

The American University In Cairo Oral History Project

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Sohila Mohamed
Narrator: Soha Ali
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Place: The American University in Cairo
New Cairo Campus
In The International Program
office

College: The American University In Cairo
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My interviewee is Ms. Soha Ali; she is Program Associate at The International Program Office in the American University In Cairo. Ms. Soha Ali is from Cairo Egypt, and she is 32 years old. She graduated from the Sadat Academy 10 years ago. Ms. Soha Ali has been working in AUC for 4 years until now.

My intension was to know about how the revolution affected the international students here in Egypt, and I thought Ms. Soha Ali is very suitable for my choice to cover the information about my topic.

During the interview Ms. Soha Ali talked about the international student, why they come to Egypt, what do they study, What she thinks about the revolution and if the revolution affected the international students by any factor.

20 February 2012

Person Present: Sohila Mohamed

Soha Ali

Mohamed: What is your name?

Ali: Soha Ali Mohamed

Mohamed: Your title

Ali: Program Associate at The International Program
Office AUC

Mohamed: Your place of residency

Ali: Nasr City Cairo

Mohamed: Your Age

Ali: 32

Mohamed: Where did you graduate from?

Ali: (Laughter) Sadat Academy for Management Sciences

Mohamed: What major?

Ali: Energy and Petroleum installations

Mohamed: Why did you choose to work in AUC?

Ali: AUC [American University In Cairo] is reputable university in Egypt it has been here for like I guess 100 years; it is a contribution to the country by the level of education that they offer. As for me it was a nice job, a nice package all in all and my colleagues are nice so I like it.

Mohamed: For how many years have you worked here?

Ali: So far 4 years

Mohamed: What does the international office do?

Ali: Do you want to know about the international program office in general or just my part?

Mohamed: Both of them

Ali: Ok, the international program in general it has like three sections 1 is exchange programs, study abroad programs between AUC and other universities like we send an AUC students on exchange study abroad for a limited period of time which is a semester or a year and they come and on the other half this kind of agreement it obliges the other party which is the other universities of Egypt to send us students back

and forth. The other part is special programs which is handles not like study abroad but like special trips made by universities outside Egypt to Egypt for like a month or three weeks that they have trips to see sight seeing and some kind of intensive lectures that they want to attend to some professors, so it has different organizations. The third part which is my part is handling the advising and the registration for international students or mainly non degree students at AUC which most of them are international, it means that he is enrolled in a university back at his country and he wants to come here to experience Egypt in general and studying at Egypt and the middle east so he comes to study for a semester or a year and he goes back home to his university and the courses that he takes here are transferred back to his university as if he has been there so we have the responsibility of advising him all the course and registering him up on the system and follow up with his through academically through out the semester and or his stay whatever it is.

Mohamed: And your part?

Ali: My part mainly is the technical part, like my boss advices and do the advising communication with the student and if we need a professor's approval on something and for me its like registering and keeping track and responding on the students.

Mohamed: Is their specific course that they have to take?

Ali: No, depends on their major and what they want but most of them we have to say that they are social science students, they are interested in the middle east so what is happening in the middle east is related to politics so most of them come here to take political science class, international relations, development, some people take courses about Islam or Arab history or Christian history but mainly social science that is most required by international students.

Mohamed: What do you think about the revolution?

Ali: It had to be done (laughter) this way or another way, this time or another time it had to be done.

Mohamed: So do you think after a year we are going on the right track?

Ali: This is a very hard question to answer because... the revolution came without an appointment at this stage no body knew. We did it on the same target we want the same thing. But by time in a country as big as Egypt with the kind of routed corruption in all the country's emphasize and in people sometimes, specially in the major emphasis of the country like interior affairs, police, part of the army it is very hard to say that we are in the best track but maybe the best track according to the other options that might happen. Violence in higher level than this or protestors put on other risks to themselves and to this country so maybe maybe so far we are in a good track but not the best of.

Mohamed: How many international students attended AUC before the revolution?

Ali: Before the revolution I use to have about 250 new students at the begging of the fall semester and the spring semester, I have to say that after the revolution this dropped to the thirdly around 80 students.

Mohamed: Did the revolution affect people coming from abroad?

Ali: It has two sides of affect some universities... most of our universities are American universities ok. So the American community depends a lot on the media so every time there is violence happened here like what happened in Maspero or Mohamed Mahmoud downtown or whatever this is reflected in a very bad way in the American media like in newspapers, TV and things like that so it gives a very bad image about the security conditions in Egypt according to that some universities have cancelled the program for a semester or two because they feel the students will not be safe, some other students cancelled the program on their own, some students are very challenged to be here while they remained so they

challenged their parents and universities and they said no I want to go stay and be there.

Mohamed: If something happened to an international student during an incident is AUC responsible for it?

Ali: Yes, to some extent yes if they were... it is not the responsibility of my office it is the responsibility of the international student office because the deal on everything that international student other than academic so if they happen to have any risks, problems in the streets or even if it is a robbery and they have to go to the police station, they send someone to help them and close the case and get the best ending of the situation.

Mohamed: The international students that were here a year ago what problems did they face?

Ali: I have to say the revolution started on the 25th and it gets very intense on the 28th and this was before the spring semester few days before it starts, so there was an evacuation. People did know what is happening even we Egyptians we did not know what was going to happen.

So universities in other countries said ok get our students back home now and they were evacuated only around 30 or 40 students no we want to stay in Egypt. So during the semester spring 11 I do not remember anything that happened to any of my students. They were very excited, very interested to stay and see what is happening and the changes and the protesting made by Egyptians and the uprising of everything.

Mohamed: The international students that are currently here do they face any problems?

Ali: I have to say that by time during the past year the security conditions got worst on the personal level like even we, we feel unsafe to go from place to place by car or on foot or in transportation. A lot of robberies happened, a lot of car robberies have been reported so I think that, not talking about the semester when the revolution took place but after that I guess it is a bit risky so always have this security session that is being presented to the international students during orientation by the

security director at AUC to give them heads up about what is happening in the country and how to be safe and we have emergency numbers and everything. I always say do not walk alone don't speak to strangers, if anybody asks you for something to follow him or to direct him just do Not answer it is not your job and even if incidents happen like Mohamed Mahmoud or whatever like what happened in portsaid two weeks ago. There was a reflection of these violent attacks in the ministry of interiors down town. We always say do not go this is not your fight you can sympathize you can help by sending meds with some Egyptian friends but do not involve in something that is not yours because it will cause you problems more than you think for yourself, for your country for your university so don't make such a risk.

Mohamed: Do they really follow the rules that they are given?

Ali: (laughter) I can not say, I can not answer this question because students are different from each other some people go by rules and some other people don't and they are young and excited and they want to be here for this to see what is happening in the country so you can not avoid them from going you just have to give some advices but at the end it there choices.

Mohamed: But there wasn't any case

Ali: So far no hopefully Elhamdella [Thank God]

Mohamed: (Smile) good! (Laughter)

Mohamed: Thank you so much