



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

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7 November 2024

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@TnPresidency

Leila Jaffel, Minister of Justice, Tunisia
Fax: (+216) 71 568 106

Mondher Belaid, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific
Research, Tunisia,
Fax: (+216) 71 801 701; email: mes@mes.rnu.tn

Your Excellencies:

We write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our profound concern over the arbitrary arrest in Tunisia of the French citizen and doctoral student Victor Dupont as he was conducting dissertation research. We insist on his immediate release.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has close to 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and the freedom of expression both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Victor Dupont is a doctoral candidate in political science at the *Institut de recherches et d'études sur les mondes arabes et musulmans* (IREMAM) which is affiliated with the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) and the University of Aix-Marseille. He was in Tunisia to conduct doctoral research for his study of the biographies of young, unemployed graduates in the governorate of Jendouba, in the north-west. This was not his first visit to conduct his field research which is being partially financed by the European Union and had received the approval of the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education.

On Saturday, 19 October, Mr. Dupont was arrested when 18 officers forcefully entered the apartment he was renting in a suburb of Tunis. He was taken into custody by the Tunisian national guard responding to a warrant for his arrest from the military justice system that claims to suspect him of “endangering state security”. Since 21 October he



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has been detained in Mornaguia prison, where many political prisoners are currently incarcerated.

The allegations of the military tribunal regarding the involvement of Victor Dupont in illegal activities are totally lacking in credibility. His project involves scholarly research using social scientific methodology to study Tunisian society and especially its youth. It has no connection with foreign powers or foreign affairs and presents no threat whatsoever to the security of the Tunisian state. Rather, Dupont's arrest highlights the constraints on academic freedom in Tunisia today and poses a dangerous precedent for the future of social scientific investigation in the country.

Tunisia is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which protect the rights to freedom of expression and association, which are at the heart of academic freedom. Thus, we respectfully urge your government to desist from inhibiting the accumulation of knowledge through critical social scientific research '*sur le terrain*' and ensure that these vital rights are vigorously protected. Finally, we repeat our firm request that Victor Dupont be released from prison without further delay and be allowed to continue to pursue his scholarly research.

Thank you, in advance, for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ash Ü. Bâli'.

Ash Ü. Bâli
MESA President
Professor, Yale Law School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand'.

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



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Cc:

Jean-Noel Barrot, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs,
Government of France

Patrick Hetzel, Minister of Higher Education and Research,
Government of France

Anne Guéguen, Ambassador of France in Tunisia

Udo Bullmann, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on
Human Rights

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer for the Committee on Foreign Affairs
of the European Parliament

Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Fiona Knab-Lunny, Member of Cabinet of Josep Borrell, High
Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

Hannah Neumann, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament
Subcommittee on Human Rights

Raphael Glucksmann, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament
Subcommittee on Human Rights

Bernard Guetta, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament
Subcommittee on Human Rights

Christian Sagartz, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament
Subcommittee on Human Rights

Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

David McAllister, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European
Parliament

Irene Khan, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and
protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights



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