UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
(Alexandria Division)

BASMA ELOUFI,

Plaintiff,

v.

MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING NETWORKS, INC.,

Defendant.
_____/

Case No. 1:25-cv-543-MSN-LRV

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

FIRST AMENDED COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Basma Eloufi ("Eloufi"), for her First Amended Complaint against Defendant Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. ("MBN"), alleges as follows:

1. Eloufi, an Egyptian woman, worked for MBN from April 2018 until MBN terminated her employment in May 2022. During that time, two Lebanese men who supervised her, Salim Allawzi ("Allawzi") and Bahaa Al Hajjar ("Al Hajjar"), disparaged her as an Egyptian and as a woman and, after she reported that conduct to MBN's Human Resources department, retaliated against her for doing so.

2. In July 2019, Eloufi complained in writing to MBN's Human Resources Manager that Allawzi had told her, in front of MBN colleagues, that she was "from the country of belly dancers and whores." One week later, MBN told Eloufi that Allawzi would become her direct supervisor.

3. Al Hajjar, who supervised Allawzi and whom MBN brought into its handling of Eloufi's complaint, then began calling Eloufi a "cheater" for going to Human Resources. On February 8, 2022, Al Hajjar told Eloufi that she had made "a mistake by taking a co-worker to

HR," that he had been "treating [her] like this intentionally" so that she would "stop going to HR," and that "[i]f I see you up there in the HR office it's not going to be well." Eloufi lost consciousness in MBN's newsroom later that day and was taken to the hospital by ambulance.

4. On February 14, 2022, Eloufi submitted a written complaint to MBN's Acting President, its General Counsel, and other senior officers stating that Al Hajjar was retaliating against her because of her earlier complaint of discrimination "against my nationality and me being a woman." Eighty days later, while Eloufi was on medical leave, MBN notified her that it was terminating her employment after rejecting her physician's request for two more months of leave.

5. On December 12, 2025, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") found reasonable cause to believe that MBN violated Title VII by subjecting Eloufi to a hostile work environment because of her sex and national origin and by retaliating against her, and that MBN violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by failing to accommodate her and by terminating her. A copy of the EEOC's Determination Letter is attached as Exhibit 1.

6. Eloufi brings claims under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000e to 2000e-17 ("Title VII"); the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101 to 12213 ("ADA"); Section 1 of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, as amended, 42 U.S.C. § 1981 ("Section 1981"); and the Virginia Human Rights Act, Va. Code § 2.2-3900 et seq. ("VHRA").

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

7. The Court has subject-matter jurisdiction over Eloufi's claims under, among other statutes, 28 U.S.C. § 1331 because they arise under federal law.

8. The Court has supplemental jurisdiction over Eloufi's VHRA claims under 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a) because the claims arise from the same facts as her federal claims and form part of the same case or controversy under Article III of the United States Constitution.

9. Venue is proper in this judicial district under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(1) and (2) and 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5(f)(3) because MBN maintains its principal place of business in this judicial district and the unlawful employment practices alleged here occurred at MBN's headquarters in Springfield, Virginia, where Eloufi worked.

THE PARTIES

10. Plaintiff Basma Eloufi is a woman of Egyptian national origin and of Egyptian and Arab ancestry and ethnicity. MBN employed Eloufi from April 1, 2018, until it terminated her employment effective May 18, 2022. Eloufi resides in the City of Alexandria, Virginia.

11. Defendant Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. is a private, non-profit corporation that operates the Alhurra television network, Radio Sawa, and related digital platforms, which provide news and information in Arabic to audiences in the Middle East and North Africa. MBN is funded by grants from the United States government administered by the United States Agency for Global Media. During Eloufi's employment, MBN maintained its headquarters at 7600 Boston Boulevard, Springfield, Virginia 22153. MBN employs more than 450 people in the United States and is an "employer" within the meaning of Title VII, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e(b); the ADA, 42 U.S.C. § 12111(5)(A); and the VHRA, Va. Code § 2.2-3905(A).

ADMINISTRATIVE EXHAUSTION

12. On or about September 12, 2022, Eloufi filed a Charge of Discrimination, No. 570-2022-02647, with the EEOC. The charge requested filing with both the EEOC and the Virginia state fair-employment agency.

13. The charge alleged discrimination based on sex, national origin, disability, and race, and alleged retaliation.

14. On or about November 9, 2022, MBN submitted a position statement to the EEOC responding to the charge.

15. On December 12, 2025, the EEOC issued its Determination Letter, finding reasonable cause to believe that, beginning in April 2019, MBN violated Title VII "by subjecting [Eloufi] to a hostile work environment and adverse terms and conditions of employment because of her sex (female) and/or national origin (Egyptian) and by discharging her on May 5, 2022," and that MBN violated Title VII "by retaliating against [Eloufi] by altering the terms and conditions of her employment and discharging her because she complained about discrimination and harassment" (Ex. 1 at 3).

16. The EEOC also found reasonable cause to believe that, beginning in October 2020, MBN violated the ADA "by failing to accommodate [Eloufi], disclosing her protected medical information, and terminating her based on her disability and/or the need to make reasonable accommodation and/or in retaliation for requesting a reasonable accommodation" (Ex. 1 at 3).

17. The EEOC further found reasonable cause to believe that, beginning on or before November 16, 2021, MBN subjected a class of women at its Virginia location to a hostile work environment based on sex, race, national origin, and color, and retaliated against a class of women who engaged in protected activity. The EEOC found that MBN "frequently retaliated against female employees who complained about harassment or discrimination" and "subjected women who complained to increased scrutiny, continued harassment, adverse terms and conditions of employment, and denial of promotions" (Ex. 1 at 2–3).

18. Eloufi attaches the Determination Letter to show the findings the EEOC made.

19. Eloufi filed her charge within 300 days after MBN's termination of her employment, the events of February 8 and February 14, 2022, and the other acts alleged below that occurred on or after November 16, 2021, each of which contributed to the hostile work environments alleged in this First Amended Complaint.

20. More than 180 days have passed since Eloufi filed her charge. Eloufi has satisfied every administrative prerequisite to her claims under Title VII, the ADA, and the VHRA.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

21. Eloufi, Allawzi, and Al Hajjar spoke with one another principally in Arabic. Unless otherwise stated, the statements quoted in this First Amended Complaint were made in Arabic, and the quotations are English translations.

22. Before joining MBN, Eloufi worked for five years for MBC, a Middle Eastern television network, where she created digital content for programs including Arab Idol, Arabs Got Talent, and Albernameg with Bassem Youssef.

23. On or about April 1, 2018, Eloufi began working at MBN's Springfield headquarters as a Digital Content Developer, a position for which she relocated from Egypt to the United States.

24. Leila Bazzi ("Bazzi"), MBN's Executive Producer for Programming, recruited Eloufi to create digital content from MBN's television programs.

25. Under Bazzi's supervision, Eloufi produced a story on slavery in the United States that won a Telly Award, and she trained colleagues in creating digital content from MBN's programs.

26. MBN rated Eloufi's overall performance for the 2019–2020 review period as "Exceeds Expectation." In 2021, MBN awarded Eloufi a performance bonus and a 3.5 percent salary increase.

27. Allawzi is a Lebanese man who worked for MBN throughout the period relevant to this action, first as Social Media Specialist and, beginning in or around May 2019, as Social Media Lead for MBN's Digital Alhurra unit. Eloufi's position as Digital Content Developer required her to work closely with Allawzi and to coordinate with him on the digital content she created from MBN's programs. From July 2019 until January 2021, Allawzi was Eloufi's direct supervisor.

28. Al Hajjar is a Lebanese man who joined MBN in 2019 as Editor in Charge of Alhurra Digital. From 2019 until January 2021, Al Hajjar supervised Allawzi. MBN's performance document for the review period from May 1, 2019, through July 31, 2020, identifies Al Hajjar as Eloufi's manager and as the manager who evaluated her. From January 2021 until MBN terminated Eloufi's employment, Al Hajjar was Eloufi's direct supervisor.

29. Thaer Soukar ("Soukar"), MBN's Vice President for Digital, supervised both Allawzi and Al Hajjar.

Allawzi's Harassment of Eloufi as an Egyptian Woman (2018–2019)

30. On Eloufi's first day of work, April 1, 2018, as she introduced herself to colleagues and described her experience at MBC, Allawzi interrupted and asked, "why would they hire you? Do you think MBC is better than Alhurra?"

31. In or around August 2018, after Allawzi learned that Eloufi had published a new book of literature, he told her: "you Egyptians are ignorant and do not know how to write. Even Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize by chance."

32. During the summer of 2018, Allawzi repeatedly disparaged Eloufi's work by reference to her national origin, telling her that "[t]his is such an 'Egyptian' thing to say," that "[y]ou're an Egyptian, you don't know what you're talking about," and that "Egypt is the country of belly-dancers, leave the big topics to us Lebanese, we know politics."

33. Allawzi repeatedly told Eloufi that she was Egyptian and "Arab," while he and other Lebanese were superior because they were "Phoenicians." He did so beginning in April 2018, when Eloufi started at MBN, and again in or around August 2018, at a party outside work, and he continued to do so after he became her supervisor, including in December 2020.

34. In 2018, when a colleague driving Eloufi and Allawzi home from work dropped Eloufi off first near the Springfield Metro station, Allawzi told her: "oh you live here . . . they have no security. Aren't you scared that someone may break in and cut your throat while you're sleeping? Shouldn't you keep a knife under your pillow?" Allawzi made comments of this kind to Eloufi, a single woman who lived alone, on other occasions. Fearing that Allawzi or someone associated with him would break into her home, Eloufi later moved, at greater expense, to a gated community.

35. Allawzi's treatment of Eloufi was apparent to their colleagues, who asked her why Allawzi treated her that way. On one occasion, a colleague, Karim Kazem, told Allawzi in Eloufi's presence to "[s]top talking to her like this."

36. Allawzi repeatedly told Eloufi, "you're working with Leila, you have to pay for that." Eloufi later learned from Bazzi that Allawzi resented Bazzi, who is also Lebanese, because Bazzi recruited and managed her team based on merit and did not give preference to employees of Lebanese descent.

37. In April 2019, at a birthday party at the home of Mohamed Fadilat, an MBN associate producer, attended mostly by MBN employees, Allawzi told Eloufi, in front of those present: "You're from the country of belly dancers and whores; you don't know how to cook as you're eating from the trash in your country."

Eloufi's Complaints About Allawzi and MBN's Decision to Make Him Her Supervisor (March–September 2019)

38. In March 2019, Eloufi reported Allawzi's mistreatment of her to Soukar.

39. Shortly after the April 2019 birthday party, Eloufi reported Allawzi's remark to her supervisors, Bazzi and Amro Elkahky, and to Soukar. Bazzi and Elkahky directed her to MBN's Human Resources department.

40. Soukar told Allawzi that Eloufi had complained about him, and Allawzi then began rejecting her work without explanation. Allawzi told Eloufi: "You reported me to my manager? Who do you think you are? I have a back in this company and you're going to pay for that."

41. On June 27, 2019, Eloufi met with Myrna Ganley ("Ganley"), MBN's Human Resources Manager, and reported Allawzi's statements that she "came from the country of belly dancers and whores" and that Egyptians are "eating from the trash." Ganley asked Eloufi to put her complaint in writing.

42. On June 28, 2019, Eloufi also forwarded to Ganley a June 17, 2019 email in which Eloufi had told a male colleague that he refused her requests on a project "because I am a woman."

43. In its position statement to the EEOC, MBN stated that Ganley and Anne R. Noble ("Noble"), MBN's General Counsel, investigated the complaint described in Eloufi's June 17, 2019 email.

44. On July 3, 2019, Eloufi told Soukar that she was going to Human Resources to report Allawzi.

45. On July 5, 2019, Eloufi sent Ganley a written complaint titled "complaint on Salim Allawzi's behavior." The complaint stated that Allawzi had been bullying Eloufi "since I started working here" and quoted his statements that she was "from the country of belly dancers and whores" who was "eating from the trash in [her] country" and that "You Egyptian are ignorant."

46. On or about July 12, 2019, one week after Eloufi's written complaint, Soukar and Ganley met with Eloufi and told her that Allawzi would become her direct supervisor.

47. When Eloufi asked Ganley how MBN could place her under the supervision of the person she had just reported, Ganley said that the change was part of a restructuring and had nothing to do with her complaint. Eloufi told Ganley that the decision would allow Allawzi to continue harassing her. Ganley responded, "If you don't like it, leave."

48. That night, Eloufi suffered a panic attack.

49. In or around July 2019, MBN moved Eloufi's position into its Digital Alhurra unit as a Social Media Producer reporting to Allawzi. In its position statement to the EEOC, MBN acknowledged that, at about the time of her July 5, 2019 complaint, Eloufi learned "that she would be starting a new position as a Social Media Producer, reporting to Mr. Allawzi."

50. Ganley told Eloufi that the change would not affect her salary or her pay grade. Eloufi later learned from MBN's Oracle personnel system that, after Allawzi became her supervisor, MBN had reduced her pay grade from 22 to 21.

51. On July 22, 2019, Eloufi wrote to Ganley again: "I would like to share my concern about any retaliation that may happen, as my new role requires working with him as my line manager. Again, I do not feel safe working with him."

52. On September 9, 2019, Eloufi asked Ganley for an update on her complaint. Ganley responded that "[t]he issues have been addressed with he and his manager and appropriate action has been taken," and, when Eloufi asked what had happened, that "[i]t is not appropriate for me to share the details."

53. Upon information and belief, the manager to whom Ganley referred was Al Hajjar, who supervised Allawzi at that time. Ganley later told Eloufi that she had involved Al Hajjar in the matter. Al Hajjar therefore knew of Eloufi's complaint against Allawzi by no later than late 2019.

54. The EEOC found that, when Eloufi complained to MBN's Human Resources department, MBN "informed her supervisors of the complaint but took no further action" (Ex. 1 at 2).

Retaliation and Harassment Under Allawzi's Supervision (July 2019–January 2021)

55. In or around July 2019, shortly after Allawzi became her supervisor, Allawzi decided that Eloufi would no longer create original digital content, and Al Hajjar approved that decision. MBN has stated that Eloufi's July 22, 2019 email to Ganley concerned a decision "to direct [Eloufi] to use extant Alhurra content to populate the channel's digital platform (rather than to create new content for the site)."

56. The decision converted Eloufi's role from content producer to publisher of clips, basic work of the kind assigned to recent graduates, and removed the original content creation that had been the core of her position and the reason MBN recruited her.

57. For the approximately seventeen months that Allawzi supervised her, he did not permit Eloufi to create original content, and he assigned her program-related work to perform alone while the rest of the team worked together.

58. After becoming Eloufi's supervisor, Allawzi told colleagues in several MBN departments that Eloufi had reported him to Human Resources, that she "couldn't prove anything," and that he had "won" and been made her manager as a result. Allawzi also described Eloufi to colleagues as a "troublemaker." Several colleagues stopped speaking to Eloufi after hearing Allawzi's account.

59. On October 8, 2019, Eloufi underwent surgery and began approved medical leave. Less than two days later, while Eloufi was still in the hospital, Allawzi messaged her to ask her to come to work the next day to approve performance goals. When Eloufi reminded him that she was in the hospital, Allawzi's reply made clear that he still expected her to come to work.

60. Allawzi also told colleagues about Eloufi's surgery, which she had disclosed only to Human Resources, and commented to colleagues about her weight and her weight loss. Allawzi disclosed the surgery to, among others, Firas Bashir, Mohamed Fadilat, and Shahira Khatatbeh. The EEOC found that MBN "disclosed her medical information to her colleagues" (Ex. 1 at 2).

61. On October 21, 2019, Eloufi complained to Ganley in writing that Allawzi had contacted her in the hospital and was assigning her work without regard to her medical condition, and wrote, "he didn't stop, and I think he will never stop doing that."

62. On or about November 27, 2019, Eloufi told Ganley that she did not feel safe working under Allawzi and that she intended to apply for another position at MBN.

63. On November 29, 2019, Eloufi sent Ganley a written complaint, which she called her "last hope," stating that Allawzi was "treating me differently than all of the people in the team because I reported him to the HR," that she had "tried to forgive him for his racist and degrading comments," and that she did not feel safe working with him.

64. On December 17, 2019, Eloufi met with Ganley about her retaliation complaint. On December 19, 2019, Ganley met with Eloufi and Allawzi together. During that meeting, Allawzi said that he was "legally allowed to be rude" and that he was reporting complaints about Eloufi's behavior to Al Hajjar.

65. After the meeting, Eloufi returned to Ganley's office and told her that she did not feel safe working with Allawzi and that he treated her differently because she was a woman from an Arab background. Ganley responded that Human Resources was there if Allawzi did anything in the future and that Eloufi's managers were there to help her as well.

66. Al Hajjar was waiting outside Ganley's office during that conversation on December 19, 2019, saw Eloufi meeting with Ganley through the office's glass wall, and went in to speak with Ganley after Eloufi left. That same day, Al Hajjar began calling Eloufi a "cheater" and accusing her of "playing behind [his] back." Al Hajjar also told Eloufi to stop talking to Human Resources.

67. The EEOC found that Eloufi's supervisors "subjected her to heightened scrutiny, removed job responsibilities from her portfolio, and disparaged and undermined her authority, by calling her a 'cheater' in front of staff for reporting them and telling her colleagues that she was unreliable" (Ex. 1 at 2). The EEOC further found that Eloufi "continued to report the harassment to higher-level management and to Human Resources, but no corrective action was taken" (Ex. 1 at 2).

68. On January 2, 2020, Ganley wrote to Eloufi that "the issues were due to miscommunication and not retaliation." MBN took no further action on Eloufi's complaints.

69. In or around December 2019, during Allawzi's supervision, Eloufi applied for a Visuals Editor position on the Alhurra Digital video production team, which Soukar and Al Hajjar oversaw. She passed the position's test and interview and was not selected. When Eloufi asked Soukar about the decision, he told her that MBN would be making changes in the teams and needed someone other than Eloufi. At the time, Allawzi was telling colleagues that Eloufi was a "troublemaker" who had falsely reported him to Human Resources. Alaa Soliman ("Soliman"), the team's lead and a friend of Allawzi, told Eloufi that he did not want women on his team because they "have hormones" and cause "drama."

70. In August 2020, while Eloufi was covering news of the August 4, 2020 explosion at the Port of Beirut, Allawzi and Al Hajjar, on separate occasions, each told her that she did not understand the explosion because she was not Lebanese and was "not smart enough" to cover the news.

71. Eloufi, who is Muslim, wore a headscarf at work until late 2020, while Allawzi was her supervisor. On the day she first came to work without it, on or about September 29, 2020, Allawzi stood behind her desk with two male colleagues and talked loudly, so that she would hear, about how it is forbidden in Islam for women to be uncovered and how Islam views women who do not wear headscarves. Later that day, Allawzi returned to her desk alone and told her: "now that you've changed your look, we'll ask you to come to the office more so that we can see you."

72. Allawzi also told others, in Eloufi's presence, that women who remove their headscarves do so to sleep with men outside of marriage, and he said that Eloufi could now "sleep with men and drink alcohol."

73. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Eloufi wore her headscarf wrapped over her nose and mouth in place of a face mask, Al Hajjar told her that she looked "like a ninja." In or around October 2020, after Eloufi stopped wearing the headscarf, Al Hajjar told her, "I'm glad you finally took off that thing that was suffocating you. Now I finally support you."

Eloufi's Promotion to Content Lead Under Al Hajjar (December 2020–January 2021)

74. In or around December 2020, Bazzi, Elkahky, and Ruba Abdelhadi ("Abdelhadi"), MBN's Marketing Lead, asked Soukar to allow Eloufi to produce digital content again because Allawzi's restriction was harming MBN's programs.

75. Soukar then created a Digital Programming Unit dedicated to digital content from MBN's television programs and invited Eloufi to apply to lead it.

76. Eloufi was selected and, in January 2021, became Content Lead for the Digital Programming Unit, reporting directly to Al Hajjar.

77. The change in positions did not remove Eloufi from the chain of supervision in which Allawzi had harassed her. Al Hajjar, who had supervised Allawzi, approved the removal of Eloufi's content-creation duties, and received Allawzi's reports about her, became her direct supervisor. Allawzi remained Social Media Lead, and Eloufi's unit continued to publish its work through him.

78. In or around December 2020, MBN launched The Lebanese Scene, a program covering events inside Lebanon, and Eloufi was assigned to cover it for MBN's digital platforms.

Allawzi and Al Hajjar ridiculed Eloufi because she was Egyptian and could not pronounce certain Lebanese words, told her that the program was about "Phoenicians," and said that it needed a "smarter person" to cover it.

79. Al Hajjar also told Abdelhadi, who is Palestinian, that she was "dumb" and could not understand Lebanese affairs because she was not "Phoenician."

80. Eloufi told Al Hajjar that she intended to complain to Human Resources about Allawzi's statements that she was not suited to cover The Lebanese Scene because she was not Lebanese. Al Hajjar told her not to go to Human Resources and not to put anything in writing.

Harassment of Eloufi as an Egyptian and as a Woman under Al Hajjar's Supervision (2021–2022)

81. Al Hajjar, like Allawzi, told Eloufi that the Lebanese were "Phoenicians" while she was "Arab," including during the December 2020 launch of The Lebanese Scene, and he treated Lebanese employees as superior to others. In or around December 2021, after Abdelhadi produced creative work, Al Hajjar told her, in Eloufi's hearing, that "it seems you have some Lebanese blood to make you think out of the box."

82. Al Hajjar also disparaged Egyptian women. In or around December 2021, in Eloufi's presence, he told Abdelhadi that "Egyptian women are only good at becoming belly dancers, and that's their limit."

83. In or around January 2022, while an MBN information-technology employee was repairing Eloufi's office computer at her request, Al Hajjar told the employee to set Eloufi's computer aside and give priority to another employee's computer, because Eloufi was Egyptian and did not "know anything about computers anyway." Al Hajjar told the employee to focus on the computers of people from "better countries," such as Dubai or Lebanon.

84. Al Hajjar described Eloufi's work with Abdelhadi, another woman manager, as "women teaming up against him."

85. Allawzi and Al Hajjar also made sexual remarks about Eloufi's body. In or around January 2022, when Eloufi came to the office wearing a knee-length business skirt, Allawzi looked at her hips and told her, "We should bring you more to the office so we can watch more of that."

86. Also in or around January 2022, during several meetings with Al Hajjar to prepare equipment for the arrival of Ahmad Qadi ("Qadi"), a visual editor whom Eloufi had hired for her team and who was relocating from Dubai, Al Hajjar had Eloufi stand while he remained seated, and he stared at her hips. During one of those meetings, referring to her appearance after she had lost weight and stopped wearing a headscarf, he told her, "Finally, you cleaned up."

87. The EEOC found that Eloufi's male supervisors "made repeated comments questioning [Eloufi's] competence because of her sex and sexual remarks about her body" (Ex. 1 at 2).

Al Hajjar's Retaliation Against Eloufi for Her Complaints (2021–February 2022)

88. After January 2021, Allawzi continued to tell MBN employees, including Dina Obaid, a member of Eloufi's team, and Moatism Ali of MBN's marketing department, that Eloufi had been unable to prove anything against him in front of Human Resources, and those employees avoided working with Eloufi as a result. Between January and April 2021, Allawzi also repeatedly ridiculed Eloufi as a team lead without a team, asking her whether she "believed [she was] a manager" and "where is your team?"

89. Between January and April 2021, when Eloufi reported Allawzi's statements to Al Hajjar and said that she would go to Human Resources if they continued, Al Hajjar told her to

"stay silent and don't go to HR" and said, "I don't have time to stop Salim." Each time she reported Allawzi's ridicule, Al Hajjar told her: "Don't write emails and don't go to HR. You wanted a position, we gave it to you. Stay silent."

90. Throughout his supervision of Eloufi, Al Hajjar accused her of "cheating on him," "playing behind [his] back," and "conspiring" against him whenever she met with Human Resources, with Soukar, with Bazzi, or with Abdelhadi. He also called Eloufi a "cheater" whenever he saw her speaking with a male colleague and questioned her about why she was speaking with him. The Arabic word Al Hajjar used for "cheater" was "khayna," which, directed at a woman, describes a woman who has been sexually unfaithful. The question he asked, "enty betkhoneeny?"—"are you cheating on me?"—is one ordinarily put to a woman suspected of infidelity to her husband or partner. Al Hajjar also called Eloufi "gasoosa," a word for a female spy.

91. Al Hajjar often stopped at Eloufi's desk and asked her, "what are you doing? cheating on me? writing emails against me?" When she stepped away for coffee or to use the restroom, he called her to ask where she was and whether she was "cheating on him." For example:

a) In or around December 2020, after seeing Eloufi in Bazzi's office during meetings to launch The Lebanese Scene, Al Hajjar called her to his desk and asked, "Are you conspiring with Leila against me? Are you cheating on me? What game are you playing?"

b) In or around January 2021, while Eloufi was in the women's restroom speaking with a colleague, Amy Al Shazly, Al Hajjar called Eloufi because she had been away from her desk for some time and asked whether she was cheating on him.

c) In or around November 2021, Al Hajjar saw Eloufi meeting with Abdelhadi about work outside MBN's building. He later called Eloufi to his desk and told her, "Are you cheating on me? You're playing a very dangerous game."

d) In or around January 2022, while Eloufi was at her desk planning for Qadi's arrival, Al Hajjar stopped at her desk, put his face close to her shoulder, and whispered, "You're a cheater, and [you're] playing a very dangerous game." He then walked away.

92. Al Hajjar called Eloufi on weekends and during her time off to ask, "how does it feel disrespecting your time off? feels good, right?"

93. Al Hajjar repeatedly warned Eloufi that she would lose her job if she spoke up about his treatment of her.

94. On December 29, 2021, after seeing Eloufi in Bazzi's office, Al Hajjar confronted her: "what are you doing in Leila's office behind my back?"

95. In early January 2022, Qadi reported for his first day of work. Eloufi welcomed him, showed him the building, and introduced him to Al Hajjar. Al Hajjar then told her: "did you really believe that you're a content lead? You're just here to do what I want you to do. You don't get to do anything related to management." Al Hajjar told Eloufi that her title was only "on paper" and that he was the "one and only" manager.

96. In or around January 2022, Al Hajjar assigned two employees to Eloufi's team without telling her or seeking her agreement, and he declined to share with her information related to her unit's work.

97. On or about January 26, 2022, Eloufi met with Soukar by video and reported that Al Hajjar repeatedly called her a "cheater" and accused her of playing behind his back and

creating conspiracy theories. Soukar told Eloufi that Al Hajjar had a communication problem and that hers was not the first complaint Soukar had received about Al Hajjar's behavior.

98. Soukar asked Eloufi to prepare a plan for her unit's work, met with her about the plan on three occasions, and asked her to present it to Al Hajjar. On January 13, 2022, Eloufi told Soukar that she had prepared the plan he requested. Eloufi and Al Hajjar met to discuss the plan on February 8, 2022.

The February 8, 2022 Meeting

99. On the morning of February 8, 2022, Eloufi told Al Hajjar that she had a sore throat, feared she had COVID-19, and understood that MBN directed employees with symptoms to stay home. Al Hajjar told her that working from home was "a privilege [he] gave to [her], and [he could] take it back at any time," and required her to attend the meeting in person.

100. The meeting took place in Room 105 at MBN's headquarters and lasted from approximately 10:30 a.m. until about noon. Al Hajjar rejected Eloufi's plan, told her that she had no experience, prohibited her from describing her accomplishments at MBN in any written document, and told her that "being a content lead is just a joke."

101. During the meeting, Eloufi asked Al Hajjar why he called her a "cheater" and why he said that she was playing behind his back. Al Hajjar answered: "because you're a cheater, you did a mistake by taking a co-worker to HR, who do you think you're? are you trying to teach us something? I was treating you like this intentionally, so you stop cheating on me, conspiring and playing behind my back, and stop going to HR."

102. Al Hajjar added: "you went to the HR complaining about your colleague and you couldn't prove anything against him." When Eloufi responded that the colleague "was racist with me" and that Human Resources had told her it had investigated and protected her rights, Al

Hajjar said: "There was no investigation, MBN tricked you and they just said that to you to shut you up."

103. Eloufi told Al Hajjar that she would go to Human Resources after the meeting. Al Hajjar replied: "don't talk to anyone, If I see you up there in the HR office it's not going to be well, stop cheating on me and reporting everything, stop playing games and conspiring against me and your colleagues."

104. Al Hajjar then told Eloufi: "you couldn't prove anything on him the first time and you can't prove anything on me this time. From now on, you're not allowed to talk to anyone. I don't want you to talk to anyone without my permission, no HR no other managers or colleagues, and from now on, you have no word on your team, I'm the one who will tell you what to do, and you have to send me every single step by email so I confirm it, even if you're going to the bathroom."

105. On or about February 8, 2022, Al Hajjar also told Eloufi to "[s]hut up" and to listen to him because "he is the man."

106. In its position statement to the EEOC, MBN acknowledged that, during the February 8, 2022 meeting, Eloufi asked Al Hajjar about the investigation of her complaint against Allawzi.

107. Immediately after the meeting, Eloufi went to Soukar's office, reported what Al Hajjar had said, and raised the investigation of her complaint against Allawzi. Soukar directed her to Human Resources.

108. Eloufi then went to Hassan Fahmy ("Fahmy"), a senior Human Resources manager, and told him that she was having problems with Al Hajjar. Fahmy told her that he had

no record of her earlier complaint or of any investigation and directed her to William Sabatini ("Sabatini"), Senior Advisor to MBN's President.

109. Shortly before 2:00 p.m. on February 8, 2022, while Eloufi was trying to describe these events to a colleague, Eloufi began crying and lost consciousness in MBN's newsroom. Emergency personnel took her by ambulance to the Inova emergency department in Lorton, Virginia, where she was treated for chest pain and a panic attack.

110. While Eloufi was in the emergency department, Al Hajjar telephoned the colleague who had accompanied her and told the colleague to leave Eloufi at the hospital and return to work. Eloufi returned to the emergency department on February 9, 2022.

Eloufi's February and March 2022 Complaints

111. On February 10, 2022, Eloufi wrote to Soukar that Allawzi was "racist," that Soukar had made Allawzi her manager despite knowing that, and that Al Hajjar had been calling her a "cheater" because of "the investigation and the complaint I submit against Salim." Soukar responded, "I refuse it all, but it's not the right time."

112. At 11:40 a.m. on February 14, 2022, Eloufi sent an email titled "Retaliation, harassment and verbal abuse complaint" to Hassan Shwiki, MBN's Acting President; Soukar; Imad Haj, MBN's Vice President for Administration and Finance; Sabatini; and Noble. A copy of the email is attached as Exhibit 2. Eloufi attaches the email to show what she reported to MBN, when, and to whom.

113. The email stated that it was "an official complaint against my direct manager Bahaa Al Hajjar," that Al Hajjar had been "retaliating against me for the past two years," and that "[m]y manager admitted he was doing that to me because of a previous complaint to HR about discrimination against my nationality and me being a woman."

114. The email further stated that "the reason behind this retaliation is because of my gender and my nationality, because I'm a woman and because I'm Egyptian"; described the February 8, 2022 meeting; requested an investigation; requested the records of MBN's investigation of her complaint of "discrimination and racism and retaliation against me because I'm a woman and I'm an Egyptian"; and asked MBN to protect her "from any future revenge or retaliation from Bahaa Al Hajjar or any other person inside MBN."

115. At 1:30 p.m. that day, Noble and Sabatini met with Eloufi by video. Eloufi told them that Al Hajjar was using his position as her manager to punish her for going to Human Resources and reporting Allawzi, which she described as retaliation. Noble and Sabatini told Eloufi that MBN would investigate her complaint and would send her forms to apply for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA").

116. On February 18, 2022, Eloufi asked Laura Sankoh ("Sankoh"), an MBN Human Resources Manager who administered employee leave and benefits, to tell Al Hajjar that she was on leave, explaining that she had "passed out after a meeting with him" and had "reported that matter to HR." Eloufi also told Sankoh that Al Hajjar had messaged her on February 9 and 16, 2022, while she was on leave. Sankoh responded that Al Hajjar "has been spoken to."

117. On March 1, 2022, Sabatini wrote to Eloufi, with a copy to Noble, that MBN had "followed up on the issues you raised in your email of February 14."

118. The same day, Eloufi wrote to James Nida, MBN's Director of Security, that she feared that Allawzi and Al Hajjar would act against her because she had reported them, and that she had complained to Human Resources about Allawzi because "he discriminated against me being a woman and being Egyptian."

119. On March 3, 2022, Noble and Sabatini told Eloufi that MBN had investigated her complaint and taken appropriate action, but declined to tell her what investigation MBN had conducted or what action it had taken.

Eloufi's Disability, Her Request for Accommodation, and MBN's Termination of Her Employment

120. After February 8, 2022, Eloufi's treating providers diagnosed her with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression, and her cardiologist found inflammation of the muscles around her heart.

121. These conditions substantially limited Eloufi's major life activities of sleeping, eating, concentrating, and thinking, and the operation of her brain and cardiovascular functions. During this period Eloufi could not sleep or eat normally and experienced chest pain, difficulty breathing, numbness in her left arm, and pain in her upper body.

122. Eloufi's physicians prescribed medication and treatment and directed her to remain out of work. MBN granted Eloufi FMLA leave beginning February 8, 2022, and helped her obtain short-term disability benefits.

123. On February 11, 2022, Eloufi wrote to Sankoh and Sabatini that her emergency-room physician had referred her to a cardiologist and a psychiatrist, that a psychiatrist had prescribed medication for three months, and that she had been told to join a program with Dominion PHP for long-term treatment.

124. MBN knew of Eloufi's conditions. MBN approved her FMLA leave on the basis of her physician's certification, and in its position statement to the EEOC, MBN acknowledged that, on February 14, 2022, Eloufi told Noble and Sabatini that she was seeing both a cardiologist and a psychiatrist.

125. Before her FMLA leave expired, Eloufi told Sankoh that her physician would recommend additional time off. Sankoh told Eloufi that extending her leave would not be a problem and that MBN needed only documentation from her physician.

126. On April 28, 2022, Eloufi's physician, Dr. Sohail, provided MBN a note stating that Eloufi needed to remain on leave for at least two more months, with a tentative return date subject to reevaluation. The EEOC found that the note requested "two additional months of medical leave" (Ex. 1 at 2).

127. When Eloufi provided the note, Sankoh told her that MBN would apply for long-term disability benefits on her behalf.

128. MBN did not contact Eloufi or her physician to discuss the requested leave, her expected date of return, or any alternative accommodation before deciding to terminate her employment.

129. In its Determination Letter, the EEOC found that MBN "did not engage in the interactive process and, instead, on May 5, 2022, notified [Eloufi] that she would be terminated" (Ex. 1 at 2).

130. On May 5, 2022, one week after receiving the note, Sankoh emailed Eloufi that MBN had "carefully considered this medical note as a request for an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act," had determined that the request was for "an indefinite leave of absence" that "is not a reasonable accommodation," had concluded that "there are no other reasonable accommodations that can be granted that would allow you to perform the essential functions of your job," and, "because you have no remaining leave," was "left with no option but to terminate your employment as of May 18, 2022." A copy of the email is attached as Exhibit 3.

131. Eloufi attaches the email to show what MBN told her and when. She does not adopt MBN's characterization of her physician's note as a request for "an indefinite leave of absence" or its statement that no other reasonable accommodation was available.

132. The same email encouraged Eloufi, "[w]hen you are medically able to work," to "apply for any open position at MBN that interests you."

133. Eloufi's FMLA leave was scheduled to expire on May 8, 2022, and her short-term disability benefits on May 17, 2022. MBN ended her health insurance on May 31, 2022.

134. Sankoh, who signed the termination notice, did not resolve questions about Eloufi's leave on her own. On February 18, 2022, when Eloufi asked whether MBN would cover her medical visits as a workplace incident, Sankoh wrote that she had "posed the question to my manager." On February 25, 2022, when Eloufi asked how her leave would be treated as a work incident, Sankoh responded, "Let me ask Anne again regarding Worker's Comp."

135. According to MBN's position statement to the EEOC, MBN's policy requires an employee who believes she has been subjected to discrimination to report it to the Director of Human Resources or to the General Counsel.

136. Upon information and belief, Noble, Sabatini, or both participated in or approved the decision to terminate Eloufi's employment. The basis for that belief is that Noble and Sabatini received Eloufi's February 14, 2022 complaint and met with her about it on February 14 and March 3, 2022; Noble had investigated Eloufi's June 2019 complaint that a male colleague refused her requests "because I am a woman"; Sankoh consulted Noble on matters relating to Eloufi's leave; Sankoh had told Eloufi that extending her leave would not be a problem; and Noble later prepared and signed MBN's position statement to the EEOC defending the termination.

137. Before May 5, 2022, Sankoh knew that Eloufi had reported Al Hajjar to Human Resources, and Noble and Sabatini knew that Eloufi had complained that Al Hajjar was retaliating against her for reporting discrimination because of her sex and national origin.

Harm to Eloufi

138. MBN's termination of Eloufi's employment deprived her of her salary, which was $99,000 per year when MBN promoted her to Content Lead effective December 28, 2020, and which MBN increased by 3.5 percent in 2021, and of her eligibility for annual performance bonuses. It also deprived her of her employment benefits, including medical, vision, and dental insurance; employer-paid life, accidental death and dismemberment, and short- and long-term disability coverage; and MBN's dollar-for-dollar matching contributions to her 401(k) retirement account of up to six percent of her salary.

139. Since May 2022, Eloufi has diligently searched for comparable employment.

140. The harassment and retaliation alleged above caused Eloufi to suffer panic attacks, loss of consciousness and emergency treatment on February 8 and 9, 2022, chest pain, anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, and humiliation, for which she has required cardiology, primary-care, and psychiatric treatment and medication.

141. Allawzi's and Al Hajjar's conduct also changed identifiable terms and conditions of Eloufi's employment. It removed the original content creation that had been the core of her position, reduced her pay grade, removed her authority to manage her unit, required her to report every step of her work, including restroom breaks, to Al Hajjar, and barred her from speaking with Human Resources, other managers, or colleagues without Al Hajjar's permission.

142. Eloufi continues to suffer emotional distress, damage to her professional reputation, and economic loss as a result of MBN's conduct.

COUNT I
Retaliation in Violation of Title VII, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-3(a)

143. Eloufi incorporates paragraphs 1 through 142 as if fully set forth here.

144. Title VII makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an employee "because [she] has opposed any practice made an unlawful employment practice by this subchapter, or because [she] has made a charge, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing under this subchapter." 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-3(a).

145. Eloufi engaged in protected activity under Title VII's opposition clause when she complained to MBN's management and Human Resources about harassment based on her sex and national origin and about retaliation for her complaints, including on June 27 and 28, July 3, July 5, July 22, September 9, October 21, November 27, November 29, and December 17 and 19, 2019; in or around December 2020; and on February 8, February 10, February 14, February 18, and March 1, 2022.

146. Each complaint opposed conduct that Eloufi reasonably believed violated Title VII. Her complaints identified, among other things, Allawzi's statements disparaging Egyptians and Egyptian women, his "racist and degrading comments," a male colleague's refusal to accept her requests "because I am a woman," and retaliation for her complaints to Human Resources, and her February 14, 2022 complaint expressly attributed Al Hajjar's treatment of her to her sex, her national origin, and her earlier complaint of discrimination.

147. MBN knew of Eloufi's protected activity. Her February 14, 2022 complaint went to MBN's Acting President; its General Counsel, one of the two officials to whom MBN's policy directs employees to report discrimination; its Vice President for Administration and Finance; Soukar; and Sabatini. Noble and Sabatini met with her about it on February 14 and March 3, 2022. On March 1, 2022, Sabatini confirmed in writing, with a copy to Noble, that MBN had

"followed up on the issues you raised in your email of February 14." Sankoh, who signed the termination notice, knew by February 18, 2022, that Eloufi had reported Al Hajjar to Human Resources.

148. MBN took a materially adverse action against Eloufi when, on May 5, 2022, it notified her that it was terminating her employment effective May 18, 2022. The termination of a worker's employment would dissuade a reasonable worker from making or supporting a charge of discrimination.

149. MBN would not have terminated Eloufi's employment but for her protected activity. MBN notified Eloufi of her termination eighty days after her February 14, 2022 written complaint, eighty-six days after she told Al Hajjar that she was going to Human Resources and then reported him to Soukar and Fahmy, seventy-six days after she told Sankoh that she had reported Al Hajjar to Human Resources, and sixty-five days after her March 1, 2022 complaint to MBN's Director of Security.

150. Retaliatory animus toward Eloufi's complaints was expressed throughout the period between her complaints and her termination. Al Hajjar, her supervisor, told her on February 8, 2022, that he had mistreated her "intentionally" so that she would "stop going to HR," warned her that "[i]f I see you up there in the HR office it's not going to be well," and forbade her to speak with Human Resources without his permission; he messaged her twice during her leave; and MBN's senior officers declined to tell her what, if anything, they had done in response to her complaint.

151. MBN terminated Eloufi's employment: (a) after Sankoh had told her that extending her leave would not be a problem if her physician provided documentation; (b) after her physician provided that documentation and identified a tentative return in approximately two

months; (c) without discussing the request with Eloufi or her physician; and (d) while describing the request as one for indefinite leave and inviting Eloufi to apply for open positions once she was able to work.

152. Eloufi pleads this Count in the alternative to Counts V and VI, as Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(d)(2) permits.

153. MBN acted with malice or with reckless indifference to Eloufi's federally protected rights. MBN's General Counsel and senior officers received Eloufi's written complaint of retaliation for reporting discrimination based on sex and national origin, and MBN terminated her employment less than three months later, while she was on medical leave following the events she had reported.

154. As a direct and proximate result of MBN's retaliation, Eloufi has suffered and continues to suffer substantial harm.

COUNT II
Retaliatory Hostile Work Environment in Violation of Title VII, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-3(a)

155. Eloufi incorporates paragraphs 1 through 142 as if fully set forth here.

156. Title VII's anti-retaliation provision, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-3(a), prohibits an employer from subjecting an employee to a hostile work environment because she opposed a practice that Title VII makes unlawful.

157. Eloufi engaged in the protected activity described in paragraphs 145 and 146, beginning with her June 27 and July 5, 2019 complaints to Ganley.

158. Because Eloufi had complained about him, Allawzi rejected her work, removed her content-creation duties with Al Hajjar's approval, told colleagues throughout MBN that she had reported him and "couldn't prove anything," described her as a "troublemaker" who had

falsely reported him to Human Resources, including while she was seeking a transfer to the Visuals Editor position, and reported complaints about her behavior to Al Hajjar.

159. Beginning on the day he saw Eloufi meeting with Ganley about her retaliation complaint, and continuing until February 8, 2022, Al Hajjar told Eloufi to stop talking to Human Resources; repeatedly accused her of "cheating on him," "playing behind [his] back," and "conspiring" against him whenever she met with Human Resources, Soukar, Bazzi, or Abdelhadi; called her a "gasoosa," or spy; asked her whether she was "writing emails against me"; called her about her whereabouts during breaks; warned her, in November 2021 and again in January 2022, that she was "playing a very dangerous game"; warned her that she would lose her job if she spoke up; told her, in December 2020 and repeatedly in early 2021, not to go to Human Resources and not to put her concerns in writing; and stripped her of her authority to manage her unit. The EEOC found that Eloufi's supervisors called her a "cheater" in front of staff "for reporting them" (Ex. 1 at 2).

160. On February 8, 2022, Al Hajjar confirmed that he had engaged in this conduct "intentionally, so you stop cheating on me, conspiring and playing behind my back, and stop going to HR." He then warned Eloufi of consequences if she went to Human Resources, forbade her to speak with Human Resources, managers, or colleagues without his permission, and required her to report every step of her work, "even if you're going to the bathroom."

161. The conduct was unwelcome. Eloufi objected to it, complained of it to Ganley, Soukar, Noble, Sabatini, and others, and told Ganley in writing that she did not feel safe working with Allawzi.

162. The conduct was severe and pervasive. Eloufi's supervisors carried it out for more than two years; it recurred whenever Eloufi spoke with Human Resources or other managers; it

included threats to her employment and a prohibition on contacting Human Resources; it isolated her from colleagues; and it culminated in a confrontation after which Eloufi lost consciousness at work and was taken to the hospital by ambulance. The conduct would dissuade a reasonable worker from making or supporting a charge of discrimination.

163. The conduct formed a single, continuing hostile work environment. It consisted of the same type of conduct—ridiculing and punishing Eloufi for having reported Allawzi—by the same chain of supervisors under the same Vice President. Al Hajjar took part in it both as Allawzi's supervisor and as Eloufi's; on February 8, 2022, he repeated the assertion Allawzi had spread among colleagues, that Eloufi "couldn't prove anything" against Allawzi; and MBN's January 2021 reassignment placed Eloufi under the supervisor who had approved Allawzi's removal of her duties.

164. Acts contributing to this hostile work environment occurred within 300 days before Eloufi filed her charge, including Al Hajjar's November 2021 accusation, after seeing Eloufi with Abdelhadi, that she was cheating on him and "playing a very dangerous game"; his December 29, 2021 confrontation about her meeting with Bazzi; his January 2022 whispered warning, with his face at her shoulder, that she was a "cheater" who was "playing a very dangerous game"; his January 2022 statements stripping her of her managerial authority; his assignment of employees to her team without her knowledge in January 2022; the February 8, 2022 meeting; and his February 9 and 16, 2022 messages during her leave.

165. MBN is liable for the conduct. Allawzi and Al Hajjar were Eloufi's supervisors: MBN empowered each of them to change her duties, Allawzi used that power to reassign her from content producer to publisher, and Al Hajjar evaluated her performance from May 2019 onward and controlled her unit. Independently, MBN knew of the conduct through Eloufi's

complaints to Ganley, Soukar, Fahmy, Noble, and Sabatini and failed to take prompt and effective action to end it; instead, it placed Eloufi under Allawzi's supervision one week after her written complaint, deemed her retaliation complaint a "miscommunication," and placed her under Al Hajjar.

166. MBN acted with malice or with reckless indifference to Eloufi's federally protected rights for the reasons stated in paragraph 153.

167. As a direct and proximate result of the retaliatory hostile work environment, Eloufi has suffered and continues to suffer substantial harm.

COUNT III
Retaliation in Violation of the Virginia Human Rights Act, Va. Code § 2.2-3905(B)(7)

168. Eloufi incorporates paragraphs 1 through 142 as if fully set forth here.

169. The VHRA makes it an unlawful discriminatory practice for an employer to discriminate against an employee because she has opposed any practice made an unlawful discriminatory practice by the VHRA, or because she has made a charge, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing under the VHRA. Va. Code § 2.2-3905(B)(7). The VHRA makes discrimination because of sex or national origin an unlawful discriminatory practice. Va. Code § 2.2-3905(B)(1).

170. The allegations in paragraphs 145 through 151 and 157 through 165, incorporated here, establish that MBN retaliated against Eloufi in violation of the VHRA by terminating her employment and by subjecting her to a retaliatory hostile work environment because she opposed discrimination based on sex and national origin.

171. As a direct and proximate result of MBN's violation of the VHRA, Eloufi has suffered and continues to suffer substantial harm.

COUNT IV

Failure to Accommodate in Violation of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. § 12112(a) and (b)(5)(A)

172. Eloufi incorporates paragraphs 1 through 142 as if fully set forth here.

173. The ADA prohibits a covered employer from discriminating against a qualified individual on the basis of disability, 42 U.S.C. § 12112(a), including by "not making reasonable accommodations to the known physical or mental limitations of an otherwise qualified individual with a disability who is an applicant or employee, unless such covered entity can demonstrate that the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the business of such covered entity," 42 U.S.C. § 12112(b)(5)(A).

174. Eloufi is an individual with a disability under 42 U.S.C. § 12102(1)(A) because the conditions described in paragraphs 120 and 121 substantially limited her major life activities of sleeping, eating, concentrating, and thinking and the operation of her brain and cardiovascular functions. She also has a record of such impairments under 42 U.S.C. § 12102(1)(B).

175. MBN had notice of Eloufi's disability through her communications with Sankoh, Noble, and Sabatini, her FMLA certification, and Dr. Sohail's April 28, 2022 note.

176. Eloufi was a qualified individual. She had performed the essential functions of her positions at MBN for four years, receiving an overall rating of "Exceeds Expectation" for 2019–2020 and a performance bonus and salary increase in 2021, and she held the Content Lead position MBN created because of her expertise. With the accommodation of approximately two additional months of leave, she could have returned to perform the essential functions of her position.

177. Dr. Sohail's April 28, 2022 note requested that MBN extend Eloufi's leave for approximately two months, with a tentative return date. MBN treated the note as a request for accommodation under the ADA.

178. The requested accommodation was reasonable. It sought leave for a period identified by Eloufi's physician, with a tentative return date. Sankoh had told Eloufi that an extension would not be a problem. Upon information and belief, holding Eloufi's position open for approximately two additional months would not have imposed an undue hardship on MBN, which employed more than 450 people in the United States and approximately 82 people in its digital department.

179. MBN refused the accommodation. It characterized the requested leave as "indefinite," did not engage in an interactive process with Eloufi or her physician, proposed no alternative accommodation, and terminated her employment one week after receiving the request.

180. MBN did not make a good-faith effort, in consultation with Eloufi, to identify and make a reasonable accommodation that would provide her an equally effective opportunity and would not cause an undue hardship.

181. As a direct and proximate result of MBN's failure to accommodate Eloufi, she has suffered and continues to suffer substantial harm.

COUNT V
Discriminatory Discharge in Violation of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. § 12112(a) and (b)(5)(B)

182. Eloufi incorporates paragraphs 1 through 142 as if fully set forth here.

183. The ADA prohibits a covered employer from discriminating against a qualified individual on the basis of disability in regard to the discharge of employees, 42 U.S.C. § 12112(a), and from denying employment opportunities to a qualified employee with a disability if the denial is based on the need to make reasonable accommodation to the employee's impairments, 42 U.S.C. § 12112(b)(5)(B).

184. The allegations in paragraphs 174 through 176, incorporated here, establish that Eloufi was a qualified individual with a disability.

185. MBN discharged Eloufi because of her disability and her need for accommodation. MBN's May 5, 2022 notice states that MBN terminated her employment because, given her physician's statements about her condition, "there are no other reasonable accommodations that can be granted that would allow you to perform the essential functions of your job," and because she had "no remaining leave." MBN would not have terminated Eloufi's employment but for her disability and her need for the accommodation she requested.

186. Eloufi pleads this Count in the alternative to Count I, as Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(d)(2) permits.

187. As a direct and proximate result of MBN's discriminatory discharge, Eloufi has suffered and continues to suffer substantial harm.

COUNT VI
Disability Discrimination and Failure to Engage in the Interactive Process in Violation of the Virginia Human Rights Act, Va. Code §§ 2.2-3905 and 2.2-3905.1

188. Eloufi incorporates paragraphs 1 through 142 as if fully set forth here.

189. The VHRA makes it an unlawful discriminatory practice for an employer to "discharge . . . any individual . . . because of such individual's . . . disability," Va. Code § 2.2-3905(B)(1)(a); to use disability "as a motivating factor for any employment practice, even though other factors also motivate the practice," Va. Code § 2.2-3905(B)(6); to "[d]eny employment or promotion opportunities to an otherwise qualified applicant or employee because such employer will be required to make reasonable accommodation for a person with a disability," Va. Code § 2.2-3905.1(B)(3); and to "[f]ail to engage in a timely, good faith interactive process with an employee who has requested an accommodation . . . to determine if

the requested accommodation is reasonable and, if such accommodation is determined not to be reasonable, discuss alternative accommodations that may be provided," Va. Code § 2.2-3905.1(B)(5).

190. MBN is an "employer" within the meaning of Va. Code §§ 2.2-3905(A) and 2.2-3905.1(A). MBN employed far more than five employees for each working day in each of 20 or more calendar weeks in 2021 and 2022.

191. Eloufi is a "person with a disability" as defined under Va. Code § 51.5-40.1, which Va. Code § 2.2-3905.1(A) incorporates. After February 8, 2022, Eloufi's treating providers diagnosed her with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression, mental impairments that had substantial adverse effects on her cognitive functions, including her ability to concentrate and think. Her cardiologist also found inflammation of the muscles around her heart. These impairments substantially limited Eloufi's major life activities of sleeping, eating, concentrating, and thinking, and the operation of her brain and cardiovascular functions.

192. Eloufi is a person qualified to perform the essential functions of a job with or without reasonable accommodations. She performed the essential functions of her positions at MBN for four years, received an overall rating of "Exceeds Expectation" for 2019–2020 and a performance bonus and salary increase in 2021, and led the Digital Programming Unit that MBN created because of her expertise. With the additional leave her physician requested, she could have returned to perform the essential functions of her position.

193. MBN knew of Eloufi's impairments. On February 11, 2022, Eloufi told Sankoh and Sabatini that her physicians had referred her to a cardiologist and a psychiatrist and that she had been prescribed medication for three months. MBN approved her FMLA leave on the basis of her physician's certification, knew by February 14, 2022, that she was being treated by a

cardiologist and a psychiatrist, and on April 28, 2022, received Dr. Sohail's note stating that she needed to remain on leave.

194. Through Dr. Sohail's April 28, 2022 note, Eloufi requested an extension of her medical leave as an accommodation for her impairments, and MBN treated the note as a request for accommodation. The additional leave was necessary to permit Eloufi to complete her treatment and return to perform her job.

195. The requested accommodation was reasonable. It sought leave for a period identified by Eloufi's physician, with a tentative return date. Sankoh had told Eloufi that extending her leave would not be a problem and that MBN needed only documentation from her physician. MBN's termination notice itself anticipated that Eloufi would become "medically able to work." Upon information and belief, holding Eloufi's position open for the requested period would not have imposed an undue hardship on MBN, which employed more than 450 people in the United States and approximately 82 people in its digital department.

Discharge Because of Disability and the Need for Accommodation

196. MBN discharged Eloufi because of her disability and because it would have been required to make reasonable accommodation for it. Seven days after receiving Dr. Sohail's note, and after Sankoh had assured Eloufi that an extension would not be a problem, MBN declared the request one for "an indefinite leave of absence" that "is not a reasonable accommodation." It terminated Eloufi's employment because it would not grant the leave she requested and because she had "no remaining leave."

197. Eloufi's disability was, at a minimum, a motivating factor in MBN's decision to terminate her employment, even if other factors also motivated the decision. The termination notice gave three reasons for the termination: (a) Eloufi's request for medical leave; (b) MBN's

determination that no other accommodation was available; and (c) her lack of remaining leave. Each of those reasons arose from her disability and the treatment it required.

Failure to Engage in the Interactive Process

198. MBN did not engage in a timely, good-faith interactive process. It did not contact Eloufi or her physician to discuss the requested leave, her expected date of return, or any alternative accommodation. Having concluded that the requested leave was not a reasonable accommodation, MBN did not discuss any alternative accommodation with Eloufi. It instead announced that "there are no other reasonable accommodations that can be granted" and ended her employment. That failure is itself an unlawful discriminatory practice under Va. Code § 2.2-3905.1(B)(5).

199. Had MBN engaged in the interactive process the VHRA requires, it would have learned Dr. Sohail's expected return date and the anticipated length of Eloufi's treatment program. MBN's failure to engage in that process resulted in the termination of Eloufi's employment and the harm described below.

200. The EEOC found reasonable cause to believe that MBN failed to accommodate Eloufi and terminated her because of her disability or her need for accommodation.

201. MBN acted willfully and wantonly, and in conscious disregard of Eloufi's rights. After Sankoh assured Eloufi that an extension of her leave would not be a problem, MBN terminated her employment within a week of receiving the physician's documentation it had requested. It did so without contacting Eloufi or her physician, while characterizing leave that her physician had prescribed with a tentative return date as "indefinite."

202. As a direct and proximate result of MBN's violations of the VHRA, Eloufi has suffered and continues to suffer substantial harm.

COUNT VII
Hostile Work Environment Based on Sex and National Origin in Violation of Title VII, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a)(1)

203. Eloufi incorporates paragraphs 1 through 142 as if fully set forth here.

204. Title VII makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against any individual with respect to her compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because of her sex or national origin. 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a)(1). Requiring an employee to work in an environment permeated with discriminatory intimidation, ridicule, and insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of her employment violates this provision.

205. Eloufi was subjected to conduct based on her national origin, including Allawzi's statements that "you Egyptians are ignorant and do not know how to write," that Egypt is "the country of belly-dancers," that she was "from the country of belly dancers and whores" who was "eating from the trash in [her] country," and that the Lebanese were superior "Phoenicians"; Allawzi's and Al Hajjar's statements in August 2020 that she was "not smart enough" to cover the Beirut explosion because she was not Lebanese, and in December 2020 that The Lebanese Scene concerned "Phoenicians" and needed a "smarter person"; and Al Hajjar's statements that "Egyptian women are only good at becoming belly dancers" and that her computer should be set aside because she was Egyptian and did not "know anything about computers anyway," in favor of people from "better countries."

206. Eloufi was subjected to conduct based on her sex, including: (a) Allawzi's statement that she came from "the country of belly dancers and whores"; (b) Allawzi's statements, in her presence, that women who remove their headscarves do so to sleep with men outside of marriage, and that Eloufi could now "sleep with men and drink alcohol"; (c) Allawzi's statement in September 2020 that MBN would "ask [her] to come to the office more so that we

can see [her]," and his statement in January 2022, while looking at her hips, that MBN "should bring [her] more to the office so we can watch more of that"; (d) Allawzi's remarks to her, a single woman living alone, about someone breaking into her home and cutting her throat while she slept; (e) Soliman's statement that he did not want women on his team because they "have hormones"; (f) Al Hajjar's statement that he was glad she had "finally" removed her headscarf, his practice in January 2022 of having her stand while he sat and stared at her hips, and his statement to her, "Finally, you cleaned up"; (g) Al Hajjar's statement that Egyptian women are "only good at becoming belly dancers"; (h) his direction that she listen to him because "he is the man"; (i) his description of her work with another woman as "women teaming up against him"; and (j) his repeated use of "khayna" and "enty betkhoneeny," Arabic terms that, directed at a woman, accuse her of sexual infidelity, including in January 2022, when he put his face to her shoulder and whispered, "You're a cheater."

207. This conduct was directed at Eloufi because she is a woman and because she is Egyptian. Much of it referred expressly to her national origin, to Egyptian women, or to women generally. In its Determination Letter, the EEOC found that MBN's male supervisors and coworkers directed comparable conduct at other women whose national origins differed from their own (Ex. 1 at 2).

208. The conduct was unwelcome. Eloufi objected to it, reported it to Soukar and Ganley, and described it in her written complaints of July 5, 2019, November 29, 2019, February 14, 2022, and March 1, 2022.

209. The conduct was severe and pervasive. It began on Eloufi's first day and continued for four years; it came principally from her supervisors; it included slurs equating Egyptian women with prostitutes, made in front of colleagues; it included sexualized

commentary about her dress and conduct and remarks about violence against her as a woman living alone; it included supervisors' staring at and remarks about her body; it was accompanied by the removal of her core duties and her isolation from colleagues; and it caused her panic attacks, loss of consciousness at work, and medical treatment.

210. A reasonable Egyptian woman in Eloufi's position would have found the environment hostile and abusive.

211. Acts contributing to this hostile work environment occurred on or after November 16, 2021, including: (a) Al Hajjar's statement in or around December 2021, in Eloufi's presence, that "Egyptian women are only good at becoming belly dancers, and that's their limit" (¶ 82); (b) Allawzi's statement in or around January 2022, while looking at Eloufi's hips, that MBN "should bring [her] more to the office so we can watch more of that" (¶ 85); (c) Al Hajjar's practice in or around January 2022 of having Eloufi stand while he sat and stared at her hips, and his statement to her, "Finally, you cleaned up" (¶ 86); (d) Al Hajjar's instruction in or around January 2022 that a technician set Eloufi's computer aside because she was Egyptian and did not "know anything about computers anyway" (¶ 83); (e) Al Hajjar's whispered statement in or around January 2022, with his face at her shoulder, that she was a "cheater" (¶ 91(d)); and (f) Al Hajjar's direction on February 8, 2022, that Eloufi listen to him because "he is the man" (¶ 105). The environment was continuous. The same supervisors, in the same chain of command, made the same kinds of remarks before and after November 16, 2021. In September 2020, Allawzi told Eloufi that MBN would "ask [her] to come to the office more so that we can see [her]"; in January 2022, he told her that MBN "should bring [her] more to the office so we can watch more of that." In October 2020, Al Hajjar told Eloufi that he was glad she had "finally" removed her headscarf; in January 2022, he told her, "Finally, you cleaned up."

212. MBN is liable for the conduct because Allawzi and Al Hajjar were Eloufi's supervisors, as alleged in paragraph 165, and, independently, because MBN knew of the harassment through Eloufi's complaints and failed to take prompt and effective action to end it, instead placing her under Allawzi's supervision one week after her written complaint.

213. As a direct and proximate result of the hostile work environment, Eloufi has suffered and continues to suffer substantial harm.

COUNT VIII
Retaliation in Violation of 42 U.S.C. § 1981

214. Eloufi incorporates paragraphs 1 through 142 as if fully set forth here.

215. Section 1981 guarantees all persons within the United States the same right to make and enforce contracts, including the enjoyment of all benefits, privileges, terms, and conditions of the contractual relationship, as is enjoyed by white citizens. 42 U.S.C. § 1981(a)–(b). Section 1981 protects persons subjected to intentional discrimination because of their ancestry or ethnic characteristics, and it prohibits an employer from retaliating against an employee who opposes such discrimination.

216. Eloufi's employment relationship with MBN was a contractual relationship within the meaning of Section 1981.

217. Eloufi opposed discrimination based on her Egyptian and Arab ancestry and ethnicity when: (a) on July 5, 2019, she complained to Ganley of Allawzi's statements that she was "from the country of belly dancers and whores" and that "You Egyptian are ignorant"; (b) on November 29, 2019, she complained of his "racist and degrading comments"; (c) on December 19, 2019, she complained that Allawzi treated her differently because she was "a woman from an Arab background"; (d) in or around December 2020, she told Al Hajjar that she intended to complain to Human Resources about Allawzi's statements that she was not suited to

cover The Lebanese Scene because she was not Lebanese; (e) on February 10, 2022, she told Soukar that Allawzi was "racist"; and (f) on February 14, 2022, she complained of retaliation for her complaint of "discrimination and racism . . . because . . . I'm an Egyptian."

218. The allegations in paragraphs 147 through 151, 153, and 158 through 166, incorporated here, establish that MBN terminated Eloufi's employment and subjected her to a retaliatory hostile work environment because of this protected activity, and that MBN acted with malice or reckless indifference to her federally protected rights.

219. As a direct and proximate result of MBN's retaliation, Eloufi has suffered and continues to suffer substantial harm.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

For the foregoing reasons, Plaintiff Basma Eloufi requests that the Court enter judgment on the First Amended Complaint, in her favor and against Defendant Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc., as follows:

A. Award Eloufi appropriate amounts of back pay and front pay, in fair and reasonable amounts to be determined at trial;

B. Award Eloufi compensatory damages for the harm she suffered as a result of MBN's conduct, in a fair and reasonable amount to be determined at trial;

C. Award Eloufi punitive damages against MBN, in an amount sufficient to punish and deter the conduct alleged;

D. Order MBN to remove from Eloufi's personnel records any adverse references arising from the conduct alleged in this First Amended Complaint, to provide a neutral reference to prospective employers, and to provide training to its managers and Human Resources staff on preventing and responding to harassment and retaliation;

E. Award Eloufi the costs and fees she incurred in connection with this action, including reasonable attorney fees; and

F. Grant Eloufi such other relief as the Court deems just and proper.

JURY DEMAND

Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 38(b), Eloufi respectfully demands a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

Dated: November 25, 2026

/s/ Jordan D. Howlette
JORDAN D. HOWLETTE
VSB No. 97839
Justly Prudent
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Washington, DC 20002
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Counsel for Plaintiff

EXHIBIT 1

U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION
Washington Field Office

131 M Street, N. E., Suite 4NW02F
Washington, D. C. 20507
Intake Information Group: (800) 669-4000
Intake Information Group TTY: (800) 669-6820
Washington Direct Dial: (202) 921-2970
FAX: (202) 827-2349
Website: www.eeoc.gov

Charge No. 570-2022-02647

Basma Eloufi [redacted] Charging Party

The Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. Respondent
7600 Boston Blvd
Springfield, VA 22153

DETERMINATION

Under the authority vested in me by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), I issue the following determination on the merits of the subject charge filed under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended (Title VII) and Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended (ADA). Respondent is an employer within the meaning of Title VII and the ADA. All other requirements for coverage have been met.

Charging Party alleges that Respondent discriminated against her due to her sex (female), national origin (Egyptian), race (white), disability and in retaliation for her complaints regarding the same. She alleges that, from the outset of her employment with Respondent, she was subjected to inappropriate comments and harassment regarding her national origin, race, and sex by her supervisors, Salim Allawzi and Bahaa AlHajjar, Syrian men. She alleges that she complained about this to higher-level management and to human resources. She alleges that her complaints were not investigated or addressed and that she was subject to retaliation when she was barred from creating digital content, her role was changed, she was denied staff, and she was isolated from her colleagues. She contends that the harassment and retaliation exacerbated her disability and culminated in an incident at work that led to a hospitalization and medical leave. She alleges that Respondent discriminated against her based on her disability when it failed to provide medical leave as a reasonable accommodation. She further contends that, due to her disability, sex, and national origin, as well as in retaliation for her engagement in protective activity, Respondent discharged her from her position on May 5, 2022. Charging Party also asserts that Respondent disclosed her medical information to her colleagues.

Respondent denies that it discriminated against Charging Party. It alleges that she first complained about harassment in July 2019 but that her allegations were vague and could not be substantiated. It further asserts that it offered career support and numerous options to address her concerns. It further asserts that, when Charging Party's Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) leave expired, she was unable to provide a fixed return-to-work date, and it was an undue hardship to continue to hold open her position. Respondent denies disclosing Charging Party's medical information.

Charging Party began her employment with Respondent in April 2018 as a Digital Content Developer. She is a qualified individual with a disability. The evidence shows that Charging Party's male supervisors made inappropriate comments related to her sex and national origin, for example, "You came from a country of belly dancers and whores" and "You Egyptians eat from the trash." Her male supervisors also made repeated comments questioning her competence because of her sex and sexual remarks about her body. When Charging Party complained to Respondent's Human Resources department, Respondent informed her supervisors of the complaint but took no further action. The evidence shows that Charging Party's supervisors then subjected her to heightened scrutiny, removed job responsibilities from her portfolio, and disparaged and undermined her authority, by calling her a "cheater" in front of staff for reporting them and telling her colleagues that she was unreliable. Charging Party continued to report the harassment to higher-level management and to Human Resources, but no corrective action was taken. The evidence shows that, on February 8, 2022, Charging Party had a medical incident and was hospitalized after a confrontation with Mr. AlHajjar, forcing her to take medical leave. On April 28, 2022, she submitted a doctor's note requesting two additional months of medical leave when her FMLA leave expired on May 8, 2022. The record demonstrates that Respondent did not engage in the interactive process and, instead, on May 5, 2022, notified Charging Party that she would be terminated. The evidence further demonstrates that it disclosed her medical information to her colleagues.

The investigation also revealed that other women were subjected to sex-based harassment. Specifically, female employees were subjected to unwanted touching and sexual advances, inappropriate sexual comments, and inappropriate sex-based comments by male coworkers and supervisors. For example, one woman was locked into her supervisor's office while he groped and kissed her. Additional women were subject to repeated comments about whether they were pretty enough to work on television. In addition, the evidence reveals that when male coworkers and supervisors were from a different country than their female colleagues or subordinates, they created a hostile work environment based on the female employees' race, color and national origin. For example, women from Northern Africa were told that they are "not really Arabs." A woman from Syria was told by her supervisor that all Syrians are terrorists, poor, and stupid. Male employees made comments on the physical appearances of women from different countries, including telling women that they were less attractive than women with other national origins. Male employees further made comments that only fair-skinned women were pretty enough to be on television, while darker skinned women were not.

The investigation also revealed that Respondent subjected women to unequal terms and conditions in the promotions process, such as by requiring them to take tests to qualify for promotions when men were excused from this requirement. The evidence demonstrates that male supervisors favored male employees from their home countries for promotions and that this resulted in qualified women being denied promotions.

The evidence also shows that Respondent frequently retaliated against female employees who complained about harassment or discrimination. It failed to take appropriate action regarding the investigation and disposition of employee complaints and, instead, subjected women who complained to increased scrutiny, continued harassment, adverse terms and conditions of

employment, and denial of promotions. The investigation reveals that the harassment, unequal treatment, and retaliation forced female employees to leave their employment with Respondent.

Based on the evidence obtained during the investigation, I find reasonable cause to believe that Respondent violated the ADA beginning in October 2020 when it discriminated against Charging Party by failing to accommodate her, disclosing her protected medical information, and terminating her based on her disability and/or the need to make reasonable accommodation and/or in retaliation for requesting a reasonable accommodation. In addition, I find reasonable cause to believe that beginning in April 2019, Respondent violated Title VII when it discriminated against Charging Party by subjecting her to a hostile work environment and adverse terms and conditions of employment because of her sex (female) and/or national origin (Egyptian) and by discharging her on May 5, 2022. I further find reasonable cause to believe that Respondent violated Title VII by retaliating against Charging Party by altering the terms and conditions of her employment and discharging her because she complained about discrimination and harassment.

Arising out of a reasonable investigation of the Charge, I find reasonable cause to believe that beginning on or before November 16, 2021, at Respondent's Newington, Virginia, location, Respondent violated Title VII when it discriminated against a class of women on the basis of their sex (female), and race, national origin, and color, which varied depending on the harasser, by subjecting them to a hostile work environment, and to adverse terms and conditions of employment, including constructive discharge and denial of promotion. I also find reasonable cause to believe that Respondent violated Title VII by retaliating against a class of women who engaged in protected activity.

I make no findings with respect to any other allegations made in the charge.

Upon finding reasonable cause to believe that unlawful employment practices have occurred, the Commission attempts to eliminate the alleged unlawful practices by informal methods of conciliation. Conciliation is Respondent's opportunity to voluntarily remedy the unlawful employment practices found to have occurred. The Commission now invites the parties to join with it in reaching a just resolution of the matter. The confidentiality provisions of Sections 706 and 709 of Title VII and Commission Regulations apply to information obtained during conciliation. If Respondent declines to enter into conciliation discussions, or if the Commission's representative is unable to secure an acceptable conciliation agreement, the Commission shall so inform the parties in writing and advise them of the court enforcement alternative available to aggrieved persons and the Commission.

You are reminded that Federal law prohibits retaliation against persons who have exercised their right to inquire or complain about matters they believe may violate the law. Discrimination against

persons who have cooperated in Commission investigations is also prohibited. These protections apply regardless of the Commission's determination on the merits of the charge.

On Behalf of the Commission,

12/12/2025
Date

Mindy E. Weinstein, Director
Washington Field Office

EXHIBIT 2

Retaliation, harassment and verbal abuse complaint

You forwarded this message on Mon 2/14/2022 11:40 AM

Basma Ahmed Sayed Hassan Eloufi
Mon 2/14/2022 11:40 AM
To: Hassan Shwiki; Thaer Soukar; Imad Haj; William Sabatini; Anne R. Noble

To whom it may concern,

This is Basma Eloufi, I'm the content lead for the digital programming unit in Alhurra Digital team at MBN.

I'm sorry for the long email, I prefer short and direct communication, but I had to mention a lot of details to give you an overview about what's happening with me, so please forgive me for the length of the email.

This email is an official complaint against my direct manager Bahaa Al Hajjar, the editor in charge of Alhurra digital, as he was retaliating against me for the past two years, verbally harassing and abusing me, and asking me to do unprofessional things in my work. I don't feel safe working with him, and I don't feel safe working at the office with this happening to me inside it. My manager admitted he was doing that to me because of a previous complaint to HR about discrimination against my nationality and me being a woman. My manager was punishing me for going to HR and reporting a discrimination incident that happened to me, and he admitted that in our meeting at the office that happened Tuesday 8th of February at 10:30 am till 12 pm, which I passed out after (inside MBN's newsroom and in front of everyone).

I'm on sick leave after passing out, and I'm terrified, and under huge pressure and stress emotionally and physically. My manager knows I have no family here and I live by myself, I'm speaking for myself because I'm worried about my health and I'm afraid of any future harm he or any other colleague can cause to me If he/they know that I reported this to HR.

In this email, I put the responsibility of my life and my job in your hands, as this happened to me inside MBN's headquarter, during my workday. And the reason behind this retaliation is because of my gender and my nationality, because I'm a woman and because I'm Egyptian, as documented in my previous report to HR, and I'm writing this email to:

1. I'm requesting an official investigation with Bahaa Al Hajjar to know what happened to me. As my manager claimed that "MBN tricked me and lied to me in the first investigation, and they didn't investigate anything, and they just told you that to shut you up" I'm quoting him. My manager is attacking the organization I'm working in and accusing MBN of doing "fake reports". I'm confused and afraid, and I don't know why he is doing that. I know that he was retaliating against me based on what he thinks as a manager. This conversation happened between both of us in a private meeting, in room 105, from 10:30 am till 12:00 pm, and I passed out a little after hearing this in the meeting.

2. I want to know the result of this investigation. Last time the HR manager told me "we can't tell you the details because the person you're complaining about is your manager" and this is what happened two years later. This time I want to know what happened. I passed out in the newsroom in front of everyone, my life is in danger and my mental and physical health is affected. I want to know where is my right? how MBN is protecting me? and what actions will be done to rectify this situation?

3. Reopen my appraisal last year, as my manager Bahaa Al Hajjar, refused to give me the appraisal I deserve, though I was working with no team and no resources and after a deadly car accident, and when I told him that he said, "Oh you're getting money from your car accident, so no money from MBN". I didn't know at that time that he was retaliating against me.

4. I want all the records and the results of the first investigation that the HR had with Salim Allawzi related to discrimination and racism and retaliation against me because I'm a woman and I'm an Egyptian. I want to know what happened, and I want to know how MBN took care of my rights and protected me, as a woman and as someone who is working inside MBN.

5. I'm requesting from MBN to protect me and my job, from any future revenge or retaliation from Bahaa Al Hajjar or any other person inside MBN: In the first investigation of discrimination, the HR refused to share any information about my right or how the case was handled, and I trusted them with that. And now I don't feel safe working with my manager, and I don't feel safe coming to the office with Bahaa And Salim around. It's my right to feel safe in my workplace. I have good connections with everyone at the office, and people always describe me as a cheerful and positive person, this threat is affecting my performance and my health as well.

Record of what happened on 8th of February 2022:

I passed out at the office in the newsroom on 8th of February after a long meeting with my manager Bahaa, it happened from 10:30 am till after 12:00 pm at meeting room 105, he asked me to come to the office, I told him before coming to the office that I'm not feeling well, and I have pain in my throat, I'm afraid it could be covid, I don't want to come as it's MBN directions to stop spreading covid and stay at home if you have any symptoms. My manager said, “you got the vaccine already, there is no covid, working from home is a privilege I gave to you, and I can take it back at any time, I sent you the invitation to the meeting already in room 105”. I told him “ok I'll dress up and come to the office”.

During the meeting, my manager insulted me and my work. He rejected my plan and the goals I put for the team and asked for unrealistic goals and plans. My manager said that I have no experience in doing my job, and he prevented me from mentioning any achievements I did in 4 years inside MBN in any documents or emails or any written way. He said that he is the only decision-maker, and I don't get to decide anything. When I reminded him that I'm a team lead and this is my plan for the team, I'm the only one inside MBN who is creating digital content for TV shows and MBN hired me for my experience and success, and I have more than 10 years of experience doing this job, 4 years inside MBN and in other international organizations. My manager said “being a content lead is just a joke.. did you believe you're really a manager?” he asked me “not to do anything related to management or content as he is the only manager” quoting him.

- I asked my manager “why you're treating me like this? is there is anything I did wrong or any miscommunication between us? I'm willing to fix it. I respect you and I want you to respect me back”.
- My manager "treating you like what?"
- I said, "you called me a cheater and you said I'm playing behind your back and stabbing you in the back".
- My manager said "oh, I'm kidding"
- I said "I don't think you're kidding, it's not funny, and you used these words many times in some serious situations"
- My manager said “because you're a cheater, you did a mistake by taking a co-worker to HR, who do you think you're? are you trying to teach us something? I was treating you like this intentionally, so you stop cheating on me, conspiring and playing behind my back, and stop going to HR”
- I told my manager: "there is no cheating in going to HR, it's my right, and I don't have to tell you before going. why do you keep saying that? why do you keep calling me a cheater?"
- He said, “this is you, you're a cheater, you're playing behind my back, you went to the HR complaining about your colleague and you couldn't prove anything against him, what do you say now?”.
- I said “This colleague was racist with me, and I followed MBN rules and I reported it to HR. There was an investigation, and the HR manager at that time told me they took care of my rights”
- My manager said, “There was no investigation, MBN tricked you and they just said that to you to shut you up”.
- I said “what?! what are you saying? I'm going to HR after this meeting because what you're saying is very dangerous”.
- My manager was getting angry, and he said, “don't talk to anyone, If I see you up there in the HR office it's not going to be well, stop cheating on me and reporting everything, stop playing games and conspiring against me and your colleagues”.
- I said, “I'll go because you said MBN tricked me, I want to know what happened in the investigation, this is an American organization, and you say they faked an investigation and lied to me”.
- My manager said “you couldn't prove anything on him the first time and you can't prove anything on me this time. from now on, you're not allowed to talk to anyone. I don't want you to talk to anyone without my permission, no HR no other managers or colleagues, and from now on, you have no word on your team, I'm the one who will tell you what to do, and you have to send me every single step by email so I confirm it, even if you're going to the bathroom”.

I was shocked by what my manager said, and I went to the vice president Thaer Soukar's office and I reported what happened, he redirected me to Hassan Fahmy in HR. I went to Hassan Fahmy from HR and he said he doesn't have records of my previous investigation and he redirected me to William Sabatini, I went downstairs to my desk to write an email to Sabatini. I was shocked and terrified, I felt helpless, and I was afraid of my manager's revenge. I started to realize what happened to me in almost four years in MBN. Two years of being bullied and discriminated by Salim Allawzi and two years of retaliation from Bahaa Al Hajjar. I went to talk to my colleague Elsi Melkonian, and before I talk, I started crying and I passed out. My colleagues told me that I was unconscious for a while till they called 911 and they arrived. I was transferred by ambulance to Lorton Inova emergency room, where I was treated for Heart attack symptoms and a panic attack. I had chest pain and the ER doctor referred me to a cardiologist to follow up with. In the ER room, while I was receiving the medical treatment and started to open my eyes and to realize what happened. My colleague Elsi Melkonian was with me. A lot of our co-workers and managers called her to check on me. Bahaa Alhajjaar called her and he said "What are you doing with Basma? leave the hospital and come back to work". "She told him "Basma is in the ER, and she was unconscious, she has no family and no one to stay with her, I'm staying with her till she feels ok, and I took my manager's -Adam Nixon - permission to be out of the office with her".

My manager put me under a lot of stress for the last two years which caused me to pass out and collapse at the office. I was trying to communicate with him professionally for a long time, till I couldn't take anymore. When I felt the door is closed. I asked Thaer Soukar for help, as he is always professional and willing to listen. Soukar has been the only helpful and resourceful person in leadership to acknowledge the situation. I had a couple of meetings with him because I was having difficulties in communicating with my manager due to his lack of experience about my work, as my direct manager doesn't know about Alhurra programs or the nature of my job, and his way of accusing me of “cheating” and harassing me verbally and using inappropriate words during work.

Thaer Soukar helped me, and he asked me to put a plan for the team so he can trust me with bigger responsibilities. I also reported to him the harassment and the retaliation, and he said it's an unprofessional way of communication from Bahaa, and my manager should not say that to me. I took his advice and followed his guidance, I prepared the plan after I got an official request from Bahaa, and I delivered it to my manager Bahaa who asked for a meeting to discuss it. (which was the Tuesday morning meeting) that I passed out after.

I didn't report this to HR as my manager was threatening me not to go to HR a long time, accusing me of “cheating on him - playing dangerous games - stabbing him in the back” for talking to HR or any other colleague or manager. I was trying to avoid going to HR, and fixing things by communicating and focusing on my work. It's not an easy decision for a woman to go to HR, because of literally what happened and what's happening now, I'll be

Retaliation, harassment and verbal abuse complaint

threatened, and I'll pay the price of this complaint later from my work and my health, and I'll face revenge and retaliation. I was hoping for a different Scenario as we are in the US, where everyone is protected by laws.

Other details related to the complaint:

1. **Retaliation**: During the last two years, every time I was trying to do a meeting with the programs or marketing as a part of my job, my manager was accusing me of "cheating on him- playing games - making conspiracy theories against him", I asked him many times to stop using these words with me as I'm just doing my job. He told me I'm "cheating on him" when I was sitting with Leila Bazzi the programs manager talking about digital content from our shows. and he told me I'm "playing a dangerous game" when he saw me talking to the marketing lead Ruba Abdelhadi to publish our promos.
2. **Harassment:** Every time he passes by my desk, he asks me "what are you doing? cheating on me? writing emails against me?" and when I'm working from home, he calls me on weekends and time off and say "how do you feel when I call you in your weekend, I'm annoying right? how does it feel disrespecting your time off? feels good, right?". When I go to get coffee, he calls me to ask where I am, when I go to the bathroom, he calls me to ask if I'm "cheating on him", and If I'm working virtually and missed his call, he gets super angry and says the same things and curse over the phone.
3. **Verbal abuse:** every time I try to communicate with my manager, he responds in an unprofessional way, either by being angry, or loud, or blowing in my face, or refusing to talk and walking away or hanging up the phone suddenly. He did that in front of people and in person, at the office, and when we work virtually. His way of communicating was very embarrassing and disrespectful to me, I was trying to keep the communication between us short and professional, so he doesn't do this in person or in front of people, but he always finds a way to do that even with working from home.

Example 1: when I suggested hiring a digital producer to work in our office in Dubai for programs, to cover our programs there, he was very angry and he called me and said, "you don't know anything about management, you're not even qualified to manage a bakery".

Example 2:I asked Bahaa to provide editing laptops for Ahmed Kadi who just joined the team as a visual editor and for me as I've been working on my personal computer for two years since the pandemic started. The Helpdesk contacted me for the new laptops, and I went to see them, and I found out they didn't meet the requirements for editing. I told that to my manager and he said, "just take them and shut up". I told him these laptops are supposed to help us work remotely and they're not helping, as we will work on an editing software, and it requires at least (a GFX card -a minimum memory of 64 GB - and a big screen - not less than 16 inches) and these laptops have none of that. My manager said, "take them or come to the office, there is no corona, and you should come back to work from the office". I told him there is a pandemic and I can't -ethically - ask my team to come, if someone got sick, I can't be responsible for that, he was blowing in my face many times with and without a face mask, in front of the new member of my team, and said: "then take the laptops and don't talk to me about it again".

I was trying to help the visual editor to get a proper laptop for editing so we can start working, I was trying to fix the issue with the available resources and I suggested swapping laptops with team members, one of them is a social media producer - Dina Obaid - who has an editing laptop but she is using it in light Social media work, and she can work on one of the new laptops. I asked My manager if that's a good solution, he said (yes do it) and copy me in the email as I approved it. I did what he asked me to do, but the Helpdesk needed his written approval as my manager is the one who is responsible for the budget and computers, not me. I called my manager and asked him to approve it for helpdesk, he started cursing and Insulting the IT team, he called them (stupid and lazy), and said (they are not good at working as they're good with emails), I told him to just send his written approval, and he did.

Dina Obaid came to the office to do the swapping and when she saw the new computers said the new computers are not a good fit for her work as well, she refused the swapping. I told her that I reported that to Bahaa already and this is just a temporary solution, and she can talk to him directly. she went to talk to him and told him about refusing the swapping. Bahaa went to the Helpdesk office and saw the computers for the first time. Then he called me to say, "They're very small like a toy, I wouldn't give this laptop to my daughter". I told him "Yes, I've been telling you this for over a week, you didn't believe me till you saw the laptops by your eyes". He said "you're being unfair with your team with the swapping thing", I told him, "I asked you for the right laptops first with clear requirements for editing, and when you refused and told me to shut up, I suggested a solution because you kept asking for production, and I asked for your opinion and your approval and you approved, and even the helpdesk asked for your approval and you approved, why you're blaming me now?" he hung up on me, and he canceled the request with the helpdesk.

Mary Schaeffer from Facilities and Manoj Kumar Pillai from the helpdesk witnessed these laptops struggle.

4. **Denying Covid 19 Pandemic:** My manager asked me to return to the office and to ask my team to come to work from the office. I told him we're all working virtually due to Covid 19 pandemic and we're part of the digital team and can work remotely. My manager said, "there is no Covid, the pandemic is just an illusion, we all got the vaccine, and everyone should come back to the office". I reminded him that pandemic is not over, and there are new viruses as well, and MBN is sending reminders to work virtually and to keep face masks social distance, he said "this is all bullshit, working from home is a privilege I'm giving to you and I can take it back anytime, and I'm taking it back", I said "I can come to work from the office if it's needed, but me and my team are digital people and we can work remotely" he said "no, you all have to work from the office", I said "I can't ask my team to work from the office, If someone got sick I can't take responsibly for that, I can come myself if needed but again it's not needed, and If you're forcing me to return to the office, then ask everyone from Alhurra digital to come back". Ge said "The pandemic is over, you're outside hanging out everywhere and you just remember corona when it comes to work" I said "you don't know anything about my personal life, and even if you do, the whole world is saying there is a pandemic and people are dying from it, if you want me to come back to the office then send me an email with that please, and ask everyone from Alhurra digital to come as well" he left me and went to smoke.

I'm so tired, I'm really tired of the number of bad experiences I had in my workplace. I consider MBN as my house and I met so many wonderful people inside it, and they became my family here. I just want to do my job. why is it so hard? why do I have to listen to all this insulting every day as I am doing my job? I can't take this anymore. This is not a healthy or professional work atmosphere where I'm being insulted and accused of playing games and making conspiracy theories more than we talk about work and production.

Retaliation, harassment and verbal abuse complaint

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This is a workplace in the US where people are expected to respect the rules and the system, and I definitely do that. I came to the US because I believe in the American heritage of respecting law and justice. I expect to have my rights as a human and as a woman working as a part of one of the top American organizations.

God bless you and America,
Best
Basma

EXHIBIT 3

FMLA and STD benefits

Laura Sankoh <lsankoh@alhurra.com>

Thu 5/5/2022 4:35 PM

To: Basma Ahmed Sayed Hassan Eloufi <beloufi@alhurra.com>

Cc: 'Basma El 3oufy' [redacted]

Dear Basma,

This letter provides you with important details pertaining to your current work status. Please read it carefully.

Earlier this year, you requested, and MBN granted to you, twelve weeks of job-protected leave under the Family Medical Leave Act ("FMLA"). Your FMLA leave expires on May 8, 2022. MBN also assisted you in seeking Short Term Disability benefits, which have provided you with income during the time you were seeking medical treatment. Those benefits expire on May 17, 2022. Between now and then, MBN will assist you in applying for Long Term Disability benefits.

We have now received the April 28 medical note from Dr. Sohail, in which she writes that you will need to continue your absence from MBN for an indefinite period of time ("at least" two more months for a "tentative" return date, and even so, "based on reevaluation").

MBN has carefully considered this medical note as a request for an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, but it has determined that this request for an indefinite leave of absence is not a reasonable accommodation and that it cannot grant such a request. And given Dr. Sohail's statements that such leave is medically necessary, there are no other reasonable accommodations that can be granted that would allow you to perform the essential functions of your job.

Unfortunately, because you have no remaining leave, MBN is left with no option but to terminate your employment as of May 18, 2022.

MBN has paid both its and your share of your monthly health care insurance premiums throughout your absence. As you remain unable to return to work, it will not request reimbursement from you for those premiums. Your health insurance will continue through May 31, 2022. Prior to that date, we will send you information about your rights for continuation of your benefits under COBRA.

When you are medically able to work, we also encourage you to apply for any open position at MBN that interests you.

Please be in touch with me to discuss any questions or concerns.

Kind regards,

Laura

Laura Sankoh
HR Manager

MBN MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING NETWORKS, INC.

Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc.
7600 Boston Blvd

Springfield, VA 22153
T:
lsankoh@alhurra.com

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