

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

1219 N Santa Rita Ave
The University of Arizona
Tucson AZ 85721 USA

520 621-5850
520 626-9095 fax
mesana@u.arizona.edu
www.mesana.org



May 7, 2007

His Excellency Husni Mubarak
President of the Arab Republic of Egypt
`Abdin Palace
Cairo, Egypt
Fax: +202-390-1998

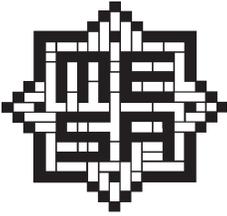
Dear President Mubarak:

We are writing on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom. We are deeply concerned about accounts of severe restrictions on student expression, including disciplinary hearings and suspensions, on several Egyptian university campuses. Accounts suggest such actions center on attempts to debate and discuss issues of political reform, particularly the recent amendments to the Egyptian constitution. We note with particular concern frequent accounts that those engaged in peaceful discussion and other forms of political debate have suffered sanctions from university administrative and disciplinary bodies.

The Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2700 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Among the numerous recent cases that have been brought to our attention are the following:

- President of Mansoura University Magdy Abou Rayan suspended 33 students for one month as well as referring them to disciplinary tribunals, apparently for staging a skit titled "Congratulations to the Son" dealing with current events (*al-Masry al-Yawm*, March 26, 2007). Nine students from the Faculty of Commerce were suspended for one month, charged with distributing lecture notes without permission. A third case is the suspension of an engineering student for one year and the referral of 14 other students to a disciplinary tribunal, all charged with gathering donations in support of Palestinians.
- At Cairo University on April 22, the Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine convened a disciplinary tribunal for 20 students, charging them with belonging to the Free Student Union.
- At Ain Shams University, 27 students were suspended for one month for participating in the Free Student Union elections (*al-Masry al-Yawm*, March 15, 2007).
- On February 21, 11 students at Tanta University were suspended for one semester after the conclusion of the Free Student Union elections.
- On April 15 at Menoufiyya University, students were arrested after announcing their intention to organize an annual end-of-year performance. On the same day, the Shebeen al-Kom prosecution charged 16 of the students with belonging to the Muslim Brothers and ordered them held for 15 days in the Shebeen General Prison.



The Egyptian Constitution itself includes explicit protection of academic freedoms. Article 47 states that “Freedom of expression is guaranteed, and every human being has the right to express his opinion and disseminate it orally or in writing or using imagery or any other means of expression within the bounds of law. Self-criticism and constructive criticism are guarantees for the soundness of the national structure.” Similarly, according to Article 18, “Education is a right guaranteed by the state, and it is mandatory at the primary phase. The state works to extend this to other phases, and supervises all of education, and guarantees the independence of universities and centers of scientific research.”

Moreover, Egyptian administrative courts have overturned university administration decisions. On April 8, the Court of the Administrative Judiciary reversed the decision by the administration of al-Azhar University suspending 32 students and barring them from sitting for final exams. On March 25, the same court reversed the decision by the Ain Shams University administration to suspend 12 students and ordered the university to pay all legal fees. The Court also compelled the president of Helwan University, Abdel Hayy Ebeid, to set a date for disciplinary hearings for 29 students suspended from Helwan University for organizing parallel student union elections.

Peaceful and free exchange of ideas is at the heart of the academic enterprise, and sanctions on those who engage in such exchanges amounts to a serious violation of academic freedom. As a committee of MESA charged with monitoring infringements on academic freedom, the Committee on Academic Freedom is deeply concerned by the frequency and consistency of these accounts and will therefore continue to follow the issue by monitoring the situation on Egyptian university campuses.

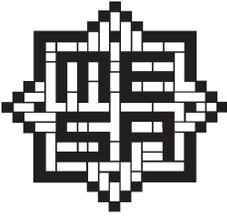
We urge you to investigate the accounts of the kind described in this letter and ensure that the Ministry of Higher Education and the administrations of Egyptian universities take steps to ensure that those who engage in discussion and debate in an academic setting can do so without fear of punitive action. We also urge you to abide by administrative court rulings reversing suspension orders and reinstating students without penalty.

Sincerely,

Zachary Lockman
MESA President

cc: Dr. Hany Mahfouz Helal,
Minister of Higher Education
101 Kasr al-Aini St.
Fax: +20 2 794-1005
hhela@mail.eun.eg
hhela@link.net

His Excellency Nabil Fahmy
Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: 202-244-4319



His Excellency Francis J. Ricciardone, Jr.
United States Ambassador to the Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +20 2 797-3200

Mr. Khaled Aly Elbakly
Minister P. and Deputy Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations
Fax: +20 2 390-9622

Dr. Hani Mohamed Gohar
Dean of the Faculty of
Veterinary Medicine
Cairo University
PO Box 12211
Giza, Egypt
Fax: +20 2 572-5240
vetdean@mail.eun.edu

Dr. Abbas Ali al-Hifnawy
President
Menoufiyya University
Gamal Abdel Nasser Street
Shebeen al-Kom, Menoufiyya
Fax: + 20 2 575-2777
A.Hfnawy@mail.menofia.edu.eg
President@mail.menofia.edu.eg

Dr. Abdel Fattah Sadakah
President
Tanta University
Gaysh St.
Tanta, Gharbiyya
Fax: + 20 4 330-2785
sadakah@tanta.edu.eg

Dr. Ali Ahmed El-Abd
President
Ain Shams University
Abbassia, 11566
Fax: +20 2 684-7824
pres@asunet.shams.edu.eg