



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9JQ

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Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani
The Government of Iraq
Baghdad, Iraq

Sent by Email: Media.office@pmo.gov.iq

26 March 2024

Dear Mr Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani,

I write on behalf of the Academic Freedom Committee of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to express our grave concern about the ongoing detention of Princeton University PhD student Elizabeth Tsurkov and to call on you to take action to secure her release.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest national academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. It is committed to supporting academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region, both in the UK and globally.

We understand that Elizabeth Tsurkov was abducted by Kata'ib Hezbollah in Baghdad on 21 March 2023, while undertaking fieldwork for her PhD dissertation. She has spent the past year imprisoned by the group without access to communication with the outside world, making it impossible to confirm the conditions in which she is being kept. Her family have repeatedly expressed concern for her ongoing safety. In November 2023, a video was released in which Ms Tsurkov “confessed” to being a Mossad and CIA agent. This confession stands in stark contrast to Ms Tsurkov’s work as an advocate for Palestinian human rights and a critic of Israel’s occupation, thus making it highly likely that this confession was both false and coerced.

In July 2023, the Government of Iraq announced that it was launching an investigation into this matter. However, the outcome of this investigation and what steps the government has been taking to secure Ms Tsurkov’s release have not been made public. We call on you to publish the outcome of this investigation, release the information you hold regarding Ms Tsurkov’s disappearance, detail the steps you have thus far taken in response to her capture, and redouble your efforts to ensure her immediate release from captivity.

It is essential that scholars and researchers of all nationalities are able to conduct research in safety and without fear, to ensure that fundamental rights of academic freedom are upheld. Academic



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freedom is vital for the creation of knowledge and the improvement of people's lives and social conditions. We are deeply alarmed by the implications that this case has for scholars across the world, as it sends the message that conducting research in and about Iraq is unsafe.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Professor Neve Gordon

Vice President, BRISMES

On behalf of the BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom