



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

**Headquarters & Secretariat**

Georgetown University  
Center for Contemporary Arab  
Studies

3700 O St. NW, ICC STE 241  
Washington DC 20057

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



16 December 2024

Linda G. Mills  
President, New York University  
linda.mills@nyu.edu

Georgina Dopico  
Provost, New York University  
georgina.dopico@nyu.edu

Dear President Mills and Provost Dopico:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our grave concern about several of your recent actions, including declaring five New York University (NYU) faculty members who were present at a peaceful pro-Palestine student demonstration to be *persona non grata* (“PNG”), which bars them from entering a number of campus buildings – in effect, suspending them. Two of the five were also arrested for trespassing by the New York City police, which you invited onto campus. Having faculty arrested, and suspending them without any reasonable investigative or disciplinary process, makes a mockery of NYU’s avowed commitment to academic freedom and to freedom of speech and assembly; it also exacerbates the climate of repression that has increasingly characterized NYU.

MESA was founded in 1966 to support 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 2800 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.

On 11 December 2024 a group of students initiated a sit-in at NYU’s Bobst Library, on an upper floor where the university administration’s offices are located; the students were calling on the university to divest from Israeli companies and institutions involved in the oppression of, or violence against, Palestinians. The following day – the last day of fall semester classes at NYU – another protest ensued in which students blocked entrances to several university buildings, including Bobst. Several faculty members were present at the protests to support the students and try to ensure their safety; as noted above, two of them were arrested and five were declared PNG.



Re: NYU Faculty  
16 December 2024  
Page 2

In a message to the NYU community on 12 December 2024 you asserted that threats had been made in the course of the protests and that “graffiti was found that directly targeted members of our community with threats of violence.” No evidence has been adduced that the faculty members who were arrested and/or declared PNG, or the protesting students, had any connection whatsoever with the graffiti. We have also been informed that interim suspensions have been imposed on a number of students, including some who did not actually participate in the protests but happened to be studying in Bobst at the time; they were apparently deemed suspicious, and subjected to investigation and/or sanction, because they had been involved in the encampments at NYU last spring. We deplore NYU’s decision to again invite the police to campus in order to arrest people for participating in peaceful protests, as it did on at least two occasions in the spring 2024 semester. NYU’s action in banning five faculty members from campus without even the semblance of due process is equally egregious and sets a very dangerous precedent. We call your attention to the [statement](#) issued on 12 December 2024 by the American Association of University Professors, which reads in part:

Declaring faculty members as persona non grata appears tantamount to a summary suspension.... The AAUP has long considered denying faculty members the right to carry out their key duties as a major sanction, second only to dismissal in severity. An administration should take such a step only after demonstrating adequate cause in an adjudicative hearing of record before an elected faculty body. No such hearing has taken place [at NYU]. These actions by NYU administrators are part of a pattern of college and university administrations responding to protests by imposing harsh and broadly chilling restrictions and sanctions. As the AAUP [warned at the start of the fall semester](#), such severe limits on speech and assembly discourage or shut down expressive activity of faculty, students, and other members of the campus community and undermine the academic freedom and freedom of speech and expression that are fundamental to higher education.

The imposition of interim suspensions on students, prior to a full and impartial investigation in conformity with generally accepted procedures, is also alarming.

Over the past fourteen months we have written repeatedly to NYU regarding threats to and violations of academic freedom and freedom of speech at the university, for example [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Regrettably, NYU continues to pay lip service to these rights while contravening them in practice. We now call on you to immediately rescind the PNG



Re: NYU Faculty  
16 December 2024  
Page 3

status of the five faculty members, do whatever you can to have any charges brought against those arrested at the protests dismissed, and lift all suspensions imposed on students outside the normal disciplinary process. More broadly, we urge you to reconsider the dangerous direction in which you are leading NYU – toward intensified suppression of academic freedom and free speech – and instead actively seek to foster a campus environment in which faculty, students and staff can exercise those freedoms without fear of arrest or arbitrary sanction.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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

Aslı Ü. Bâli  
MESA President  
Professor, Yale Law School

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

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