



**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



May 22, 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 dismay over the State Department's decision to deny Dr. Hanan Ashrawi a visa to enter the United States. Dr. Ashrawi travels to the United States regularly to visit family as well to speak about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at university and college campuses and elsewhere. She has never been refused a visa in the past. This decision to deny her permission to enter the country follows the State Department's recent refusal to allow Palestinian activist Omar Barghouti to enter the United States, despite his being in possession of a valid entry visa. We are concerned that the decision to block the entry of these two prominent Palestinians constitutes an attempt to silence voices with which the current administration disagrees, and thereby infringes the right of Americans to hear a broad range of perspectives on issues of public concern.

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.

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi has had a long and distinguished career as a political leader, a scholar and an advocate for peace. She is currently a member of the Palestinian National Council and serves on the executive committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, where she heads the Department of Culture and Information. Between 1996 and 1998 Dr. Ashrawi served as the Palestinian Authority's Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Before entering politics she was the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Birzeit University, where she also taught for many years. Finally, Dr. Ashrawi has worked tirelessly as an advocate for peace and justice. She has founded a number of organizations to further this cause, among them the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, and the Coalition for Accountability and Integrity. Her advocacy and her service to the Palestinian people and to the cause of peace and justice have won for her many awards and honors, among them the French "Officier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur," the Mahatma Gandhi International Award for Peace and Reconciliation, the Sydney Peace Prize, and the Olof Palme Prize. Eleven universities in the United States, Canada, Europe and the Arab world have awarded her honorary doctorates.



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We are concerned that the denial of a visa to Dr. Ashrawi is intended to limit the range of political perspectives to which Americans have access and thus constitutes an officially sanctioned act of political censorship as well as a dangerous violation of Americans' First Amendment rights. Given that Dr. Ashrawi had been invited to speak on college campuses on this visit, it also threatens the principles of academic freedom. Dr. Ashrawi is a vocal advocate for Palestinian rights, but we do not believe that this or any other administration should ban people from entering the United States on ideological grounds or to further its political agenda. We do not see any legitimate reason that Americans, including faculty, students and staff at our institutions of higher education, should be prevented from hearing her views and making up their own minds about them.

We therefore call on you to immediately grant Dr. Ashrawi a visa so that she can continue to enter the United States, see her family and share her perspectives. We further urge you to refrain from, and publicly oppose, preventing anyone from entering the United States simply because of their political views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue 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