

# Arab Women's Solidarity Association banned in Egypt

Egyptian governmental authorities have ordered the dissolution of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association in accordance with a decision of the deputy governor of Cairo on June 15, 1991. The Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) believes that the decision represents a new assault on the freedom of organization and association, which is severely restricted in Egypt.

The Arab Women's Solidarity Association is headed by the nationally and internationally renowned writer Dr. Nawal al-Saadawi, one of the most prominent figures in the Egyptian women's movement. In 1985, following a two-year long rejection, the AWSA succeeded in obtaining legal permit for its establishment from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Representatives of AWSA report that since its establishment the association has been pressured and harassed by the Ministry of Social Affairs on the pretext that the AWSA was engaged in activities prohibited by the law of associations.

The AWSA believes that there are two distinct organizations of the same name, one an Egyptian organization registered in accordance with the law of associations, and the other an international organization that enjoys consultative status in the UN Economic and Social Council while working in Egypt under the approval of the Egyptian foreign ministry. The Ministry of Social Affairs and other relevant authorities refused to acknowledge this.

AWSA officials claim to have replied satisfactorily to all the ministry's queries but the decision to dissolve the association was nonetheless

taken without prior warning and without an official investigation. AWSA has initiated an urgent legal appeal before the State Council Court.

The dissolution of AWSA is not the only case of the Egyptian government's violation of the freedom of establishing associations. Nearly two years ago a decision was issued dissolving an association called "Friends of Arab Media Club," thereby stopping its publication of the weekly paper "Sawt al-Arab," issued by the association on the pretext that the association dealt in political matters.

The only legal framework regulating the establishment of non-governmental organizations in Egypt is law 32 of the year 1964, which regulates all public benefit associations, prohibits them from touching on political matters and subjects them to governmental control expressed in the Ministry of Social Affairs. The ministry has powers which include the rejection of the establishment of an association, supervision and control over established associations, and the right to dissolve associations.

In the context of this law, the Ministry of Social Affairs has continued to reject the establishment of a number of non-governmental organizations, including the EOHR.

The EOHR believes that law 32 and the practices of governmental bodies concerned with applying it represent a continuing serious violation of the freedom of organization and association in violation of the international conventions to which the Egyptian government is signatory. It was with this in mind, that over a year ago the EOHR initiated

legal proceedings contesting the constitutionality of law 32. The case is still in the Egyptian judicial system.

The EOHR equally believes that the dissolution of the AWSA is a serious violation of the freedom of organization and association in Egypt. It is deeply concerned that the Egyptian government, rather than respond to the demands of public opinion for more public liberties and particularly for the freedom to form non-governmental organizations, and rather than respect its international commitments to maintain basic standards of human rights and civil liberties, is continuing to adopt the course of increasingly tightening the constraints on basic rights and liberties in Egypt.

The EOHR condemns the dissolution of AWSA and calls upon the Egyptian government to revoke it immediately, as it calls upon it to revise the legal framework regulating the establishment and operation of non-governmental organizations in the country in such a way as to guarantee respect for human rights in Egypt.

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*This call was excerpted from a statement issued by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) on 30 July 1991. Its office is located at 17 Aswan Square, Mohandessine, Giza. Tel. 3466582, Fax no. 3448166.*

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**Do not allow AWSA to be silenced.  
Do not allow women from Muslim  
countries and communities to be  
silenced.  
Defend and demand our rights.**