



Middle East Studies Association of North America

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9 June 1993

Dr. Ma'moun Salama, President
Cairo University
Giza, Cairo
Egypt

Your Excellency:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association is concerned about the implications for academic freedom embodied in the denial of promotion to full professorship of Associate Professor Nasir Hamid Abu Zayd by the promotion committee of the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University. The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2300 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The association publishes the respected *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

Dr. Abu Zayd is a scholar of international stature, dedicated to invigorating debate on Islamic culture from Islamic and Egyptian perspectives. His application for promotion has been supported strongly in the national press and academic journals and by students at Cairo University. We therefore hope that the promotion committee's decision was an oversight that will be reconsidered in the near future.

We would like to mention some procedural aspects of the case that we feel should be investigated when his case is addressed. First, in violation of Article 73 in the University Regulations, the committee reviewing Dr. Abu Zayd's promotion exceeded the time limit for deliberations. Second, although two of the three reviews submitted by committee members were positive, the committee voted to follow the sole negative recommendation, filed by Dr. Abd al-Sabur Shahin. We wonder why that report was given so much weight and further note that Dr. Mahmud Mekki, one of the two who originally accepted Dr. Shahin's appraisal over his own positive report, subsequently withdrew his support for Dr. Shahin's views and protested the committee's decision. Third, despite the unanimous protest by the Department of Arabic Language and Literature and its demand for an appeal from the committee's decision, the university has not yet agreed to reconsider the case.

We are particularly concerned about implications of Dr. Abu Zayd's case for the future of academic freedom in Egypt. In his most recent book, entitled Criticism of Religious Discourse, Dr. Abu Zayd discusses the intellectual climate that has produced the political violence that is destabilizing Egypt. In order to promote a climate in which Egyptians can live free of terror, the academy needs to be vigorous and vigilant in protecting the right of its professors to speak freely and to withstand pressure from those who disagree with them.

We urge you to conduct an investigation into Dr. Abu Zayd's case and to reopen the consideration of his promotion. Those steps will reassure academics that intellectual freedom is upheld by Cairo University, the premier national university in Egypt.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Respectfully,



Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: Dr. Mohammad al-Gohary, Vice-President, Cairo University
Dr. Hasanayn Rabi'e, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University
Dr. Hussein Kamil, Minister of Education
Minister Amr Mousa, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ambassador Robert Pelletreau, Embassy of the United States of America
Dr. Osama al-Baz, Advisor to the President
Dr. Nasir Hamid Abu Zayd, Department of Arabic Language and Literature
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