



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

1957 E Street NW, Suite 401  
Washington, DC 20052

Phone 520-333-2577  
Fax 520-207-3166  
caf@mesana.org  
mesana.org



10 January 2023

Martha E. Pollack  
President, Cornell University  
[president@cornell.edu](mailto:president@cornell.edu)

Dear President Pollack:

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 way in which Cornell University has responded to the apparent break-in and vandalizing, in September 2022, of the office of Assistant Professor Samia Henni, a member of the Department of Architecture in Cornell's College of Art, Architecture and Planning. Institutions of higher education have an obligation to vigorously defend the academic freedom of their faculty and to thoroughly investigate instances in which the persons and property of faculty members have been threatened or violated. Cornell appears not to have fulfilled this obligation with regard to Professor Henni.

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 2,400 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.

It is our understanding that Professor Henni has been targeted, on social media and in emails, for her advocacy of Palestinian rights and her criticism of Israel. Given this, the vandalizing of her office should have evoked strong concerns on Cornell's part and led it to conduct a thorough investigation of this incident, the results of which should have been shared with Professor Henni as the investigation proceeded. Instead, Professor Henni was unable to obtain any information from the Cornell University Police Department about the ongoing investigation, and she regards the administration's statement of 15 December 2022 about the outcome of its investigation – issued after three months of silence – as implausible and unacceptable.

We find it understandable that Professor Henni, and other Cornell faculty, have concluded that your university has failed to conduct the thorough, transparent and effective investigation that this incident warranted. We therefore urge your administration to re-open the investigation, in full and transparent consultation with Professor Henni and other concerned faculty, and to publicly express its strong commitment to protect the academic freedom and personal safety of Professor Henni and of all Cornell faculty, staff and students.



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 A. Brand'.

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

cc:

Michael I. Kotlikoff, Provost, Cornell University, [provost@cornell.edu](mailto:provost@cornell.edu)

J. Meejin Yoon, Dean, College of Architecture, Art and Planning, Cornell University, [aapdean@cornell.edu](mailto:aapdean@cornell.edu)