

December 5, 2003: Egypt: Commissioner says quotes are distorted and fabricated in Egyptian publication

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 5, 2003 Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

WASHINGTON - The Egyptian government weekly October published an article in which U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Commissioner Khaled Abou El Fadl was quoted as having allegedly made statements criticizing President Bush. These alleged statements are distortions and fabrications, according to Commissioner El Fadl. Moreover, these alleged statements do not in any way reflect the views of the Commission. Excerpts of the article translated into English were published on November 26, 2003 on the Web site of the Middle East Media Research Institute. In a December 1, 2003 written statement, Commissioner El Fadl said, "The quotes attributed to me are an outrageous fabrication and distortion and far exceed the limits of believability. I do not espouse these views, nor are they consistent with my published views as a matter of extensive public record. I support President Bush and his efforts to build positive relations and democratic systems in the Middle East, and will continue to give my best efforts to ensure his success. I am speaking with my attorney about what legal options to pursue against October." "We value the contribution Commissioner El Fadl is making to the work of the Commission and look forward to his contributions in the future. Most recently, on behalf of the Commission, he published an important article in the Wall Street Journal addressing the terrorist ideology supported by Saudi Arabia," said USCIRF Chair Michael K. Young. Below is the text of Commissioner El Fadl's public statement on the October article: PERSONAL STATEMENT OF DR. KHALED ABOU EL FADL December 1, 2003 On November 26, 2003, The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) issued their Special Dispatch Series No. 616, which consisted of excerpts from an interview that I supposedly gave to October Magazine, an Egyptian government weekly. According to the MEMRI translated excerpts, I warn against the reelection of President Bush, I make numerous derogatory claims about the Bush administration and its policies in the Middle East, and I tout my own apparently hyper-inflated role within the administration. Specifically, I am cited as referring to President Bush and his administration as a group of Christian fundamentalists with colonialist policies toward the Middle East; as asserting that this administration will invade Syria and Iran if the president is reelected; as having said I heard testimony in Congress that 20 percent of the U.S. troops in Iraq suffer from mental conditions; and as playing an absurdly singular role in determining American military policy, including the deployment plan to withdraw troops from Iraq, among other claims. The quotes attributed to me are an outrageous fabrication and far exceed the limits of believability. I do not espouse these views, nor are they consistent with my published views as a matter of extensive public record. Some of the quotes are simply ridiculous and idiotic. I support President Bush and his efforts to build positive relations and democratic systems in the Middle East, and will continue to give my best efforts to ensure his success. As a member of the Board of Directors of Human Rights Watch, I work to protect human rights around the world. As an American lawyer, I regularly work with the U.S. government and private firms to prosecute terrorism cases against al-Qaeda and in support of the victims of 9/11. As an Islamic scholar, I have testified in court to defend the religious rights of Jews, Christians, Muslims, Atheists, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses and many others. As a member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, I have extended my efforts to ensure the religious freedoms of those around the world. Finally, as a citizen who is proud to be American, I respect and believe in an individual's right to speak his or her mind and conscience, and to be quoted accurately. I can only hope that people will have the integrity not to attribute to me what I do not say or believe.

Dean Michael K. Young, Chair

- Felice D. Gaer, Vice Chair Nina Shea, Vice Chair Preeti D. Bansal Patti Chang Archbishop Charles J. Chaput Khaled Abou El Fadl Richard Land Bishop Ricardo Ramirez Ambassador John V. Hanford III, Ex-Officio Joseph R. Crapa, Executive Director