

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK OF ACADEMIES AND SCHOLARLY SOCIETIES

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We, the members of the Executive Committee of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies, are saddened and outraged that Venezuela's Palace of the Academies suffered vandalism and large-scale theft during the night of January 13, 2017 and early hours of January 14. It is our understanding that the Palace, which houses Venezuela's six national academies—the Academy of Physics, Mathematics and Nature; the Academy of Political and Social Sciences; the National Academy of History; the Venezuelan Academy of Language; the National Academy of Medicine; and the Academy of Jurisprudence—was attacked by a group of individuals who ransacked the building. While we understand that the building itself sustained only minimal damage, reports indicate that the individuals stole at least 60 computers and other electronic equipment, and also damaged furniture and files.

The attack on the Palace of the Academies is alarming on a number of levels. The Palace building is an official national monument of historic and cultural significance located in the center of Caracas. The six academies housed within it are venerable institutions of learning, whose distinguished academicians work in research institutions and universities around the country to further the development and advancement of the sciences and the humanities. As national academies, they provide informed and respected advice to the Venezuelan government and society in their areas of expertise. No doubt the theft of many of the academies' computers and the damage to files and property is a significant setback for the academies' research programs and financial outlook. The targeting of the academies is particularly worrisome because it comes on the heels of a number of other reported acts of destruction and looting of research institutions in Venezuela, which have included the theft of laboratory samples and equipment, medical records, and computers. Given that the Palace of the Academies is located adjacent to the National Assembly and the National Electoral Council, principal governmental buildings under the special protection of state security forces, we find it most concerning that a robbery of such magnitude—with regard to the amount and weight of electronic equipment taken—was able to take place.

We call upon the Venezuelan government to issue a strong statement of support for its scientists and academics, and for the role of the academies in Venezuelan society. We

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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.

also urge the government to ensure that the academies receive all protection needed in order to continue their vital work.

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