

# Egyptian American Report



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April 2011



Santa Barbara Music Ensemble, Sham El Nessim, 2010

## Upcoming Events

### 2011 EAO Board Members

Faiza Shereen, President  
Abla Magid, At Large  
Amany Elghamrawy, At Large  
David Elzik, Program  
Diaa Guirguis, Finance  
Fadila El-Wakil, Membership  
Said Helmy, At Large  
Nasr Ghoniem,  
Communications  
Mohamed Eltawansy, At Large

You can muffle the drum, and you  
can loosen the strings of the lyre,  
but who shall command the skylark  
not to sing?

**Kahlil Gibran**

### *Sham El-Nessim Picnic on May 28, 2011 Mason Regional Park Irvine, Shelter 6*

Sham El Nessim is a true Egyptian festival. Each spring, just as the Nile rises, Egyptians from all walks of life celebrate this renewal of spring.

Spring is here and so is the picnic. We plan to bring many of the activities from last year. In case you missed last year's picnic, we enjoyed "fasikh", helba, and eggs.

It is not only about the food. We listened to and swayed to the lively Santa Barbara Middle Eastern Music Ensemble and watched the belly dancer perform folk dances. The chess tournament was lively and close.

A special surprise! If you recall the "aragoz" from times past, look for him this spring.

Don't miss this year's picnic!



## Outstanding Achievement Award Ceremony Egyptian Pride Day

The UCLA campus was the perfect backdrop for the Outstanding Achievement Award Ceremony, as not only were we recognizing Dr. Mohamed El-Arian for his great achievements, we also were acknowledging the young people in Egypt whose peaceful revolution toppled a long-standing government and were writing history while we watched with pride and gratitude.

The Egyptian flag stood proudly in the front of the room. Also, thanks to Amany Elghamrawy, every individual wore the Egyptian red, white and black flag. The attendees were a mixture of Egyptian Americans new to the organization, long standing members, and new young faces that wanted to celebrate with the Egyptian Americans who left Egypt because they couldn't live in freedom as they wanted. Now, they see the freedom they wanted in the faces of young and old in Egypt.

Yet the common factor among the 200 attendees was the bright smiles, puffed

chests and sincere joy and respect for the people of Egypt.

All sang the Egyptian National Anthem, "Biladi, Bilad, Biladi" loudly and proudly. The most frequent phrases heard were "Can you believe it?" "Why couldn't it have happened when we were there?" and many of the long time residents of America asked, "Why didn't we have the courage to do this?"

When we did have the chance to hear Dr. El-Arian speak, he had changed his plans to speak on American and global economics and focused his speech on evolving events in Egypt. His main message was very positive, and although he pointed out some economic difficulties ahead in the short term, his assessment was more upbeat on the economy of Egypt in the long term. He was greeted with applause and gratitude.

It was a wonderful day together where all had a chance to recognize Egypt and one of Egypt's finest.

# HONORING DR. MOHAMED EL-ERIAN,

## CELEBRATING EGYPT

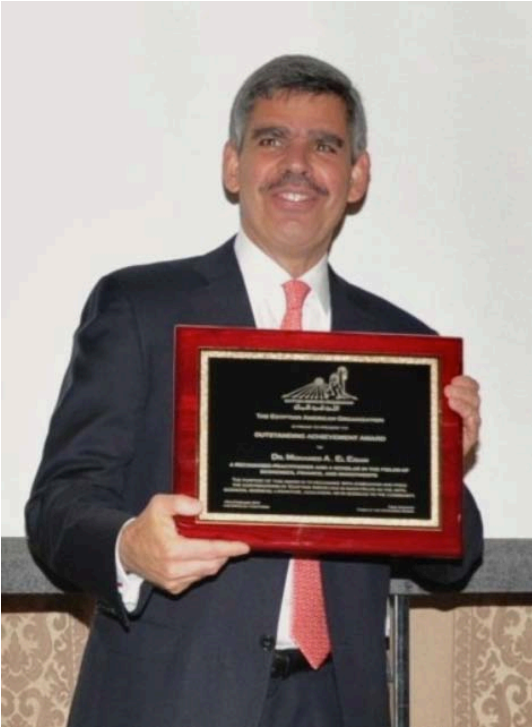
Faiza Shereen

“There was a time as a young child in Cairo when I believed that Egypt could do anything. I felt proud to grow up in a country that had overcome decades of British colonial rule . . . I was thrilled to live in the undisputed leader of the Arab world. And I was delighted that Egypt joined India and Indonesia to lead the “nonaligned movement” of the world’s young and newly independent nations. It was a period of pride and hope for many Egyptians. Yet all this was shattered by the shock of a humiliating defeat in the 1967 war with Israel.”

Dr. Mohamed El-Erian’s sentiments expressed in the quote above, and with which he began his address Sunday, February 13, evoked familiar feelings that reverberated through the UCLA Faculty Center, where an audience of over 200 had gathered to honor him as the 2011 recipient of the Egyptian American Organization’s Outstanding Achievement Award.

“Having left [the country],” he continued to say, “I never anticipated that, one day, I would again experience such feelings of intense Egyptian pride. Well, the feelings are back; and I owe this to a remarkable secular movement that bravely took to the streets of Cairo, helped Egyptians overcome decades of fear and, collectively, chase out a regime thought by many to be among the most entrenched in the world.” Like him, many of the older Egyptian Americans in the audience had been taken by surprise--not only by the extraordinary events of Tahrir Square- but by the emotions they recalled.

Dr. El-Erian had prepared a talk that he put aside, deciding that current events demanded that he speak about Egypt. Pointing out the unique aspects of this revolution--focused on its legitimate demands, this uprising denigrated no outsider; it did not resort to violence, even when attacked by



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or

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Please contact Dr. Said  
Hilmy at [said@cox.net](mailto:said@cox.net)



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the regime's thugs; it did not require or request foreign assistance--he concluded that this "improbable feat" was a "home-made people's revolution; one whose foot soldiers deserve the peace prizes usually given to reformist elder statesmen."

We have all been taken by surprise. We have all been victims to some extent of the view--strategically maintained by Mubarak's regime—that Egypt must be ruled by an iron fist, that any alternative spelled disaster and would reek havoc. But the architects of this revolution refused to be paralyzed by fear.

One feature of this brave new order is a transformed political consciousness that, among other things, invalidates the escalating inter-religious conflict (encouraged by whom?) leading to inflamed rhetoric on both sides which further aggravates the situation, distracting Egyptians from their main enemy and turning them upon each other. In a BBC report, Maha Abdelrahman is quoted saying: "the state's major crime has been in the way it has indirectly incited and fuelled sectarian tension between Muslims and Christians." Only a few weeks before the Tahrir events, I wrote a response to the bombing that had killed Copts in Alexandria that I threw away when the uprising began. While these aggressions and eruptions of violence are real and deserve to be addressed, millions of Muslim Egyptians-- the vast majority-- denounce these acts and object to the use of Islam by their perpetrators. As Boutros Boutros-Ghali stated in an interview with Spiegel online: "Our ties are far too old to be destroyed. Copts and Muslims have lived together in Egypt for 14 centuries. There have always been highs and lows between the religious groups, but never collective hate toward one another. I'm actually far more inclined to believe that the massacre in Alexandria will strengthen our bonds." Ghali's assessment is proven right. The current revolution has shown how quickly and readily Christian and Muslim Egyptians come together in the name of Egypt. Copts and Muslims have prayed together, in churches and mosques, and in the streets. The slogan from the 1919 revolution, "the crescent and the cross," is all around us, asserting



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For a published version of Dr. El-Erian's address, please see: "The Road from Tahrir Square to Democracy"

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7911777a-387d-11e0-959c-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1DzeVZRAN>

The EAO sends their condolences to the family of Dr. Gamal Mostafa, who passed away less than two weeks ago. Dr. Mostafa was the recipient of the EAO Outstanding Achievement Award in 1987.

(Continued)

Muslim/Christian solidarity. In all the events of the 18 days, not one church has been attacked or any violent act perpetrated in the name of religion.

What we are witnessing is a paradigm shift, and the ways of the last half-century are no longer viable. El-Erian pointed out that one of the reasons that Mubarak was not able to contain the revolution is that he failed to understand that it is no longer “business as usual.” It’s a new Egypt.

Reminding us, lest the euphoria of the moment becomes blinding, that hard work lies ahead, El-Erian pointed out that “the challenge now is to turn the nation’s energies to its economic, institutional, political and social rehabilitation. “ He stressed that this process must start immediately. “To support this Egypt’s economic and political institutions must be revamped, to ensure greater transparency, accountability, and checks and balances. It is important that happens in a manner that discourages the personality cults that so undermined the country in the past.” Indeed, El-Erian addresses here a tradition of deifying that has been with us, perhaps, since Pharaoh. Whether it’s object is “mawlaya,” “ma’aleek,” “el rayess,” “ya basha” or simply “sa’at el modeer,” the cult of the individual as personifying power must give place to the democratic culture of placing the power in the institution itself. For this to happen, the health of the institutions must be insured.

The EAO congregation on Sunday, February 13, was richly engaging for two reasons: the spirit of pride and hope infused by the current events and the eloquent, warmly genuine, and intellectually vibrant address of the man whose outstanding achievement we were proud to honor.



# Egyptian Academics Without Borders

A group of Egyptian-American Engineering Professors is brainstorming on transformative educational models to deliver a top-notch college education to young Egyptians.

The initial focus will be on developing first-rate engineering degrees. The proposal is to develop a public program where students can enter through a competitive merit-based system, with financial aid for those who are admitted.

There are a variety of possible sources for this aid:

- Philanthropy
- NGOs
- Government aid and
- International aid.

## List of Initial Developers of the Proposal:

1. Ahmed Ghoniem (MIT).
2. Nasr Ghoniem (UCLA)
3. Mahmoud Hussein (U Colorado).
4. Khalid Mosalam (UCB).
5. Jeff Shamma (Georgia Tech.)
6. Tarek Zohdi (UCB).
7. Mohamed Zikry (North Carolina State).
8. Osama Hassanein (Chairman of Tech Wadi).

It is estimated that there are between 50-100 Egyptian-American, Egyptian-Canadian, and Egyptian-European engineering academics that would provide their skills to help this worthy cause. Their program has seven main points:

1. This program should be carried out with input from all Egyptian Universities-no one should be left out.
2. It should be public.
3. The faculty should commit to doing this for the good of Egypt.
4. Establish a fellowship program abroad for talented graduate students.
5. Mentorship program for talented young Egyptian faculty to be mentored by the Egyptian-Academics abroad.
6. Potential online instruction provided by Egyptian Academics abroad.
7. Collaborative program between internationally recognized universities and Egyptian Universities.

## CELEBRATING EGYPTIAN FOLKLORE

**Bring your children to watch the puppet show!**

Traditional street puppetry, or **Aragoz** street puppet theater, dates back to immemorial times in the main cities of Egypt. The House of Aragoz and Khayal Al Zill , located in Sabir Bar Al Dar, an Islamic House of Antiquity near Al Hussein (used for religious and philosophical study of Islam), is a dynamic artistic and cultural preservation initiative that aims to safeguard the nearly extinct Egyptian indigenous puppets and the puppetry tradition known as *Khayal Al Zill* (shadow puppetry) and *Aragoz* (hand puppetry). In 2006, UNESCO Cairo Office together with Wamda group participated in the first exhibition of 'Shadow Puppet and Aragoz'. The foremost motivation of the exhibition is the safeguarding of Shadow Puppet & Aragoz, which are threatened to vanish.

### The History of Aragoz

The name *Aragoz* is said to have come from Karakoz, a Turkish Sultan who ruled during the Ottoman Empire. Karakoz literally means "the black-eyed". *Aragoz* is said to have its origins in China and to have arrived in Egypt around the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century. To perform almost anywhere at anytime, the *Aragoz* puppeteer would wrap himself in a tent like structure or sit behind a three paneled screen to manipulate glove puppets. There are 26 traditional *Aragoz Nimir* (numbers). Skits duration vary from five minutes to half hour in length. The skits are taught and learned orally and have never been transcribed. The *Aragoz numbers* chronicle history, children's education, prayer, government criticism, parody of social mores. The basic hero is the Aragoz who is the everyman, the bumbling boisterous simpleton, and the tongue of the people. He would endeavor to outsmart any pretentious hypocrite who chose to stand in his way.

Source: UNESCO Office in Cairo

