



**Middle  
East  
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of North America, Inc.

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November 19, 2003

Dr. Amina Hamza Mahmoud al-Guindy  
Minister of Social Affairs and Insurance  
3 al-Alfy Street  
Cairo  
Egypt

*Fax 011-202-337-5390 or 011-202-591-7799*

Your Excellency:

We are writing to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom. We wish to convey our great concern that the application of the New Woman Institution (NWI) to register with the Ministry of Social Affairs be processed as speedily as possible in order that it may undertake without delay its full range of important activities. This step is essential now that the administrative court (Giza) on October 26, 2003 reversed the Ministry's June 8, 2003 refusal – on unspecified security grounds – of the NWI's application to register under Law 84/2002.

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 the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression in the region and in connection with the study of the Middle East and North Africa in North America and elsewhere.

According to information we have received, since beginning its activities informally in 1984 and registering in 1991 under Egyptian civil law, the New Woman Institution (formerly the New Woman Research Center, NWRC) has been a significant actor in Egyptian civil society. The NWI has tirelessly campaigned on issues related to women's human rights in particular and human rights in general. The organization has done much-needed research on women's roles and status in Egyptian society, and made the results of this research freely available through workshops, seminars, position papers, books, articles, a newsletter, and an Arabic-language journal.

Although all human rights are of concern to MESA and its Committee on Academic Freedom, as an academic organization we are especially dedicated to promoting academic and intellectual freedom for those doing research in and about the Middle East. We believe that the NWI has done significant research on neglected and sometimes controversial topics of vital importance to Egyptian society. The following are some of the topics on which the NWI has sponsored

research: negotiating women's reproductive rights; women, law and development in the context of structural adjustment policies and political Islam; Egyptian women between state and fundamentalism; women's image in the media; violence against women; women in NGOs; women and adult literacy, and feminist movements in Arab countries.

The unwarranted June 8, 2003 decision of the Ministry of Social Affairs to deny the NWI's application to register came as a severe blow. MESA was therefore most pleased with the administrative court's ruling on October 26, 2003 reversing the June decision, thus clearing the way for consideration of the NWI's application as originally requested. The court decision's was a strong affirmation of democracy and an expanded role for civil society institutions, human rights, and intellectual freedom in Egypt.

Our present concern is to urge that the Ministry approve the registration of the New Woman Institution as expeditiously as possible. Five months have already gone by since the original rejection, which severely inhibited the ability of the NWI to carry on its critical work. We understand, for example, that the NWI cannot access its bank account until it receives its official registration clearance from the Ministry. A prolonged or indefinite delay in approving the registration would only compound the harm to the organization and its good work.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy W. Newhall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy W. Newhall  
Executive Director

cc: His Excellency Ambassador Nabil Fahmy, Washington, DC  
U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, David C. Welch