



INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
OF
ACADEMIES AND SCHOLARLY SOCIETIES

Summary Statement – Eighth Biennial Meeting

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**International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies
April 6, 2007, Mount Lavinia, Sri Lanka**

The International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (H.R. Network) met for its biennial meeting from April 4-6, 2007, in Mount Lavinia, Sri Lanka. It was graciously hosted by the Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka and attended by representatives of twenty-three national scientific academies and scholarly societies around the world.

The meeting, the first to be held by the H.R. Network in the developing world, began with regional discussions and Keynote Address, "The Tension between Scientific Power and Democratic Principles," by Justice Christopher Weeramantry. A day-long symposium, "Human Rights, Science, and Society," was followed by the Max Perutz Memorial Lecture, "Mainstreaming Human Rights: Responsibilities and Duties," that was given by Ambassador Jayantha Dhanapala. A tribute to the memory of Dr. Perutz was given by Nobel laureate, Torsten Wiesel, both of whom were founding members of the H.R. Network. The final day of the meeting was devoted to a workshop. Highlights and issues that were given special consideration follow. A full proceedings of the meeting will be published in the coming months. Copies of selected speeches and other materials related to the meeting can be found on the H.R. Network's website at:

http://www7.nationalacademies.org/humanrights/Network_Sri_Lanka_2007_Homepage.html.

Sri Lanka – In the Sri Lankan context, concern was expressed that leading scientists and academics could be removed from important posts without any reason being given. It seems this removal can include arbitrary and sudden termination. The meeting recognized that there may be a need to change legislation to ensure that dismissal without a stated valid reason and without recourse to some form of open public enquiry does not occur. Special concern was expressed about the problems faced by academics and scientists (including assassination and abduction) between 1988 and the present. In particular, the sentiment was strongly expressed that basic human rights need to be respected and observed by all parties, even in the most difficult of situations, and that justice needs to be seen to be done.

Iraq – Members of H.R. Network are deeply concerned about the serious risks and threats faced by scientists and academics in the current crisis in Iraq, including the continuous and systematic targeting for assassination of its colleagues. Local and international authorities must find ways by which to protect these vulnerable scientists and academics. (Three Iraqi colleagues were able to attend the meeting, with

financial support provided by UNESCO.) It is also repeatedly stressed that it is the responsibility of academies around the world to help and provide moral support to these colleagues who have courageously remained in Iraq and continue to carry out their scientific and scholarly work, despite the desperate situation that they daily confront.

Zimbabwe – The participants in the H.R. Network meeting expressed deep concern about the present political and human rights situation in Zimbabwe, and the climate of oppression created by it. Apart from the resulting violation of generally recognized principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and the suffering of a large segment of the population, the current situation has deleterious consequences for freedom of expression and for the scientific climate in the country, as well as for the position of individual scientists and scholars. Scientists are targeted with no recourse to justice, and their academic communities have been severely depleted. The H.R. Network is resolved to make this issue a priority and make public its concern by supporting the scientists in that country by all appropriate means. We recognize that the Academy of Sciences of Zimbabwe is only two years old and is, in the present climate, unable to form a Human Rights Committee. However, the Academy is a member of both the Inter-Academy Panel (IAP) and the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC) which, it is hoped, will provide an important impetus for this development.

Libya – The desperate situation faced by the five Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian doctor, who have twice now been sentenced to death during unjust trials on charges of having deliberately infected children in the Benghazi Pediatric hospital with HIV, was a focus of grave concern to the participants. While many academies have intervened vis-à-vis the Libyan authorities on behalf of these colleagues, their situation remains unresolved. A final appeal to the Supreme Court has been made by their lawyers. If that is unsuccessful, the sole recourse would be a pardon. The participants expressed profound regret for the plight of the infected children and their families. It also noted that scientific evidence presented at the trial by internationally known and respected colleagues, which absolved the accused of wrongdoing, was dismissed by the courts. While there is a desire on the part of many academies within the H.R. Network to engage in scientific exchange with Libyan colleagues, such initiatives are unlikely until the current situation is resolved and members of the international scientific community can be confident of their own safety during possible trips to Libya.

Scientists and Scholars in Conflict Situations – This thorny issue received considerable attention, particularly through contributions made by Iraqi guest speakers. Human rights violations in Iraq are obviously very serious indeed. The responsibility of academies to help those colleagues who, bravely, remain in areas of conflict in Iraq, was stressed repeatedly. Support was expressed by all three Iraqi colleagues for the idea of creating a Support Network for Iraqi Women Scientists through which they will be “twinning” with prominent women scientists in their fields around the world. This Network will be developed further in the coming months, and academies affiliated with the H.R. Network will be kept informed of how they can become involved. We heard compelling personal accounts from speakers who included scientists and other professionals from Sri Lanka, Iraq, and several African countries, and who had first-hand and continuing experience of human rights violations. This brought our activities into sharp focus and affirmed that improvements in basic rights and freedoms must be placed even higher on the agenda of our constituent academies.

Science and Government: When Politics Conflict with Scientific Findings – This topic, although not life-threatening, as is the case for some of the imprisoned colleagues whose plight is addressed by the H.R. Network, is also of importance and will be closely followed. Local cases were taken as examples. Increasingly, problems are expected in such areas as global warming, where, in totalitarian and other states, scholars who suggest alternatives to state-organized steps to alleviate the effects of such warming will be at risk, at the very least, of losing their academic positions.

Religious Fundamentalism – This topic was considered in some detail through presentations on how attitudes adopted by Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity towards science and the results of scientific research have had an impact on scientific progress. Concern was expressed about the contemporary upsurge in religious fundamentalism and its potentially stifling effects on scientific progress and human self-determination. The repression of scientific education, research, and findings that it may involve, was recognized as a major issue of concern that the H.R. Network should address as opportunities for constructive interventions are identified.

Indigenous Peoples – The Network discussed the fragile social and cultural situation of the world's 375 million indigenous people and their ongoing human rights struggle. Killings of indigenous leaders, scholars, and health professionals are widespread. The Network intends to look closely at this situation, to address cases of unjust imprisonment of indigenous scholars, and to follow the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, adopted in 2006 by the Human Rights Council of the United Nations.

Guantanamo Bay - Because the previous meeting of the H.R. Network, held at the Royal Society in London in May 2005, looked extensively at abuses at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay and at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, it was noted that the situation there still is of serious concern.

Other types of H.R. Network interventions – In the last ten years, in addition to individual cases, the H.R. Network has expressed concern about broad issues (such as the right of Bahai students to education, access by Palestinian students to Israeli and Palestinian universities, opposition to academic boycotts, etc). Given that governments, non-state armed and unarmed groups, and powerful multinational corporations can and sometimes do act in ways which are inimical to the rights of scientists and academics, the H.R. Network may be called upon to make more of these broader types of interventions or statements in future.

The Future – The participants noted that problems faced by scientists in several countries ranged from lack of promotions and loss of grants, to dismissal, and death. The H.R. Network has and should continue to address the more serious of these threats. However, it was also noted that some threats are best dealt with by actions taken by individual academies directly, others by actions taken at the regional level when the issue transcends the border of a particular country, and finally, when needed, by supportive actions taken by the H.R. Network as a whole. This means that the Network needs to continue to grow and also to stimulate further the formation of human rights foci or committees within academies worldwide.

The International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies works to address grave issues of science and human rights. These academies and scholarly societies act with full autonomy and at their own discretion on cases and issues brought to their attention on a regular basis by the Network's secretariat. Primarily, the Network assists colleagues who are unjustly detained or imprisoned for the nonviolent exercise of their basic human rights. Its work is grounded in the principles set forth in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For more information see: http://www7.nationalacademies.org/humanrights/Network_Description.html.

The participants were impressed by the efforts made by H.R. Network Executive Director Carol Corillon and her staff, as well as by members of the H.R. Network to help in specific cases where the rights of individuals have been seriously abused. It was stressed that even greater efforts to defend unjustly imprisoned colleagues are needed by national academies worldwide in the future.

The H.R. Network thanked the National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka for hosting the meeting and the Committee on Human Rights of the U.S. National Academies and its director for serving as secretariat for the H.R. Network and for supporting and assisting in the preparation of the meeting. It also expressed appreciation for the contributions of various organizations and academies in helping to support the meeting in Sri Lanka in diverse ways, including covering the expenses of several participants who could not otherwise have attended the meeting.

Finally, the H.R. Network was pleased to accept an invitation from Professor Abdellatif Berbich of the Royal Academy of Morocco, and longtime H.R. Network participant Dr. Driss Dahak, chief Justice of Morocco and member of the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco, to hold the next biennial meeting of the H.R. Network in October 2009 in Rabat, Morocco.