

**Middle  
East  
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of North America, Inc.

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Washington, DC

December 19, 2007

His Excellency Muhammad Husni Mubarak  
President, Arab Republic of Egypt  
'Abdin Palace  
Cairo, Egypt

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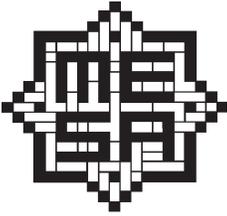
Dear President Mubarak,

We are writing on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom. On May 7, 2007, we wrote to you concerning recurring accounts of severe restrictions on student expression, including disciplinary hearings and suspensions, on several Egyptian university campuses.

We are dismayed to learn that, since that date, rather than abating, the restrictions on academic freedom at Egyptian universities have been infringed by a series of additional actions that risk creating an atmosphere of intimidation rather than fostering the free exchange of ideas essential to the academic enterprise.

According to Egyptian press accounts and human rights organizations:

- o On December 6, security forces intervened against a demonstrations by medical and other students at al-Azhar University against a steady stream of retaliatory measures taken against earlier protests; they also barred journalists attempting to cover the event from entering the campus.
- o On November 28, at a lecture in Helwan University, students from the official student union attacked socialist students from the Engineering faculty Mustafa Shawqi, Khaled al-Sayed, and Nagi Kamel, whose finger was broken. The students were attacked after they protested being marginalized during the lecture's question-and-answer period. Helwan University president Abdallah Barakat turned over the three students to security forces; security forces referred them to the prosecution, which released them a day later.
- o On November 26, 150 students at Cairo University staged a sit-in and hunger strike to protest their eviction from the university dormitories. In a press release, President of Cairo University Dr. Ali Abdel Rahman said, "The students' protests constitute incitement to their fellow students and a contravention of university norms."
- o On November 21, Dean of the Faculty of Commerce at Tanta University suspended four students (Mahmoud Hindy, Ahmed Abdel Salam, Sabri Muhammad, Abdel Halim Muhammad Ibrahim) for "posting inappropriate expressions." The students had put up signs protesting increases in university fees.
- o On November 17, the Dean of Tanta University's Sciences Faculty Dr. Ibrahim Kamel al-Shorbaji is reported to have physically assaulted student Yasser Atef and had security guards forcibly drag him to the Dean's office to prevent him from discussing the increase in university fees with his peers.
- o On October 23, at the Asyut University Faculty of Law, students al-Husseiny Abu Dayf and Muhammad Kamal Eddin were summarily suspended for one month each without



first being allowed a hearing, a violation of university by-laws. The students had sued the university president in the courts for raising annual university fees from £E14 to £E200, and the court ruled in their favor. On November 23, Abu Dayf was suspended for one more month for distributing copies of the court ruling to fellow students.

Accounts suggest such actions center on attempts to debate and discuss both issues of specific concern to students as well as more general political issues. As we noted in our previous letters of 7 May 2007 and 7 November 2007, we are disturbed by the number of incidents in which those engaged in peaceful discussion and other forms of political debate have suffered sanctions from university administrative and disciplinary bodies.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2700 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Peaceful and free exchange of ideas is at the heart of the academic enterprise, and sanctions on those who engage in such exchanges amounts to a serious violation of academic freedom. As a committee of MESA charged with monitoring infringements on academic freedom, the Committee on Academic Freedom is deeply concerned by the frequency and consistency of these accounts and will therefore continue to follow the issue by monitoring the situation on Egyptian university campuses.

We urge you to investigate the accounts of the kind described in this letter and ensure that the Ministry of Higher Education and the administrations of Egyptian universities allow those who engage in discussion and debate in an academic setting to do so without fear of punitive action. To that end, we also support the current call by many Egyptian professors and students for an end to the interference of the state security forces in campus affairs.

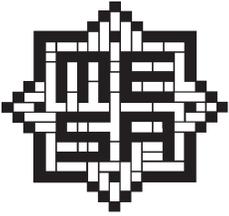
We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Laurie Brand  
Committee on Academic Freedom, Chair

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