

From Egypt

Dear Fellow Scholars, Writers, Friends:
There is an ongoing campaign in Egypt to divorce Dr. Nawal El-Saadawi, writer and medical doctor from her husband of many years, Dr. Sherif Hetata, as Nawal's views have been declared to be "against Islam." The "divorce" case will be heard in a *shari'a* court on June 18. It is being brought by the lawyer Nabih Wahash. Sherif and Nawal have asked that those who wish to support them sign the letter below to be sent on their behalf. After signatures are collected, I will send the letter to the appropriate officials. Please sign this letter in the name of intellectual freedom and justice. To sign on to the letter, reply with your name and location or affiliation or simply email Dr. Sherifa Zuhur szuhur@earthlink.net or Dr. Sondra Hale sonhale@ucla.edu

Letter written to Public Prosecutor, Maher Abdel Wahab, and Minister of Justice, Counselor Farouk Seif El Nasr

Your Excellencies:

We, the undersigned, are writing to protest the attempt to annul the marriage of Nawal El-Saadawi and Sherif Hetata on the grounds that the views expressed by Dr. Nawal El-Saadawi, medical doctor, writer and active defender of the rights of women place her outside the boundaries of Islam.

We are deeply concerned that such a measure can only produce an extremely negative image of Egypt and the Arab and Islamic world. This

intended legal action against Dr. El-Saadawi and her husband, Sherif Hetata, will be considered a basic infringement of human rights, and political and religious freedoms. We ask you to do all that is within your power to make sure that justice and intellectual freedom prevail in Egypt.

Sincerely,
Dr. Sherifa Zuhur
Visiting Scholar
Center for Middle Eastern Studies
University of California, Berkeley

Professor Sondra Hale
Department of Anthropology
University of California, Los Angeles

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

On the 6 March 2001 a weekly newspaper published an interview I had given a few days before I left for a long lecture tour in Germany, France and the United States. In this interview I reiterated the views I have defended in all my writings during the last forty years and pronounced publicly in many parts of the world including the Arab Region. In these views I link questions of sex and gender to politics, economics and culture at the local and international level and struck at the roots of all forms of exploitation and oppression whether class, patriarchal, racial national, or religious. Those who are in power have always tried to silence my voice. These attempts to silence me have increased steadily in the past years which have witnessed the predominance of capitalist neo-liberal forces and their allies including religious fundamentalism.

In the interview, I repeated my opposition to the veiling of women which implies that women are only bodies, to polygamy, to inequality in inheritance rights and insisted that all of these were in contradiction with the true spirit of Islam and the correct interpretation of the Qoranic text. I also mentioned that some of the practices of Islam had been inherited historically from the pre-Islamic era and that this was a natural phenomena in all religions and gave as an example that of the pilgrimage. The newspaper which published my interview, like many other newspapers appearing all over the world, depends heavily on sensationalism for its sales. My views were manipulated, quoted out of context and blown up with provocative headlines. The powers that

be which have always been unhappy with my views seized the occasion of a deteriorating cultural atmosphere coupled with a rebound of fundamentalist tendencies in Egypt. The Mufti of Egypt issued a declaration to the same newspaper accusing me of having strayed out of the bounds of Islam. A few days later, a lawyer raised a case against me for separation between me and my husband on the grounds of apostasy. The case is appearing before a personal law court (*Sharia* Court) on June 18, 2001. But since all cases must be raised by the General Prosecutor himself according to the amendments made to the law of Hizba, the same lawyer sent a request to the General Prosecutor asking him to have me tried on the same grounds. If the General Prosecutor agrees, I can be tried and sentenced to a period of imprisonment for attacking religion or separated from my husband by Hizba on grounds of apostasy. We are waiting to see what will happen.

What you are all doing is wonderful and we are very thankful to you. Expand it more and more until it becomes an irresistible wave. You will be defending human rights and the dignity of many men and women in our region and all over the world.

Send your protests to Farouk Seif Al Nasr, Minister of Justice, Lazoughly square, Cairo, Egypt; to Maher Abdel Wahab, the General Prosecutor, The High Court, July 26 Street, Cairo, Egypt (Fax 202 5757165); to Hosni Mubarak President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and to the First Lady Suzanne Mubarak with copies of everything to the Egyptian Embassy.

Nawal El-Saadawi