



## Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

The University of Arizona · 1232 North Cherry Avenue · Tucson, Arizona 85721

September 19, 1994

Mr. Ibrahim Nafi`, Editor  
al-Ahram  
Gala' Street  
Cairo  
EGYPT

Dear Mr. Nafi`:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association is concerned about what appears to have been a concerted campaign in the Egyptian press against the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies and its director, Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, in connection with the conference on the UN Declaration on Minorities and Peoples of the Arab World and the Middle East which the Ibn Khaldoun Center cosponsored with the Minority Rights Group in May of this year.

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.

The influential former editor of al-Ahram, Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, initiated the attack on this conference in the pages of your newspaper because he objected to its placing the situation of the Copts in Egypt on its agenda. This was followed by approximately 31 articles criticizing the conference both for the topics it was to discuss and for the fact that it was cosponsored by a foreign organization. The expression of these opinions in your newspaper was entirely legitimate. The organizers of the conference attempted to represent their view of the conference and made several submissions to al-Ahram, defending their position. However, al-Ahram printed only one brief reply to the criticisms of the conference. The effect was to create an atmosphere of threats and intimidation which caused the conference organizers to move the conference from Cairo to Cyprus. The aggressive press campaign against the conference and the lack of opportunity afforded to the organizers to explain their objectives will have a chilling effect on academic research and discussion of important contemporary issues.

Egypt has made great strides towards freedom of expression in recent years. We understand and sympathize with the concern of many Egyptians about activities of foreign scholars and the effect of foreign money on the intellectual life of the country. But we believe that intimidating scholars and researchers and inhibiting their activity serves no one's best interest and call for respect for the principle of academic freedom.

Respectfully,

Anne H. Betteridge  
Executive Director