



**Middle  
East  
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13 June 2022

Karol V. Mason  
President,  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
City University of New York  
president@jj.cuny.edu

Dear President Mason:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern over the John Jay College of Criminal Justice administration's cancellation of the Palestine Lives Conference, scheduled for 14 May 2022. This event had been organized by the college's Student Council and a student group, John Jay Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). This decision on the part of your administration violates widely accepted principles of academic freedom, embodied for example in the [Statement on Academic Freedom](#) issued by the University Faculty Senate of the City University of New York (CUNY), which represents John Jay College faculty.

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 2,800 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.

The John Jay College administration apparently told conference organizers that it cancelled the event because the organizers had not met all requirements for planning campus events. However, in a [statement](#) jointly issued by the John Jay Student Council and SJP the organizers contend that they complied with all administrative deadlines and procedures, and express their belief that the administration actually cancelled the conference because of its subject matter.

We are unaware of any detailed public statement from the John Jay administration regarding the cancellation of this conference. However, the sequence of events leading up to the cancellation suggests that the administration unfairly singled out this event by invoking a variety of procedural requirements which the organizers were willing to address and seem to have met. Moreover, we note that the decision to cancel this conference comes at a time when academic institutions are under strong pressure from political groups based outside of academia to suppress the free and open exchange of opinions on a variety of issues, including critical discussion of Israeli government policies regarding Palestinian rights.

The decision to cancel the event thus appears to be a serious violation of academic freedom, which CUNY and its faculty have pledged to uphold. We therefore call on you to provide a full and immediate explanation of why your administration cancelled this conference. More broadly, we urge you to publicly reaffirm your commitment to academic freedom at John Jay College and to ensure that, in the future, student-organized events involving topics some may



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deem controversial will be allowed to take place. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Eve M. Troutt Powell'.

Eve Troutt Powell  
MESA President  
Professor, University of Pennsylvania

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Laurie Brand'.

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

cc:  
Félix V. Matos Rodríguez  
Chancellor and University Provost,  
City University of New York  
chancellor@cuny.edu