

June 6, 1919
**Letter, Saad Zaghloul to His Excellency President
Woodrow Wilson**

Citation:

"Letter, Saad Zaghloul to His Excellency President Woodrow Wilson", June 6, 1919, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Egyptian Delegation to the Peace Conference. Collection of Official Correspondence FROM NOVEMBER 11, 1918 TO JULY 14, 1919 (Paris: Published by the Delegation, 1919), pp. 58-60. Contributed and annotated by Cyrus Schayegh. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/291009>

Summary:

In January 1918, US President Woodrow Wilson in a speech to Congress outlined Fourteen Points to undergird the postwar peace and international politics. Vis-à-vis European empires' interests and against Soviet anti-colonialism, he asserted a panorama of (actually self-interested) US ideals. Thus, point 5 called for "A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable government whose title is to be determined;" and point 14 insisted that "A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small nations alike."

Around the world, many anti-colonialists rejoiced. They insisted these points apply to their case, and hoped Wilson would agree. Neither of these two things came to pass, as Erez Manela has shown in *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (2007). In Paris during the 1919 Peace Conference, Wilson rebuffed the advances of many, including the Egyptian delegation, which wrote and self-published, in Paris in 1919, the booklet containing the two letters below. While conceding British supervision of Egypt's debt and of the Suez Canal, leading Egyptian nationalists had just after the end of World War I demanded independence and the right to address the upcoming Paris Peace conference. Britain rejected these demands and offers. An uprising ensued, which Britain tried to suppress, in March 1919 exiling leading nationalists, including Sa'd Zaghlul (1859-1927), to Malta. As this only worsened the uprising, the Britain's new High Commissioner in Cairo, Edmund Allenby (1861-1936) released the nationalists—who made haste to Paris.

Original Language:

English

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Original Scan

Transcript - English

4 Avenue Malakoff, Paris, June 6, 1919.

HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON.

Dear Sir:

I had the honor to request on April 22nd last an audience, in which, as the representatives of an ancient and civilized country, I had hoped to submit to your Excellency the real state of affairs in Egypt, as well as the national aspirations of my fellow countrymen. The reply I received from your private secretary on the 24th ult. was to the effect that my request would be submitted to your Excellency in due course. Since then, I have heard nothing more.

My request for an audience was based upon the fact that the hopes of the Egyptian people rested in you as the author of these noble principles, and as the Honored President of the Great American Democracy, which entered the war for no selfish purpose but merely to serve the cause of liberty and justice.

Again the material and scientific resources of the United States, together with the great moral efforts of the Republic, were utilized—as your Excellency emphatically declared—not in self-defense nor for the love of conquest nor, may it be permitted to add, for the consecration of foreign dominations over unwilling countries, but for the establishment of a system of international justice before which must bow both the stronger and the weaker nations.

These principles—which were declared in the name of the American people as the basis of a democratic and a durable peace—have become so deep-rooted in the hearts of the whole Egyptian people that they revolted, unarmed, for the application of these principles to their country. Their absolute faith in the Fourteen Points, in the speech of September 27th last, and in other declarations were unshakeable. And the bullets of the British army in Egypt were powerless to shake their firm belief in your ability—and in the ability of the American people—to realize the principles for which they had fought and won. In the deportation of my colleagues and myself, the Egyptian people saw an attempt on the part of the British authorities to deprive the country of the benefit of your consideration.

Their will prevailed. We were released. And our first duty on arriving at Paris was to request your Excellency for an audience. This honor was denied to us. And a few days later, the recognition by the Government of the United States of America of the British protectorate over Egypt was published throughout the world.

According to information received, the news in Egypt fell on deaf ears. The Egyptians could not imagine that the principles which promised to the world a new era of political freedom and political equality, would consecrate the servitude of a whole nation.

The decision of the Peace Conference with regard to Egypt resulted in a policy of systematic revenge by the British military authorities throughout the country. Towns and villages have been submitted to most awful exactions. Some villages have been completely burned, and thousands of families are without shelter. People who do not salute British officers are court-martialled. The judge of Kena Province refused to attend court to avoid submitting to such humiliation.

The Courbash is being most freely used. Notables are being maltreated and imprisoned. Women are violated, and in one case a husband (who was present) was shot dead by the troops while attempting to defend the honor of his wife.

And all this because the Egyptian people have dared to demand their political emancipation!

That they will persist in demanding their political freedom goes without saying. They will do so in the firm belief in the righteousness of their cause and in their whole-hearted adherence to the principles enunciated by your Excellency. They will either succeed through America's help or perish victims to their loyalty and good faith.

For these reasons, I beg to request that one of my colleagues and I be received by your Excellency so that we may explain to you the state of affairs in Egypt.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient and humble servant,

(Signed) SAAD ZAGHLUL,
President of the Egyptian Delegation.