

# Endangered Scholars Worldwide

Attacks on higher education communities are occurring at an alarming rate worldwide, threatening the safety and well-being of scholars, students, and academic staff, as well as the autonomy of higher education institutions. In response to a global increase in threats to academic freedom, Endangered Scholars Worldwide has expanded its presence as an online publication, sharing frequent updates on new and developing cases.



While we continue to publish regular updates in *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, our primary activity now takes place under the auspices of the New University in Exile Consortium, [www.newuniversityinexileconsortium.org](http://www.newuniversityinexileconsortium.org). The Consortium was launched in the fall of 2018 at the New School to create a supportive intellectual community for threatened, exiled scholars. It works to help them identify possible path toward new futures and find placements at Consortium schools, of which there are now over 65 worldwide.

For the most current information and ways in which you can be involved in our efforts to defend academic freedom and free expression, we invite you to visit our website [www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net](http://www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net) or follow us at <https://twitter.com/ESWNEWSCHOOL>.

If you are aware of a scholar or student whose case you believe we should investigate, please get in touch with us at [esw@newschool.edu](mailto:esw@newschool.edu).

Thank you for your unwavering support.

## **SPECIAL DELIVERY**

The year 2022 was another bad year for academic freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. The global escalation of violent, antidemocratic political tendencies has continued to target and harm scholars, researchers, and students. Among the most dangerous places for scholars and students are Afghanistan, Ukraine, Iran, and Myanmar, which have been facing military conflict, foreign intervention, and extreme physical violence. The end of February 2023 marked the one-year anniversary of Russia's illegitimate and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and the sixth month of the anti-government protests in Iran that followed the murder of Mahsa Amini by the country's notorious Guidance Patrol. Authoritarian governments worldwide continue to provoke new military conflicts, refugee crises, and attacks on academic freedom and scientific knowledge production. In 2022, academic freedom improved only in five small countries that encompass less than 1 percent of the world's population. According to the 2023 Academic Freedom Index (AFI) global dataset, more than half of the world's population currently lives in countries where academic freedom, freedom of speech, and exchange of scholarly knowledge have been restricted.

As of March 2023, the People's Republic of China is among the lowest-ranking and most dangerous countries for academic freedom. Institutional autonomy, freedom to research and teach, academic exchange and dissemination, campus integrity, and academic and cultural expression have scored the lowest since the 1950s. Since 2021, under government pressure, administrations of public universities have been increasingly hostile toward student unions, while unilaterally terminating the contracts of many academics because of their anti-government opinions, research on implicitly or explicitly censored topics, or their ethnic or religious identity. Under the Xi Jinping government, the number of imprisoned, disappeared, and otherwise persecuted journalists, scholars, and students has also skyrocketed. Among the imprisoned are Uyghur scholars Rahile Dawut and Ilham Tohti, prominent academics at Xinjiang University in the Uyghur autonomous

region. There are also reports of Uyghurs dying in detention or so-called education camps, including biotech researcher Mihriay Erkin and poet and publisher Haji Mirzahid Kerimi.

Besides legal and institutional pressures primarily targeting minority communities, the Xi Jinping government has also placed restrictions on academic mobility and international collaboration of Chinese scholars. Since 2016, China's Ministry of Education requires Chinese academics to seek preapproval from their institution for participating in international scholarly collaborations, both in-person and remotely. In March 2022, at least five Chinese scholars were denied permission to travel abroad to participate in academic events. The mobility of scholars and researchers is an important pillar of academic freedom and a crucial necessity for democratic and participatory production and exchange of knowledge.

In addition to restricting mobility of scholars and increasing the state surveillance in the name of national security, the Xi Jinping government has introduced mandatory national security courses at public universities. As a part of the reconstruction of the public curriculum for all educational stages, the government also has a long and growing list of subjects that should not be taught or researched. This list of censored topics currently includes, but is not limited to, the oppression and assimilation of Uyghurs and Tibetans, Taiwan's democracy, the Dalai Lama, the Tiananmen Square massacre, political dissidents and human rights activists, and criticism of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) secretariat.

As a result of the intensifying pressure on higher education institutions, publicly funded universities in Hong Kong, including some of the highest-ranking universities in Asia, lost record numbers of students and academics in 2022, according to the official data. The decline of academic freedom and increasing censorship and surveillance are considered among the main factors that discourage students and scholars from pursuing a career in Hong Kong. In the 2021–22 academic year, more than 2,000 undergraduate students dropped out



of Hong Kong's eight public universities, which is 2.7 percent of the overall student population in the city. The number of academics who left their positions at Hong Kong's public universities also drastically increased. In Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) alone, the departure of 56 scholars and researchers has been reported.

Endangered Scholars Worldwide stands in solidarity with those who strive for freedom and safety across the world and now especially with the scholars and students in Ukraine, Iran, and China. We condemn the Chinese government's systematic and recurrent breaches of international human rights law and the ill-treatment of academics, journalists, artists, and researchers. We call upon all international organizations and academic and professional associations devoted to the promotion and defense of human rights to join us in urging the Chinese government to end this ideologically motivated and inhumane crackdown on universities and scholars, disproportionately targeting ethnic and religious minorities. China has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 15 of which protects the freedom for scientific research. We ask that the international community continues to pay close attention to the situation in China and to make all efforts to get the Chinese government to honor its obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights treaties, in particular to ensure free and unhindered humanitarian access to people in need and to revoke the death sentences and incarcerations at education camps that have been issued following illegitimate trials and censorship laws that compromise the free and democratic production and dissemination of scholarly knowledge.

Visit [www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net](http://www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net) for more information.

—By *Dolunay Bulut*