RESOLUTION COMMENDING THE FBI WHISTLEBLOWER WHO EXPOSED ABUSES ON THE USE OF EXIGENT NATIONAL SECURITY LETTERS

WHEREAS, Mr. Bassem Youssef, a high ranking agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), sought and received permission to address the American Library Association (ALA) on January 12, 2008; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Youssef was then prevented by the FBI from giving a prepared speech before the ALA, and the FBI informed Mr. Youssef that he could be released from employment based on comments he made to the ALA; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Youssef courageously came before us to answer spontaneous questions about how the FBI is implementing policies affecting the privacy of all Americans, including those of library users; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Youssef has brought to light serious abuses by the FBI in administering the use of exigent National Security Letters; and

WHEREAS, The ALA had continuously supported the principles of freedom of information and the public's right to know; and

WHEREAS, The ALA has condemned the use of National Security Letters to obtain library records; and

WHEREAS, The ALA has urged Congress to pursue legislative reforms that protect library users and others from unwarranted searches; and

WHEREAS, The ALA has a long standing policy of supporting free expression by all, including government employees; and

WHEREAS, Open and unfettered access to information by and about government is a basic tenet of democratic society and crucial to the public's ability to hold government accountable; and

WHEREAS, The ALA has affirmed its support for accountable government and the role of whistleblowers in reporting abuse, fraud, and waste in government activities; and

WHEREAS, The ALA opposes any use of government prerogatives that leads to the intimidation of individuals or groups, and discourages them from exercising their rights of free expression as guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution; and

WHEREAS, The ALA encourages resistance to such abuse of government power and supports those against whom such government power has been employed; and

WHEREAS, Security concerns in today's environment have resulted in increased restrictions on access to public, unclassified government information, and actions of whistleblowers may be the only means of exposing problems in government; and

WHEREAS, Whistleblowers have often alerted Congress, government officials, and the public to abuse, fraud, and waste in government activities; and

WHEREAS, Government employees who have uncovered abuse, fraud, and waste and become whistleblowers have suffered intimidation, loss of security clearance, reduced benefits, or loss of employment; and

WHEREAS, An FBI employee must be permitted to expose abuses of the laws enforced by the FBI if the government is to be held accountable by the public; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the American Library Association commends Mr. Bassem Youssef for bringing these serious abuses before the ALA and the American public; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the ALA supports and defends Mr. Youssef's right to report on FBI abuses; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the ALA urges the FBI to desist from any retaliation against Mr. Youssef for speaking before us; that the ALA communicates these concerns to the Attorney General and the Director of the FBI; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the ALA continues to ask Congress to restore and maintain civil liberties, correct the abuse and misuse of National Security Letters and protect the rights of whistleblowers against retaliation.

Adopted by the Council of the American Library Association
Wednesday, January 16, 2008
In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Keith Michael Fiels
ALA Executive Director and
Secretary to the ALA Council