

**Middle
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of North America, Inc.

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Washington, DC

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His Excellency Muhammad Husni Mubarak
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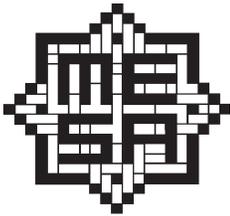
Dear President Mubarak and Minister Helal,

I am writing on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) to express serious concerns regarding the most recent wave of violations of academic freedom on several Egyptian university campuses. Intervention by security services and university administrations has sought to repress students' free exercise of their right to run and vote in student elections, and their right to engage in other forms of campus activism.

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 3000 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.

According to press and other media reports, for the past several weeks, university administrations and State Security officers have been systematically interfering in student union elections by preventing Muslim Brotherhood students from filing candidacies. Campuses have been circled with riot police and trucks, and plainclothes police and armed provocateurs have been allowed onto university grounds to disrupt and assault protesting students. In addition, activist students have been suspended, arrested, and/or denied university housing based on their political affiliation. Among the specific cases that have come to our attention are the following:

- At the beginning of the academic year, before the start of student union elections, 14 students at Mansoura University were referred to disciplinary hearings for organizing orientation activities for new students (*al-Dustor*, September 26, 2008)
- 62 students at Mansoura University have been subjected to various sanctions for setting up parallel student union elections to protest the rigging of regular student union elections. Some students have been referred to disciplinary hearings, others have been suspended, and still others have been threatened with suspension (*al-Masry al-Yawm*, October 29, 2008; *al-Badeel*, October 30, 2008)
- Two students at Helwan University were arrested by State Security officers after a heated verbal argument between the students and a campus security guard. Despite a court order freeing the students, they remain detained by State Security (*al-Masry al-Yawm*, October 28, 2008)



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- Four Ikhwan students at Fayoum University have been suspended for one week for organizing an orientation for incoming students (*al-Masry al-Yawm*, October 28, 2008). Seven additional students at the same university have been arrested by State Security officers in connection with a campus campaign organized by Ikhwan students to “promote students’ identification with Arab and Muslim identity,” (*al-Masry al-Yawm*, October 30, 2008)
- Four students at al-Azhar University were suspended for attempting to run in student union elections (*al-Masry al-Yawm*, October 21, 2008).
- Six students from the 6 April youth movement at Ain Shams University were detained for 9 hours, and one of them was referred to a disciplinary hearing, for putting up posters and distributing pamphlets expressing opposition to the ruling National Democratic Party’s policies (*al-Masry al-Yawm*, November 4, 2008)
- Fifteen students at Helwan University were beaten by campus security guards and administrative staff, in the presence of the head of the Helwan police station, for putting up posters criticizing the ruling National Democratic Party’s slogans and policies (*al-Badeel*, November 4, 2008; *al-Masry al-Yawm*, November 4, 2008)

Article 18 of the Egyptian Constitution guarantees the independence of universities and scientific research centers, a right that Egyptian academics and students are seeking to uphold. The free participation in student elections is a key element of academic freedom codified in Egyptian laws governing universities and student organizations.

We are deeply disturbed by the reports indicating continuing intimidation and assaults against student activists and continuing interference by security forces in university affairs, in violation of Egypt’s laws. We call on you to investigate these violations, to put an end to them, to reinstate suspended students, and to release students arrested for attempting to elect their campus representatives.

We await your response.

Sincerely,

Amy W. Newhall
Executive Director

cc: His Excellency Nabil Fahmy, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Dr. Abdallah Barakat, President, Helwan University
Dr. Ahmad Magdy al-Gohary, President, Fayoum University
Dr. Ahmad Bayoumi Shehab El-Din, President, Mansoura University
Dr. Ahmad El-Tayeb, President, University of al-Azhar