



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

**Headquarters & Secretariat**

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30 April 2026

Robert J. Jones  
President, University of Washington  
[president@uw.edu](mailto:president@uw.edu)

Tricia Serio  
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs  
University of Washington  
[rachelno@uw.edu](mailto:rachelno@uw.edu)

Professor Daniel Hoffman  
Director, Jackson School for International Studies  
University of Washington  
[djh13@uw.edu](mailto:djh13@uw.edu)

Dear President Jones, Provost Serio and Professor Hoffman:

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 decision of the University of Washington (UW) to remove Associate Professor Aria Fani, who holds the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Professorship in Persian and Iranian Studies, from his position as director of the Middle East Center at the University's Jackson School of International Studies. The decision to remove Professor Fani appears to have been taken in response to pressure from individuals and groups who disagreed with his opinions. This action violates Professor Fani's academic freedom and freedom of speech, but it may also be discriminatory on the basis of national origin and religion as well as the proximate cause of disability discrimination.

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.

Professor Fani has been facing a severely hostile climate at UW since at least January 2026. On 23 January 2026, he hosted a symposium entitled "[The World as Palestine,](#)" after he which he experienced



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significant doxing and harassment. The doxing campaign began with tweets (for example [here](#)) from the UW Jewish Alumni Association (UW\_JewishAlumni), followed by some 90 hostile emails that were sent to him over the course of two days. Being subjected to this harassment compelled him to submit a request on 9 February 2026 for medical leave during the spring quarter.

On 28 February 2026 the United States and Israel launched a war on Iran, Professor Fani's country of origin. He commented on the war for local news channels, about which he notified Professor Daniel Hoffman, director of UW's Jackson School of International Studies. As a precautionary measure, Professor Fani asked Professor Hoffman to remove his profile and email address from the Jackson School's website, because he feared further harassment that would worsen his health condition. Professor Hoffman apparently waited a few days to comply with this request.

On 9 March 2026 Professor Fani sent the following email message to the Middle East Center:

One of the main objectives of the Middle East Center is to offer the public nuanced and informed views of our region. Toward that end, I have answered questions that faculty and students alike have posted to me in the past 9 days. These are my views and do not reflect the diversity of opinion that exists in MEC and JSIS more broadly. Since I am on medical leave next quarter, it is important for me to share my perspective with you before the quarter concludes. Ultimately, these answers are about questions that are being ignored – yet again – in the mainstream media.

Professor Fani received numerous responses from faculty, staff, students and alumni praising his email and expressing appreciation for his interventions.

On 18 March 2026, as the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran continued, Professor Fani sent another email to the MEC listserv; at that point he had not received any messages or guidelines from Professor Hoffman or UW regarding his use of the listserv. In this message he responded to doxing from UW\_JewishAlumni on social media, described the war on Iran as a war on the Global Majority and the rules-based international order, and called Zionism a cancer that must be stopped before it overtook the planet. Shortly thereafter, Professor Hoffman texted Professor Fani, stating that "I have asked [name deleted] to make the MEC lists moderated. I can't have you posting this way in



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the list.” Professor Hoffman then emailed the listserv with the following:

The list serves that we use in our centers and programs are primarily intended to share announcements of events and to conduct administrative business for the Jackson School and for our various constituent centers and programs. In the interest of insuring that this remains the case, we will be placing all MEC lists on moderated status. There are appropriate avenues for conducting debate, expressing views and voicing concerns about the conduct of others. These lists are not that space.

On 22 March 2026 UW President Robert Jones participated in a town hall meeting on antisemitism that included noted pro-Israel radio personality Ari Hoffman, who had earlier denounced the January 2026 “The World as Palestine” symposium as antisemitic and specifically asked President Jones about it at the town hall. President Jones did not take issue with Hoffman’s allegations and stated that UW faculty needed to be better educated about hate speech.

On 27 March 2026, at approximately 6:40 a.m., Professor Hoffman texted Professor Fani and asked him to call. During the ensuing six-minute phone call Professor Hoffman told Professor Fani that he was being terminated from the directorship of the Middle East Center, less than one year into his three-year term. We regard Professor Fani’s termination as arbitrary, unjustified and a violation of the norms of academic life and faculty governance. Moreover, the disruption to Professor Fani’s work and life that his termination caused interfered with his ability to take full advantage of his medical leave, and he also feels that the stress it caused negatively affected his health. As a result, in addition to the concerns that Professor Fani’s abrupt termination raises about the infringement of his academic freedom and right to free speech, there are thus also grounds to argue that UW’s actions violate anti-discrimination protections based on disability, national origin and religion.

We therefore call on the University of Washington to immediately reinstate Professor Fani as director of the Middle East Center, to publicly denounce the defamation campaign against him and to affirm its commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech. We further call on UW to comply with federal and state anti-discrimination laws and provide Professor Fani with the necessary accommodations to maintain full participation in campus life.



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We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ussama Makdisi', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ussama Makdisi  
MESA President  
Professor, University of California, Berkeley

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written in a cursive style.

Judith E. Tucker  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor Emerita, Georgetown University

cc:

[editor@dailyuw.com](mailto:editor@dailyuw.com)

Farida Shaheed  
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education