Hamilton
President, New York University
via email: andrew.hamilton@nyu.edu

Dear Presidents DeGoia and Hamilton:

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to urge you to exercise your responsibilities as university leaders in connection with the recent decision by the Qatari authorities to deny a student visa to Kristina Bogos, currently a graduate student at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service and formerly an undergraduate student at New York University who spent a semester at NYU Abu Dhabi. The decision to deny Ms. Bogos a student visa, and indications that information provided to Qatar by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) played a part in that denial, call into question your universities' ability to ensure the academic freedom of faculty, students and staff based, or planning to teach or conduct research, at your affiliated academic institutions in these two countries.

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 3000 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 is a graduate student at Georgetown University whose research focuses on the treatment of migrant workers in the Gulf. She had planned to conduct research for her M.A. thesis while based at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service in Qatar in the fall of 2016. After being denied entry at the airport in Doha in June 2016, Ms. Bogos was subsequently allowed to enter Qatar on a tourist visa, which required that she leave the country every 30 days; her application for a student visa was denied in August 2016. 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.'"

We further note that 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 in a study abroad program at NYU Abu Dhabi she had voiced criticism of the conditions to which workers involved in building that institution's new campus on Saadiyat Island were being subjected. Ms. Bogos' personal email account was hacked in April 2016, soon after she sought Georgetown's approval for her research in Qatar, after which she received unsigned email messages informing her that UAE authorities had "warned" the Qatari authorities about her. While in Qatar during the

summer, Ms. Bogos' movements were followed, presumably by agents of the Qatari state. Upon her return to Washington, D.C. in fall 2016, Ms. Bogos informed the dean of Georgetown's School of Foreign Service in Washington, D.C. about her concerns. He told her that he would raise these issues with the Qatari authorities, but he also argued that hers was a case of national sovereignty, not academic freedom, and that the university could not guarantee freedom of movement for its students. It is not clear, therefore, what, if anything, the dean and his counterparts at Georgetown Qatar did to address the issue, and she has received no further word from the university.

We regard such refusals to grant visas to scholars and students, the compilation and use of blacklists apparently shared among the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the surveillance of student researchers, to be blatant violations of the principles of academic freedom to which you as university presidents, and the institutions which you lead, profess to be committed. Such actions, and Georgetown's failure to respond effectively to the hacking of Ms. Bogos' email, raise serious doubts about the viability of the educational mission which your institutions in the Gulf are supposed to further. They also violate the fundamental right to movement and mobility guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We therefore call on President DeGioia to publicly condemn the decision of the Qatari authorities to deny a student visa to Ms. Bogos and take steps to ensure that she be able to return to Qatar in the future. We also call on President Hamilton to exert efforts with the UAE authorities to lift the travel ban on Ms. Bogos. We further call on both of you to denounce the hacking of private e-mails belonging to members of the academic community, as well as the compilation by the UAE, Qatar and (presumably) other GCC member states of blacklists of students and scholars who are to be denied entry for political reasons.

More broadly, we call on both of you to vigorously reaffirm your commitment to academic freedom and to do all that you can to ensure that scholars and students, whether or not affiliated with Georgetown or NYU, can pursue their scholarly and educational work without obstruction or harassment (including cyberspying) in Qatar, the UAE and wherever else your two universities operate.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'B. Baron'.

Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York

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

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