



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

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

3 July 1995

Fax 2022605417

His Excellency Muhammad Husni Mubarak  
`Uruba Palace  
`Uruba Street  
Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt

Your Excellency:

The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America is deeply concerned about the court of appeals ruling on June 14, 1995 divorcing Professor of Arabic Literature, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, from his wife Professor of French Literature, Ibtihal Yunis, against both of their wills on the grounds that Abu Zayd's published work demonstrates that he is an apostate and is not eligible to be married to a Muslim woman. Professor Abu Zayd previously suffered from impingement on his academic freedom when his scholarship was interpreted as apostasy and he was denied promotion to full professor at Cairo University from 1993 until May of 1995, when he was finally promoted.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2400 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.

Although the court of the first instance ruled that those who brought suit against Professor Abu Zayd had no standing, ruling of the appeals court relies on the principle of hisba -- that any Muslim can take action on behalf of the community. This ruling effectively places drastic limits on the freedom of research and publication of our colleagues in Egypt. It is incompatible with international norms of academic freedom and human rights, and we urge the Egyptian government to intervene to ensure that these freedoms are adequately protected.

Egyptian law allows the court's judgment to be executed while the case is appealed to a higher court. We urge the government not to permit such implementation, which would gravely infringe on the rights of Professors Abu Zayd and Yunis and have a chilling effect on the academic work of their colleagues and students.

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The journalist Farag Fuda was assassinated in June 1992 when he was similarly criticized in the course of a legal case. Hence, we are apprehensive about the personal safety of Professor Abu Zayd and urge the Egyptian authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure his security.

We respectfully urge the Egyptian government to revise its laws to support fundamental norms of academic freedom, and to take all appropriate measures to ensure that court proceedings will uphold human rights.

Sincerely,



Anne H. Betteridge  
Executive Director

cc: Justice Faruq Sayf al-Nasr, Minister of Justice  
Fathi Surur, Speaker of the People's Assembly  
`Atif Sidqi, Prime Minister  
Raga' al-`Arabi, Dar al-Qada' al-`Ulya  
The Egyptian Committee for the Defense of Freedom of Thought and Belief