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25 February 2020

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 bar Dr. Eyal Weizman from entering the United States. We regard the denial of entry to Dr. Weizman, apparently on political grounds, as an attack on the right of Americans to hear and engage with the full range of perspectives on international human rights issues, including those involving allegations of human rights violations committed by the U.S. government.

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 2700 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. Weizman is a prominent British-Israeli architect. He is the founder and director of [Forensic Architecture](#), a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he is Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures and a founding director of the university's Centre for Research Architecture. In 2019 he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy. Forensic Architecture uses modern technology to search for evidence of human rights violations. Dr. Weizman had been invited to the United States, which he has visited many times, by Miami Dade College's Museum of Art and Design (MOAD) for the opening of Forensic Architecture's first major exhibition. The MOAD exhibit includes an investigation into a CIA drone strike in Pakistan that was presented to the United Nations General Assembly by a Special Rapporteur; an analysis of the killing by the Chicago police of a barber that led to an investigation by the mayor and the city's police department; and an inquiry into Israel's 2014 bombardment of the city of Rafah in Gaza that contributed to the decision of the prosecutor at the International Criminal Court to open an investigation into possible Israeli war crimes.

After the opening of the MOAD exhibition, Dr. Weizman planned to travel with his wife, Dr. Ines Weizman, a professor of architecture theory at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar in Germany, and their children, who had left London one day before he was scheduled to depart. Upon arrival at JFK airport in New York, Dr. Ines Weizman was separated from their daughters and questioned for two and a half hours before being allowed to enter the United States. On 12 February 2020, two days before Dr. Weizman was to depart London, he received an email message from the U.S. Embassy there informing him that the visa waiver which



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he would normally have enjoyed had been revoked and that he would not be allowed to enter the United States. When he went to the embassy to apply for a visa, an interviewer told him that an algorithm had identified him as a security threat, because of people he had interacted with, places to which he had traveled recently or some combination of the two. Dr. Weizman was then told that he could speed up the visa application process by providing the “names of anyone in [his] network whom [he] believed might have triggered the algorithm.” This he refused to do.

Barring Dr. Weizman 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 issues of major public interest. Excluding him 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 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 Dr. Weizman is 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 Miami Dade College and members of the community have thereby been prevented from access to the full range of viewpoints on the important human rights issues with which Dr. Weizman and Forensic Architecture engage.

We therefore call on you to immediately revoke the ban on Dr. Weizman’s entry to the United States and permit his visa-free entry for future visits. We further urge you to refrain from, and publicly oppose, banning anyone from entering the United States simply because of their political views.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dina Rizk Khoury', with a long, sweeping underline.

Dina Rizk Khoury
MESA President
Professor, George Washington University

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

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