



President of the Republic of Tunisia, Kais Saied  
Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Mondher Belaid

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12 November 2024

Your Excellencies,

We write on behalf of the Academic Freedom Committee of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES), of the Société d'études du Moyen-Orient et du monde musulman (SEMOMM) and of the Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies (SeSaMO) to express our grave concern about the ongoing detention of French national and University of Aix-Marseille PhD student Victor Dupont and call on you to secure his immediate and unconditional release.

Founded in 1973, BRISMES is the largest national academic association in Europe focused on the study of the Middle East and North Africa. SEMOMM, founded in 2014, promotes Middle Eastern and North African Studies in France and francophone countries. SeSaMO was established in 1995 and is the leading Italian association for the scholarly study of the Middle East and North Africa. Our organizations are committed to supporting academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region, both in Europe and globally.

We learnt that, alongside an unnamed friend, Victor Dupont was detained on October 19, 2024 by Tunisian authorities and has since been transferred to the military court of El Kef. Mr Dupont was in Tunisia to conduct sociological academic research on biographical and professional trajectories in Tunisia, and he had received approval from the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to undertake this research. We understand that after his arrest he was brought before a military court that alleged he posed a security threat to the state. Those with knowledge of his project have confirmed that his research presents no security risk, that the allegations made against Dupont lack both founding and credibility, and that he should have been allowed to continue unabated. We therefore condemn this extraordinary use of the military court system and demand his immediate release.

Dupont's arrest stands in direct contravention of Article 33 of the Tunisian Constitution, which states: "Academic freedoms and freedom of scientific research shall be guaranteed." Moreover, these are rights that Tunisia is legally obliged to respect. Academic freedom is protected by Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Tunisia is a state party. 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 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, both in signalling to the rest of the world that conducting research in Tunisia is unsafe, as well as contributing to a concerning trend of the Tunisian authorities criminalising voices that it perceives as dissenting.

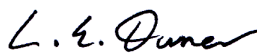
We urge you to reverse this trend and affirm your commitments to the constitutionally protected freedoms of expression, academic freedom and education, and to release Victor Dupont with immediate effect.

We await your response.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Nicola Pratt**  
BRISMES President



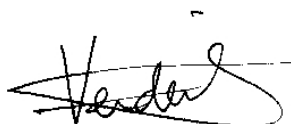
**Dr Lewis Turner**  
Chair of BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom



**Professor Rosita Di Peri**  
SeSaMO President



**Dr Maria Chiara Rioli**  
Chair of SeSaMO Committee on Academic Freedom



**Professor Eric Verdeil**  
SEMOMM President

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

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

Iliana Ivanova, European Union Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

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

Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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

Farida Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education