



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

3542 N Geronimo Ave
Tucson AZ 85705 USA

tel 520-333-2577
fax 520-207-3166
caf@mesana.org
www.mesana.org



October 19, 2017

His Excellency Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
President, Arab Republic of Egypt
'Abdin Palace
Cairo, Egypt
Fax: +20-2-23901998

His Excellency Mohamed Hossam Abdel Rahim
Minister of Justice, Arab Republic of Egypt
Cairo, Egypt
Fax: +20-2-27958103

His Excellency Sameh Shoukry
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Arab Republic of Egypt
Cairo, Egypt
Fax: +20-2-25767967

President al-Sisi and Ministers Abdel Rahim and Shoukry:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our dismay at the sentence of Ismail Serageldin, the retired founding director of the Alexandria Library (and former vice-president of the World Bank), to three and one-half years in prison on the charge of negligent management. Dr. Serageldin has consistently disputed the charge, while other world-renowned personalities, including ninety Nobel prize winners and twenty heads of state, have expressed their support for Dr. Serageldin and their complete confidence in his integrity.

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 nearly 3,000 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.

Ismail Serageldin was appointed as the director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina when it was inaugurated by President Husni Mubarak in 2002. Prior to that, Dr. Serageldin had a prominent career with appointments at the World Bank as well as on the boards of many international universities. He also has more than twenty honorary doctorates. Dr. Serageldin continues to serve as the Bibliotheca's Librarian Emeritus and is on its Board of Trustees. While director, his primary task was to reconstitute the Library and digitize the collection so that research could be carried out and academic debates could be convened. He has earned national and international recognition for achieving the goal of having revived the Library and transforming it into an active center for scholarship.



Re: Dr. Ismael Serageldin

Page 2

October 19, 2017

In the wake of the 2011 uprising and the fall of the regime of Hosni Mubarak, numerous lawsuits were filed against Dr. Serageldin. After a prosecutorial investigation that lasted more than one year, all the accusations – ranging from corruption to money laundering --were dismissed except for three, seemingly minor ones related to negligent management. For example, it was claimed that the 110 permanent library staff were not given enough work and so, their civil servant salaries were wasting government funds. There were also complaints about benefits to staff and negotiations for library resources. In 2012, the three charges were referred to an administrative court. Five years later, the court found Dr. Serageldin guilty and he was convicted. While such misdemeanors tend to be punished with a monetary fine, Dr. Serageldin was sentenced to three and one-half years in prison. Because of the extraordinarily harsh sentence, it is believed in some circles, both inside and outside Egypt, that the judiciary's ruling was politically motivated and does not reflect the practice of an objective body without special interests.

The Committee on Academic Freedom believes that a transparent and independent inquiry into the allegations against Dr. Serageldin should be conducted. Until then, and pending the results of such an inquiry, we call on you to intervene to suspend the conviction. Wrongly convicting Ismail Serageldin or levying an inappropriately harsh prison sentence are a gross injustice and an assault on academic freedom. Furthermore, they could lend credence to the suggestion that personalities who have been connected to prior regimes and/or support liberal education face threats in Egypt today.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We await your reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'B. Baron' followed by a horizontal line.

Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy W. Newhall' in a cursive style.

Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director

cc:

The Honorable Yasser Reda, Ambassador of Egypt to the United States