

July 11, 2000

His Excellency Hosni Mubarak  
President  
Republic of Egypt  
*by facsimile:* 011-202-390-1998

Your Excellency:

The Committee on Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa (CAF MENA), of the Middle East Studies Association of North America, is writing to express its deep concern over the June 30 arrest and imprisonment of Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim and several of his associates at the research institute he directs, the Ibn Khaldun Center. We urge you to take all necessary steps to secure their immediate release from prison. We further call on your government to cease its unwarranted and chilling interference into the work of the Ibn Khaldun Center, a respected and renowned independent intellectual and public policy institute.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) comprises 2700 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa, and is the preeminent professional association in the field. The association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and is committed to ensuring respect for principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression in the region and in connection with the study of the region.

Dr. Ibrahim and at least three other persons—Tameer Nabil, Ahmad Ata, and Tareq Hassan—are being held in al-Torah prison. Ms. Nadia Abd al-Nour, a Sudanese national, and the center's financial director, is being held at the Women's Prison in Qanater. Dr. Ibrahim and Ms. Abd al-Nour are being held for investigation on charges of unauthorized fund-raising, the use of such funds to commit forgery, and acceptance of foreign funds with the intent of damaging Egypt's reputation. CAF MENA does not have information on the charges against the other detainees.

Professor Ibrahim was taken from his home late on the night of June 30. His computer, files, and family safe were confiscated. Police also raided the offices of the Ibn Khaldun Center, detained Ms. Abd al-Nour, and confiscated materials. The Center has reportedly been cordoned off from further public access. In the days since, a number of additional staff members have reportedly been detained for questioning.

Professor Ibrahim, an internationally respected scholar, is a professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo and currently chair of his department. The Ibn Khaldun Center has held numerous conferences and produced well-regarded studies on the importance of democratic reform and the strengthening of civil society in Egypt. At the time of these detentions, the center was engaged in plans to monitor forthcoming national parliamentary elections. The charges on which Dr. Ibrahim and his colleagues are being investigated appear to have been brought in order to prevent them from exercising their basic right to freedom of expression and freedom of association. The manner of their arrest, and the decision to detain them during the elections, can only be seen as a further attempt on the government's part to punish them and to intimidate other Egyptians engaged in or considering such efforts.

By criminalizing the exercise of these rights, the government has again demonstrated a disturbing lack of tolerance for critical and independent views. It reflects poorly on your government to respond in this fashion to the activities of a committed Egyptian researcher and public intellectual whose transgression, it appears, has been to publicize shortcomings in the Egyptian electoral

system. The detention of Professor Ibrahim and his colleagues shows how little progress your government has made in allowing independent voices to be heard in Egypt. This action betrays, furthermore, a disturbing tendency of the government to manipulate and misuse the law in order to insulate itself from criticism and to undermine the efforts of those working to bring democratic reform to Egypt.

We consider it a matter of greatest urgency that your government secure the immediate release of Dr. Ibrahim and his colleagues from prison. We further call on your government to foster conditions in which such voices can thrive in order for the process of democratic reform in Egypt to move forward, in accordance with its commitments under international law. This must include respect for the rights of academic researchers to undertake activities in support of political reform.

Respectfully yours,

Mark J. Lowder,  
Acting Executive Director

cc: Ambassador Nabil Fahmy, Washington, DC  
Maj-Gen Habib Ibrahim el-Adly, Minister of the Interior  
His Excellency Farouq Mahmoud Seif el-Nasr, Minister of Justice