

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

The University of Arizona · 1232 North Cherry Avenue · Tucson, Arizona 85721

January 29, 1996

Mr. Jean-Louis Debré  
Minister of the Interior  
Republic of France  
Paris  
FRANCE

Dear Mr. Debré:

The Board of Directors of the Middle East Studies Association of North America is distressed to learn that, as reported in Le Monde on September 14, 1995, the Director of Public Liberties has issued an administrative order forbidding the importation into France of a book entitled Livre blanc sur la répression en Algérie (1991-1994), ou l'histoire de la tragédie d'un peuple.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2400 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The association publishes the respected International Journal of Middle East Studies and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

The book in question was published by Editions Hoggar in Switzerland and is the work of the "Comité Algérien des Militants Libres de la Dignité Humaine et des Droits de l'Homme," a group which is apparently linked to the FIS. It consists of 221 pages of testimonies of individuals who allege they have suffered from torture and other forms of repression by the security forces of Algeria over the past three years. We make no judgment on the veracity of the testimony or the political stand of the editors of the book, although we do note that the Algerian authorities have made no attempt to refute the book's charges.

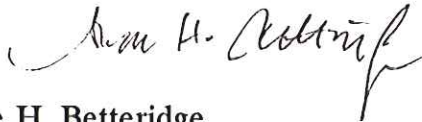
Blocking the dissemination of information is a grave violation of the academic freedom of our colleagues in France and is, therefore, a matter of grave concern to us. In forbidding the importation of the Livre blanc, the French government deprives the French scholarly community and general public of important information relevant to an informed debate over the current situation in Algeria and French policy toward that country. Moreover, because France is an important center for the diffusion of information to Algeria and other North African countries, the action of the French government in limiting the distribution of this book has negative consequences far beyond France itself.

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Censorship and restriction of the circulation of printed materials are a violation of the basic freedoms enunciated in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19.

We urge you to reconsider the order of the Director of Public Liberties and to rescind the ban on importing the Livre blanc.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Anne H. Betteridge".

Anne H. Betteridge  
Executive Director

bcc: Arun Kapil  
Visiting Scholar  
Institut Maghreb-Europe  
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FRANCE