

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

OF ACADEMIES AND SCHOLARLY SOCIETIES

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The International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (H.R. Network) supports and defends the fundamental rights of fellow academics worldwide. We, the members of the H.R. Network's Executive Committee, expressed our concern earlier this year about the widespread acts of destruction and looting of research institutions in Venezuela, including the Palacio de las Academias, which houses Venezuela's six national academies.

We are deeply troubled by continuing, serious threats to scholars and scholarship in the country. University campuses are regularly sites of violence and insecurity. In many cases, security forces and armed civilians have invaded campuses and responded to peaceful student and faculty protests with force, including beatings and the use of firearms. Scholars are regularly harassed and detained after peacefully expressing their views on societal issues. These actions violate fundamental human rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Venezuela has ratified, including the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association, and liberty. Such actions also violate the principle of academic freedom. As emphasized by the U.N. Committee charged with overseeing the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Venezuela is party, academic freedom includes "the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfill their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the State or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies," and to enjoy internationally-recognized human rights.

Threats to individual scholars and to the security of research and educational institutions have been accompanied by an alarming erosion of the autonomy of academic institutions in Venezuela, including in the areas of student admissions, training and selection of professors, university governance, and curricula. This erosion has had a profoundly negative impact on research, teaching, and international academic collaboration and is inconsistent with Article 109 of the Venezuelan Constitution, which specifically guarantees the principle of university autonomy.

We call upon the Venezuelan government to address the critical challenges facing academics in Venezuela by ensuring that they are able to conduct research and educational activities in safety, holding accountable those who have unlawfully used force against them, and respecting and protecting internationally recognized human rights, including the right of peaceful protest. We further call upon the government to safeguard the autonomy of institutions of higher learning in the country as a means to ensure continuation of Venezuela's proud tradition of excellence in research and education.

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(*Nobel Laureate)

Academies in the Network support and promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, assist unjustly incarcerated nonviolent professional colleagues, address grave science-related human rights issues, and advocate for member institutions whose independence is threatened.

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