



**Middle
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19 October 2023

Minouche Shafik
President, Columbia University
New York NY
officeofthepresident@columbia.edu

Dear President Shafiq,

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern about the campaign of threats and intimidation launched against Professor Joseph Massad after the publication of an [article](#) on the ongoing Israel-Gaza war. Particularly in these fraught times, university leadership has a heightened responsibility to protect all members of the campus community. Your failure to speak out in defense of Prof. Massad in the face of the various attempts to silence him – including a death threat – is a severe abdication of professional and academic responsibility. It sends the message, whether intended or not, that you countenance the ongoing threats to him, and by extension to potentially any other members of the campus community who may voice similar positions.

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 prestigious *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 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 outside of North America.

Joseph Massad is a scholar of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History, as well as a public intellectual who regularly publishes on the question of Palestine in its many aspects. It is a sad commentary on the state of academic freedom at Columbia University that the current attacks, including a petition circulating calling for his dismissal, are only the most recent in what has been a series of attempts over the years undertaken by campus and off-campus groups to remove Professor Massad from the classroom and silence him for his writings on Palestine.

Whether or not one shares Massad's perspective on recent events in the current war, your failure to speak out forcefully in defense of a member of the university faculty sends a chilling message to all -- faculty, students and staff—that either the protection of academic freedom is not a cornerstone of your presidency or that you implicitly countenance the ongoing harassment and threats.



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This country's institutions of higher education should be places in which even the most controversial and unpopular views can be expressed, debated and criticized. We therefore strongly endorse the [call](#) of Professor Massad's Columbia University colleagues and students for an investigation into and accountability regarding the death threat that he received under his office door, as well as other death threats he has received by phone and e-mail. We also call upon you to issue a statement to the entire campus of unequivocal support for the academic freedom of Dr. Massad as well as for that of all other members of the campus community.

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