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7 May 2024

Dr. Andrew Martin Chancellor, Washington University in St. Louis admartin@wustl.edu

Dr. Beverly Wendland Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Washington University in St. Louis bwendland@wustl.edu

Brent Feig Director of Law Enforcement Operations, Washington University in St. Louis bfeig@wustl.edu

Dear Chancellor Martin, Provost Wendland, and Mr. Feig:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our shock and revulsion at the brutalization by the police of Professor Steve Tamari of nearby Southern Illinois University Edwardsville as he peacefully participated in a protest for Palestinian rights on the Washington University in St. Louis (WU) campus on 27 April 2024. We also register our deep concern over the suspension of six of your faculty members for alleged participation in the same protest, as well as the arrest and suspension of many of your students.

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 North America and elsewhere.

On 27 April 2024 Professor Tamari was documenting police arrests of activists at a student encampment supporting Palestinian rights and calling on Washington University to sever its relationship with Boeing because it supplies weapons systems to Israel. Without provocation, several police officers violently attacked Professor Tamari, resulting in his hospitalization with nine broken ribs and a broken hand; he will need surgery to repair the damage to his hand.

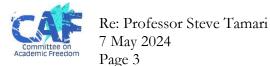


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Your decision to call in the police to break up the encampment, resulting in the severe injuries to Professor Tamari as well as numerous arrests and suspensions, came despite ongoing attempts to resolve the situation peacefully. Dr. Megan-Ellyia Green, the president of the St. Louis Board of Aldermen and an adjunct professor at your university's Brown School of Social Work, noted in an 28 April 2024 Facebook post that student organizers had asked her and Alderwoman Alisha Sonnier to intercede to open communications with WU leadership. Dr. Green wrote that "we approached the police line to ask to speak with the vice chancellor who was on the other side of the police line, only to be threatened with arrest." They were later able to speak with the vice chancellor and told him that the students wanted to communicate with the administration. The vice chancellor indicated that he would report the students' request to his colleagues in the administration; however, police arrived 15 minutes later and began to make arrests, in many cases using excessive force. Alderwoman Green noted that members of six different police departments were present on campus that day.

In a week that witnessed police attacks on faculty and students at peaceful protests at campuses around the country, the violence inflicted on Professor Tamari stands out as by far the most grievous that we have heard about. Moreover, your administration's sanctioning of several of your own professors was similarly called out as exceptionally harsh. For example, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* noted on 30 April 2024 that "while professors have been arrested or disciplined at a handful of other colleges, including Emory, New York and Indiana Universities....the number of professors involved and the severity of the punishment at Washington University stands out." Six WU professors have been placed on paid administrative leave and forbidden from contacting students.

Several of the suspended faculty have contested the allegations leading to their suspension. Two of them have been accused of using their swipe cards to facilitate the entry into university buildings of people unauthorized to be there; they contend that they entered campus buildings that were unlocked to use the bathroom. Another faculty member, accused of helping to set up the student encampment, insists that he had never joined it but only participated in a march before it was erected; he asserts that he was arrested while filming Professor Tamari's brutalization. In its 30 April 2024 article the *Chronicle of Higher Education* quoted a statement by the executive committee of Washington University's chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) declaring that it "defends the right of faculty to due process, and has not seen that our suspended colleagues' actions threatened the community in any way that required emergency exception to that process."



The brutalization of Professor Tamari is inexcusable, and your administration's decision to call in the police even as city leaders were trying to mediate cannot be justified. We remind you of the <u>statement</u> on "Academic Freedom in Times of War" issued by the AAUP on 24 October 2023, which is directly relevant to your decision to have members of WU's student body and faculty arrested and disciplined:

It is in tumultuous times that colleges' and universities' stated commitments to protect academic freedom are most put to the test. As the Israel-Hamas war rages and campus protests proliferate, institutional authorities must refrain from sanctioning faculty members for expressing politically controversial views and should instead defend their right, under principles of academic freedom, to do so.

We therefore call on you to issue an immediate apology to Professor Tamari for the severe injuries that the police inflicted on him and offer to assist him should he choose to pursue legal action. We also call on you to immediately rescind the suspensions of your faculty and students, and to seek the dismissal of criminal charges against all those arrested for peacefully protesting. At the same time, we urge you to review all disciplinary measures and procedures taken against them to ensure that they are in conformity with longstanding university policies and the right to due process. We further ask you to refrain from adopting any policy, or taking any measure, which is likely to exert a chilling effect on the right or ability of students, faculty and staff to freely express their opinions on matters of public concern and to advocate for whatever cause they wish. Finally, we urge you to publicly and forcefully reaffirm your commitment to respect and defend the free speech rights and the academic freedom of your faculty, students and staff, and to fully protect the safety and well-being of all members of your campus community.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Aslı Ü. Bâli MESA President

Professor, Yale Law School

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Jani O. Bul

Laurie Brand

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

Cc:

Dr. Dennis Barbour, Chair, Faculty Senate Cecilia Hanan Reyes, manager of the Faculty Senate