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## Endangered Scholars Worldwide

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# 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. While we continue to publish regular updates in *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, in response to a global increase in threats to academic freedom, Endangered Scholars Worldwide (ESW) has expanded its presence as an online publication under the auspices of the New University in Exile Consortium ([www.newuniversityinexileconsortium.org](http://www.newuniversityinexileconsortium.org)), sharing frequent updates on news and developing cases in contribution to the Consortium's efforts to create a supportive intellectual community for threatened, exiled scholars.



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**

Amidst a troubling global surge in violent and antidemocratic political movements, scholars, researchers, and students worldwide have become increasingly vulnerable. This dangerous trend, spanning from

Ukraine to Afghanistan, Azerbaijan to Mali, has given rise to unprecedented levels of democratic regression. Democratic regress and its impact on academic freedom and autonomy of higher education have now reached critical proportions with the escalation of military conflict and government takeovers in the highly controversial and politically polarized Sahel region of Africa.


Situated between the Sahara Desert to the north and tropical savannas to the south, the Sahel encompasses some of the world's most impoverished, ecologically fragile, and politically divided countries, and is a base for various radical Islamist terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, Islamic State, and al-Qaeda. Although the protection and provision of education in the region during armed conflict has been on the UN's agenda since 2010, in the past few years the attacks on education by armed groups continued to escalate and intensify across the region, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan, and Nigeria. The success of military coup d'états in Mali, Burkina Faso, and most recently Niger, as well as thwarted coup attempts in several neighboring states such as Guinea Bissau and the Gambia, has led to the militarization of schools and the encroachment on educational institutions by rapidly consolidating autocratic governments. These circumstances have not only established deeply troubling precedents but also led to a significant reduction in student and teacher participation in schools.

As of August 2023, over 11,000 schools are closed due to escalating conflict between radical Islamist groups and state forces in the Central Sahel and the Lake Chad basin. Since 2021, the number of attacks on schools in the region has doubled. Many educational facilities have been ravaged or commandeered by paramilitary factions and armed forces. In numerous instances, Boko Haram and its affiliated splinter groups have not only targeted schools and universities but also ruthlessly killed or kidnapped hundreds of students and educators. This wave of violence has discouraged parents from sending their children to school and severely impeded equitable access to education.

The gravity of school attacks is exacerbated by preexisting disparities in educational access in the region, including but not limited to linguistic, ethnic, and religious tensions that further fragment schools and curtail the freedom of expression. A recent in-depth analysis by Kofi Koranteng Adu and Jonathan Odame, published in the *International Journal of Educational Development* in July 2023, highlights the multifaceted challenges to academic freedom in Africa. In addition to consistent reductions in national education budgets and the ascent of authoritarianism, a growing culture of self-censorship within academia is stifling scientific knowledge creation and inhibiting the free expression of scholars, students, and researchers. In order to avoid persecution and prosecution, researchers and scholars avoid writing or conducting research on certain topics that are either ideologically sensitive and controversial or culturally considered taboo, such as LGBTQ and gender and sexuality subjects.

Endangered Scholars Worldwide (ESW) is deeply alarmed by the unfolding events in the Sahel. These developments imperil democratic politics, jeopardize the right to education and information for students of all ages, and place teachers, scholars, and researchers in precarious positions. UNICEF estimates that 10 million children in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso urgently require assistance to secure their right to education. ESW aligns with international organizations and civil society initiatives dedicated to human rights in condemning the military coups in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. As they have exacerbated political divisions and transformed education into a tool for indoctrination by stifling critical thought and scientific inquiry.

While the Sahel region witnesses a rapid evolution in its political landscape that is intensifying threats against education, Azerbaijan, a state in the South Caucasus region of Eurasia, presents a contrasting scenario. The political inertia maintained by the decades-long rule of the Aliyev family, in power for most of the past 55 years, poses a significant challenge to academic freedom and freedom of expression.



Most recently, the state arrested Gubad Ibadoghlu, an internationally renowned economist affiliated with several research organizations and universities worldwide, including the New University in Exile Consortium, and an eminent Azerbaijani opposition figure. His unjust detention serves as a stark reminder of the indispensable significance of freedom of speech, institutional independence, and job security within the realm of higher education. Without these cornerstones, educational institutions find themselves handicapped, unable to conduct rigorous research, disseminate scholarly knowledge, or contribute unbiased, scientifically grounded insights to public conversations.

Endangered Scholars Worldwide firmly stands in solidarity with those advocating for their rights and freedom. We at the ESW vehemently call for the immediate and unconditional release of Gubad Ibadoghlu as well as other scholars and students who have been unjustly detained and imprisoned—in Azerbaijan, the Sahel region, and beyond. This collective plea underscores ESW’s unwavering commitment to upholding academic freedom, safeguarding human rights, and promoting the unobstructed pursuit of knowledge and expression.

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

—By *Dolunay Bulut*