

SETTING YOURSELF UP IN CAIRO AND MOVING AROUND



I have been in Cairo many times and have walked the streets of Cairo often until after midnight. Nationsonline.org lists Cairo as the 17th most populated city in the world and it shows and feels that way. Motorized traffic is dense and it's often difficult to cross the major arteries. However, it's easy and cheap to get a taxi.

Over time my family and I have stayed in hotels ranging from the no-star to one-star category to that of five stars. Compared to many other countries, and certainly compared to western countries, you can get accommodated affordably, depending on the level of comfort and luxury you desire.

We will have our meetings on the premises of FEDA. The photograph at the top shows the main entrance to the complex, which is situated in the oldest part of Cairo, called Al-Gamaliya, also referred to as Islamic Cairo because of the abundance of beautiful mosques dating back to the early part of the last millennium. The picture

below to the right shows part of the interior of the building.

FEDA stands for 'Friends of Environment and Development Association.' FEDA's mission is "to achieve sustainable development for Egypt through implementation of projects leading to the upgrading of selected fragile eco-systems with the goal of improving the quality of life of its residents." You can read more about FEDA at <http://www.fedaeg.com/mission.html>.



Attached to this document are maps of part of Cairo. The first map covers the part where you will mostly be moving, comprising the areas where most tourist hotels are located as well as the part of Cairo called Al-Gamaliya, where we will be meeting. The second map is a blow-up of the part enclosed in the blue rectangle on the first map, indicating the exact location of our meeting venue, i.e. the FEDA premises. Its coordinates in decimal degrees are, according to my GPS device: N 30.05188; E 031.26184. You may use these to locate FEDA on Google Earth or on your GPS-enabled cell phone.

There are no recommendable hotels in the near vicinity of FEDA. The two red rectangles on the first map indicate areas where major hotels can be found such as

the Ramses and Nile Hilton, the Shepherd and Semiramis Intercontinental in the smaller rectangle on the right, and the Sheraton, Pyramisa, Marriott and many interesting smaller hotels in the bigger red rectangle on the left. Among the latter category is the President Hotel which is identified by the red circle. This is where Lya and I will be staying. It is very affordably priced and good if you are happy with modest luxury. The official classification is three stars and customer review comments are good. We found the best booking facility for it—and for most other hotels—to be <http://www.hotelclub.com>. We have stayed at the President before fully satisfied after it had been recommended to us by people who had a similarly positive experience. One of the many good things of the President is its location on Zamalek Island. Zamalek is among the quieter areas in town. It's a bit trendy and has lots of interesting eating place. The Crave, next door to the hotel is, in fact, terrific. The streets are narrow. Hence, motorized traffic is less of a hindrance.

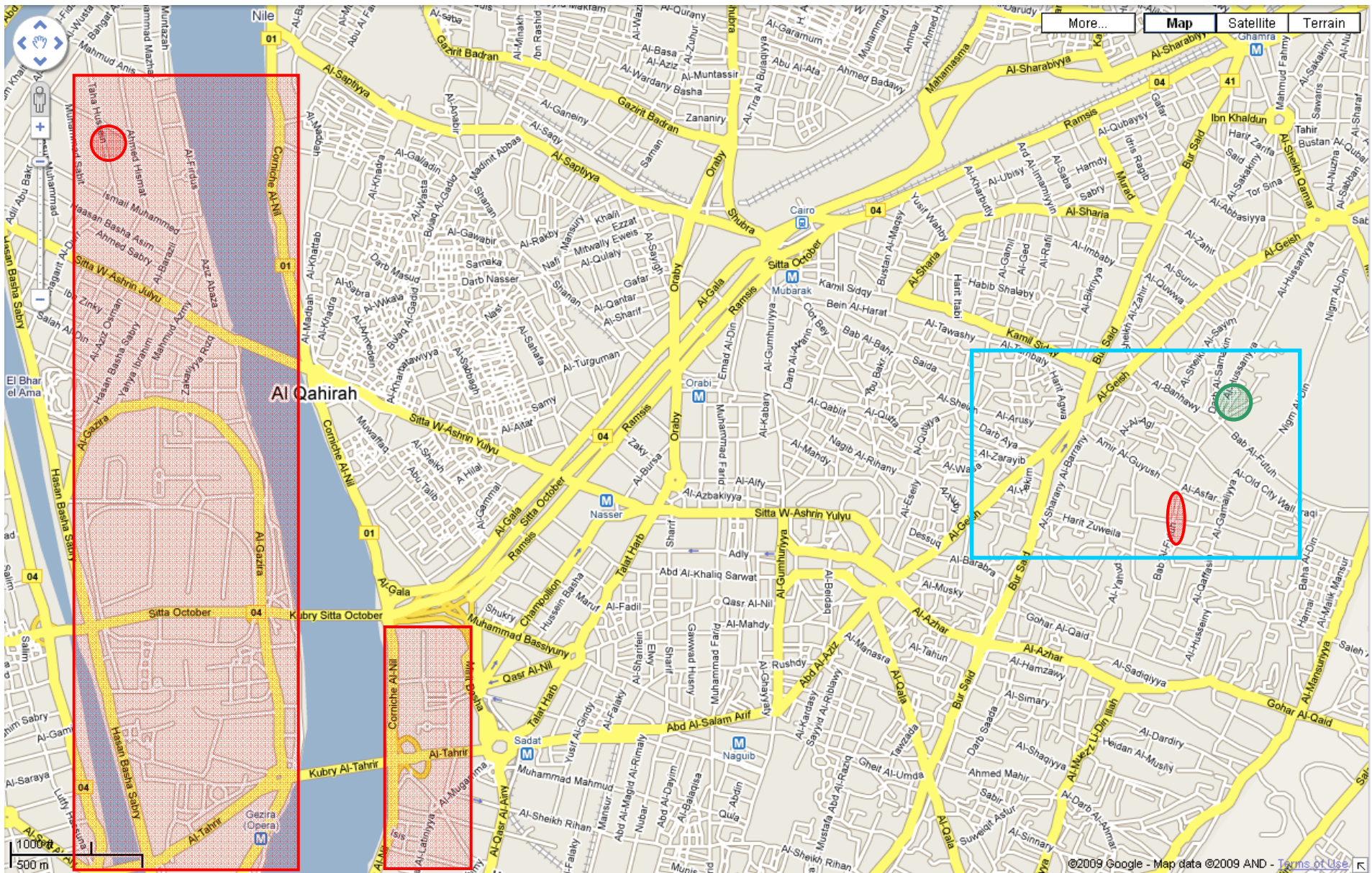
Colloquium participants are advised to check out any online booking facility and choose a hotel inside either of the two rectangles. Most booking sites will show you a map with the location or at least give the address, which you can then locate via 'Google maps'.



Wherever you stay, you can either walk to get to the conference venue (it's between four and five km from the President Hotel; Lya and I did it a couple of times—quite an experience) or you take a taxi. Depending on the density of traffic, going by car may not be much faster than walking, but it's a different experience. Participants staying in the same or nearby hotels may team up for sharing transport and negotiate with drivers to have a car at their disposal for the entire day. Let me know where you book your hotel and I'll set up a database where everyone stays for everyone to consult, so as to facilitate contact among participants.

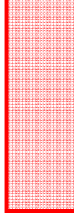

We will probably leave at least one afternoon unprogrammed so that participants can use it as they like. As there is a tremendous wealth in term of historical cultural heritage in Egypt, including in the Cairo area, you will want to add several days to your trip to explore it. If you have the time, you can also travel south from Cairo by train—there is a good quality sleeper train that takes you overnight from Cairo to Luxor or Aswan—or you may decide to book a a cruise on the Nile to visit these same places. Check out the Internet or good guide books, or consult with your travel agent, to get a feel for what is available. In Cairo you should certainly spend an afternoon or so in the Egyptian Museum and a day at the pyramids will be equally worth its while. Close to where we meet is the famous Khan el Khalili market that you will want to visit as well. To the right is a picture to convince you.



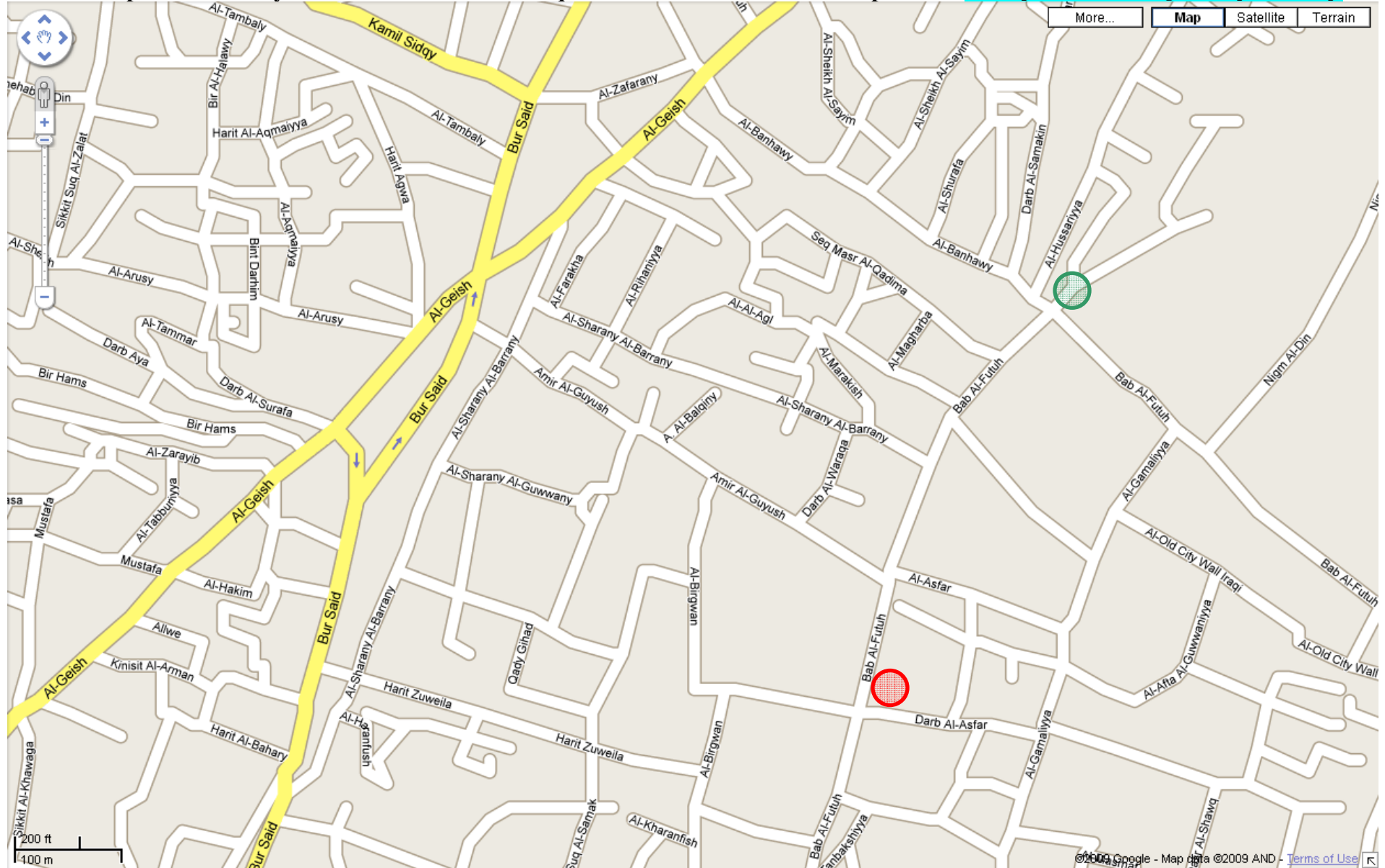
Jan Visser



-  Approximate location where colloquium takes place (Friends of Environment and Development Association - FEDA). For exact location see detailed map on next page.
-  Approximate location of President Hotel in Zamalek where Lya and I will be staying (booking opportunity via www.hotelclub.com)

-  Areas where major hotels are located (e.g. Hilton, Sheppard, Sheraton, Marriott, etc.). Zamalek (the bigger rectangle, the south part of which is designated Doki) is generally quieter than the downtown/Garden City area (the smaller rectangle to the right).
-  Taxi drop-off at Bab Al-Futuh (the gate of entry through the old city wall). Walk the last 500 m.

Detailed map of Al-Gamaliya area of Cairo where colloquium will be held at the FEDA premises (blow-up of the blue rectangle in the previous map).

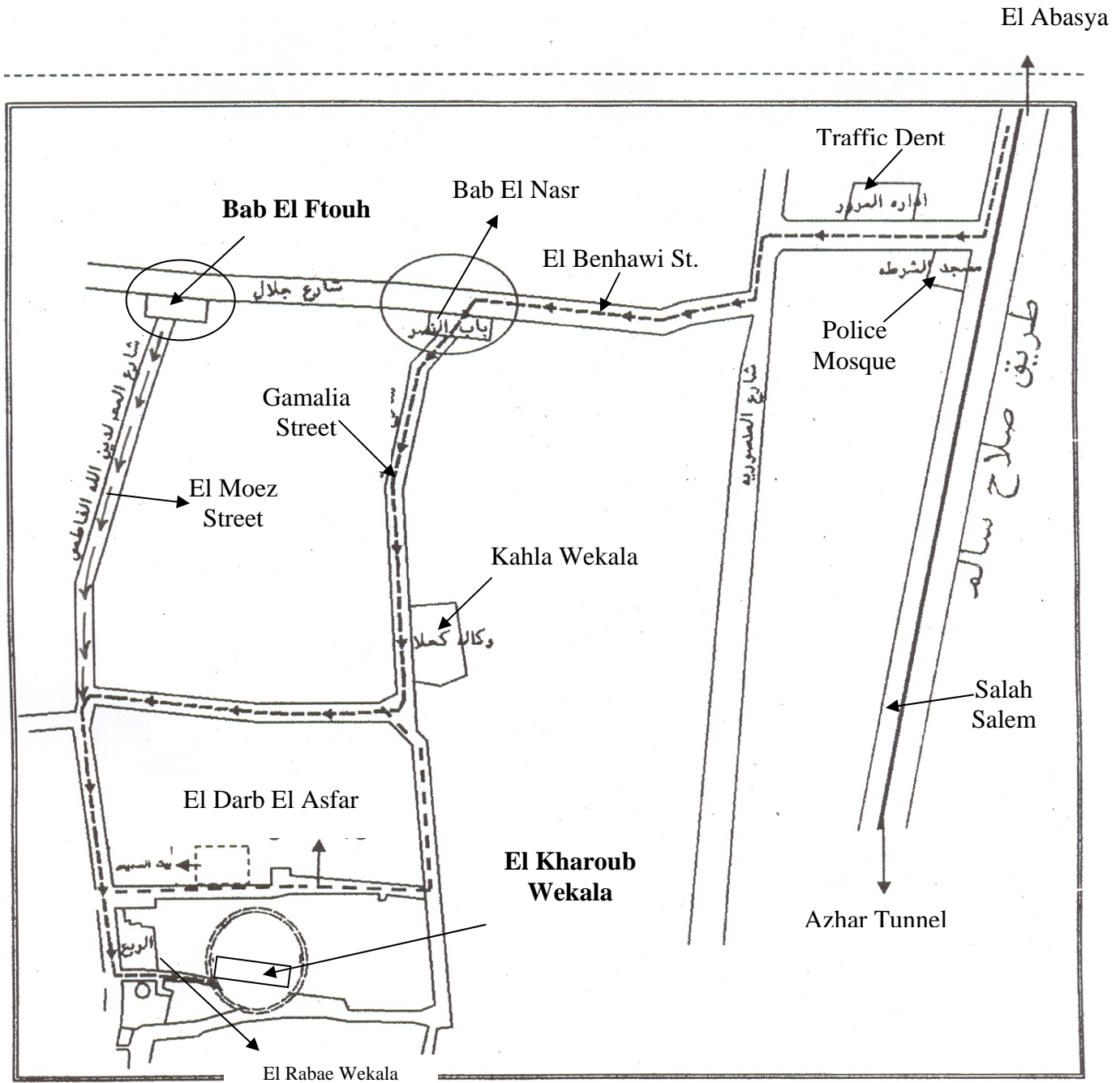


Exact location of the premises of the Friends of Environment and Development Association (FEDA) where the colloquium will be held.

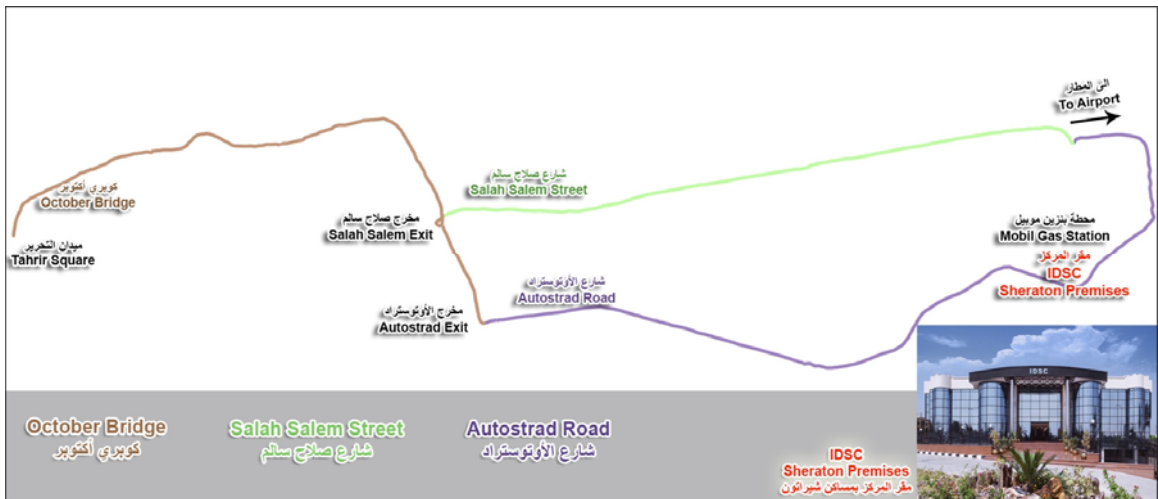


Taxi drop-off at Bab Al-Futuh (the gate of entry through the old city wall). Walk the last 500 m.

Adli Bishay kindly provided us with the following detail regarding the exact location of **El Kharoub Wekala** where we will meet. Note that the names of the streets provided by Google Maps on the page above are incorrect. The map below shows exactly (see arrows) how to walk from **Bab El Ftouh**, the gate where a taxi will drop you off and where you enter El Gamaliya, to the colloquium venue.



Two renditions of a map prepared by IDSC for localizing IDSC’s facilities in the Sheraton District of Cairo. That’s where we meet for the opening day, Sunday. A photograph of the building is provided as well. Please print the map if you go there using your own transport or if you want to use it to guide your cab driver.



WHAT TO DO UPON ARRIVAL AT CAIRO AIRPORT

Here are some notes, based on my personal experience, to ease your way through Cairo airport into a taxi cab and then to your hotel.

If you have never been in this part of the world you may initially feel slightly overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle that accompanies most social negotiations in Egyptian society (and in the Arab world at large). Don't worry about it. You'll get used to it. Besides, most people find experiencing a culture different from their own an enriching experience.

Some nationalities will have been required to obtain an entry visa prior to their departure. Many other nationalities are allowed to obtain their visa upon arrival at the airport. What follows describes the procedures for the latter category of visitors. Those who already have a visa can skip the first step.

- 1) When you arrive in the immigration area of Cairo airport you first go to any of the money exchange counters to buy a visa stamp (costing \$ 15). You may also want to change some money while you are at it.*
- 2) Next you join the line to pass through immigration with your passport and visa stamp. The immigration officer will stick the stamp in your passport.*
- 3) Following the immigration formalities there is baggage pickup for checked luggage. Next you pass through customs.*
- 4) After having gone through customs you come into the arrival hall. In the center of the arrival hall is a round information counter where you can book a taxi. Tell them where you go (for most people the President Hotel, 22 Taha Hussein Street in Zamalek). They should charge you 75 Egyptian Pounds (some \$ 13 I believe at the current rate). You pay and get a voucher for the driver. Someone from that counter will accompany you to a taxi and will explain to the driver where you are going. I have found that many cab drivers don't know how to reach the President Hotel in the most efficient manner, due to the fact that many streets in Zamalek are one-way only. So, the driver may be asking around in the area. Don't worry, you already paid the fare. A tip of around five Pounds at the end of the ride, or a little more if there is a lot of luggage handling, will make the driver happy. (Ordinary cab rides in town are normally arranged with the driver on the basis of an agreed price, in which case no tips are added — see also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tip#Egypt> and/or <http://politicalcalculations.blogspot.com/2007/10/tipping-around-world.html>).*

Planes from or via several destinations in Europe arrive at Cairo airport in the middle of the night when there is little traffic. Should you come in after midnight the ride will be relatively quick as roads are empty (compared with the very dense daytime traffic). You may actually have to convince the driver not to take undue risks with your life, telling him that you are not in a hurry. They sometimes drive recklessly.

Should there be any need to contact me while you are in Egypt, my local cell phone number is +20175951202.

Have a safe and enjoyable trip!

J.V.