



**Middle
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Committee on
Academic Freedom

April 17, 2019

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern and dismay over the U.S. government's decision to deny Omar Barghouti entry to the United States, despite his holding a valid visa. Mr. Barghouti had been invited to the United States by the Arab American Institute for a speaking tour, to engage with journalists and to participate in educational programs; after his speaking tour he was to attend his daughter's wedding. We regard the denial of entry to Mr. Barghouti as he was about to board his flight to the United States as a politically motivated attack on the right of Americans to hear and engage with the full range of perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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 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. Barghouti is a prominent Palestinian activist and co-founder of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. He had been invited to speak at New York University and at Harvard University, and to meet with leading policy makers and journalists, including a public discussion with the respected American Jewish journalist Peter Beinart. Barring Mr. Barghouti from entering the United States deprives university students and faculty, as well as members of the general public, of an opportunity to directly engage with a well-qualified speaker on an issue of major public interest. Excluding Mr. Barghouti from the United States also violates his right to travel without unreasonable impediment, a decision apparently made because the U.S. government does not like his political views.

We note that in the past the Israeli government has restricted Mr. Barghouti's ability to exit and enter Israel by refusing to renew his travel document. On 7 February 2019 Amnesty International called on Israel to "end the arbitrary travel ban on human rights defender Omar Barghouti." He was subsequently issued an Israeli travel document, and he already possessed a U.S. visa valid through January 2021. Nonetheless, when Mr. Barghouti arrived at Ben Gurion Airport for his flight to the United States on 10 April 2019 airline staff informed him that the U.S. Consulate in Tel Aviv had been directed by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to ban him from traveling to the United States. He was not provided any explanation for this decision beyond the statement that it was an "immigration matter."

We do not believe that this or any other administration should ban people from entering the United States on ideological grounds, thereby preventing Americans from hearing views the government dislikes. The denial of entry to Mr. Barghouti is



Re: Denial of entry to Omar Barghouti
April 17, 2019
Page 2

an act of political censorship and a dangerous violation of Americans' First Amendment rights. It also undermines the principles of academic freedom, since faculty and students at several of this country's institutions of higher education have thereby been prevented from access to the full range of viewpoints on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We therefore call on you to immediately revoke the ban on Mr. Barghouti's entry to the United States and permit his entry. We further urge you to refrain from, and publicly oppose, banning anyone from entering the United States simply because of their political views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written over a horizontal line.

Judith E. Tucker
MESA President
Professor, Georgetown University

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

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