Workshop report

Strategies to protect human rights researchers and academics at risk

9 December 2016, Senate House, London

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSORTIUM

Workshop report 9 December 2016

HRRN
Human Rights Researchers Network
Scholars • Students • Practitioners

Strategies to protect human rights researchers and academics at risk

Yeşim Yaprak Yıldız

HUMAN RIGHTS CONSORTIUM | SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

ROUTLEDGE Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Introduction

'Strategies to protect human rights researchers and academics at risk: a workshop for academics, students and NGOs'¹ was organised by the [Human Rights Consortium](#) in response to growing risks and threats against researchers across the world. It was held at the School of Advanced Study (University of London) on 9 December 2016.

Human rights researchers and academics often work under difficult and dangerous circumstances. By carrying out their research, campaign and advocacy activities they become the target of both state and non-state actors. The pressures and attacks facing them vary in terms of their form and severity, ranging from threats, judicial intimidation, killings and disappearances. Risks facing persons conducting human rights research are not limited to conflict zones or authoritarian regimes but might take place in more implicit and indirect forms in established democracies. At a time when documenting human rights violations is more critical, human rights defenders (HRDs) face imprisonment, torture and threats of death. The reports by Amnesty International, Frontline Defenders and Peace Brigades International show the scale of threats facing HRDs across the world from Syria to Peru. Besides government censorship on academic content and internet censorship delimiting free expression, direct repression on scholars creates an environment of self-censorship.

More generally, university academics are often targeted because of what they say or write, or just because repressive governments see them as a potential opposition. In its [*Free to Think*](#) 2016 report the [Scholars at Risk network](#) (SAR) reported that attacks on higher education communities are occurring at an alarming rate around the world, threatening the safety and well-being of scholars, students, and staff. The report documents violent attacks on higher education communities, increasing pressure and restrictions on higher education in Turkey and Egypt including widespread arrests; prosecutions; travel restrictions; loss of position and threats to peaceful student expression. Likewise, [Council for At-Risk Academics](#) (Cara) works to protect and support academics in danger around the world, including those caught up in the Middle East's conflict zones. Most want to return home when they can to help build better societies, but for now they need a place of sanctuary. The number of applications for help from Cara rose from three to four per week in 2015 to 15 to 20 per week by June 2016, demonstrating the urgency of the situation. Over 220 academics, with 300 family members, are already being helped, but many more are in urgent need of support.

---

1   This report should be cited as follows: Yildiz, Y. Y. (2017), 'Strategies to protect human rights researchers and academics at risk', Human Rights Consortium Workshop Report, [School of Advanced Study](#).

In addition to international mechanisms which recognise and protect the right to free expression and the rights of HRDs, there is a growing effort worldwide for collective and proactive strategies to assist those who are at risk. Organisations including SAR, Cara, Amnesty International, Privacy International and Peace Brigades International support these efforts through their protection mechanisms which include advocacy, training, grants and fellowships. There is a growing need for more collaborative and creative strategies which take into account diverging needs in different contexts. As Bennett et al. argue, 'orthodox ways of thinking will result in rigidity and exclusivity in policies and practices. As such, they may fail to keep pace with emerging threats to defenders, the changing nature of civic action, and actors and actions that promote and protect human rights'.[2]

Bringing together scholars and practitioners, this workshop aimed to help develop strategies for the protection and promotion of the rights of academics at risk and human rights practitioners in the conduct of their research and to reflect on creative tactics to prevent attacks and improve the conditions of researchers worldwide. The workshop was attended by representatives of NGOs working with HRDs and academics at risk as well as individual scholars.

Session 1: Setting the context

Dr Corinne Lennox, Associate Director of the [Human Rights Consortium](#), opened the session by inviting the speakers and the workshop participants to reflect on the following questions:

- What are the current risks and challenges facing human rights researchers and academics?

- What are the crosscutting issues affecting human rights researchers and academics at risk?

Dr Alice Nah, Lecturer at the [Centre for Applied Human Rights](#) at the University of York, began her talk by identifying some of the current risks and challenges facing human rights researchers and academics. In addition to the state pressure on academics including restrictions on freedom of expression, dismissals and travel bans, as outlined by the Scholars at Risk's report, in many countries academics are threatened and attacked by non-state actors, militant groups or religious fundamentalist groups for what they say. The challenges facing scholars are exacerbated by various forms of regulation including that imposed by universities. Alice stressed

2   Karen Bennett, Danna Ingleton, Alice M. Nah & James Savage (2015), 'Critical perspectives on the security and protection of human rights defenders', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 19, 883–95.

that research ethics committees sometimes prioritise reputational risks of universities over academic freedom and the protection of research subjects. As Joanna Williams argues in _Academic Freedom in the Age of Conformity_, there is increasingly a culture of conformity and avoidance of controversy that inhibits the ability to express our ideas on campuses. The UK government with its Prevent strategy has introduced uncertainty about what can be discussed, researched and investigated and has required universities to be a place where we regulate what is said and what is communicated.

Alice outlined several questions for the workshop participants to consider during the discussion session. In the face of threats and attacks coming from governments, other state actors, universities and non-state actors, she asked:

- How can we maintain the university as a space where ideas, norms and values can be discussed, criticised, deconstructed and understood?
- How can we protect fundamental freedoms that we require fulfilling our roles in universities to develop understanding and communicate knowledge?
- How do we protect freedom of information, freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of assembly and association?
- How do we understand and respond to regimes, regulations and surveillance that put researchers and academics and students at risk?
- Lastly, how do we protect academics, students and researchers in the UK and in other countries as they exercise their rights?

University of York, Centre for Applied Human Rights provides a protective fellowship scheme for Human Rights Defenders. For more information, please visit www.york.ac.uk/cahr/defenders/protective-fellowship/

Yeşim Yaprak Yıldız of the Human Rights Consortium, and a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, discussed some crosscutting issues affecting both academics and human rights defenders through the case of Turkey. The crackdown on academics in Turkey started following a petition campaign by Academics for Peace in response to an upsurge in violence against Kurdish civilians in the context of the conflict between Turkish security forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The petition condemned state violence against civilians and called for the state to restart peace negotiations with the PKK and was signed by over 2,000 academics. Following President Erdogan's reaction against the petition calling the signatories 'pseudo-intellectuals' and 'traitors', an investigation under the

Anti-Terror Law was launched against the initial 1,128 signatories, which is currently ongoing. Four academics who later held a press conference on the issue were arrested and imprisoned for three months pending trial. Judicial harassment was accompanied by administrative investigations, suspensions, dismissals, forced resignations or retirements and travel restrictions. The repression expanded and accelerated following the 15 July coup attempt. With the statutory decrees during the state of emergency launched after the coup attempt, hundreds of academics lost their jobs with no right to appeal.

Yesim highlighted how the line separating activists, human rights defenders and academics is increasingly blurred in the face of state repression and violence. In a country where free expression is restricted and oppositional voices are silenced, a simple academic act or any expression regarded as 'harmful' to the state can turn into a political act. Facing such injustice for simply exercising a democratic right similarly transformed many of the signatories of the petition into activists defending the right to free speech and academic freedom. Furthermore, many academics had to seek refuge in other countries due to the political risk and social death faced in Turkey. This bleak situation facing academics has also brought about new solidarity networks, creative and collaborative initiatives challenging censorship and restrictions on academic freedom. Having lost their jobs, academics for peace turned their faces to alternative forms of knowledge production and organisation, including initiatives like street academies. There are also solidarity networks across the world to support academics in Turkey.

One such example is the solidarity network initiated by the students and scholars at Goldsmiths College. Judith Blumberg, a representative of the group, mentioned their initiative to create two scholarships for academics at risk at the university.

The case of Turkey does not stand alone. As one of the participants of the workshop Moataz El Fegiery, from the Frontline Defenders, stated, there are parallels between the restrictions on academic activity in Turkey and Egypt. According to a new law concerning NGOs in Egypt, all researchers are required to apply for permission from intelligence agencies if they wish to do surveys, or public polls or conduct research. Restrictions on academics

and researchers include travel bans outside Egypt including for conference attendance. Frontline Defenders documented around 80 travel ban orders between 2014 and 2016. Giulio Regeni and many other similar cases in Egypt demonstrate the gravity of the situation.

In addition to authoritarian or conflict-afflicted countries, Western countries are not exempt from restrictions and surveillance over academics and researchers. Universities often prioritise their reputation over protecting academic freedom. One workshop participant, a senior lecturer based at a London university, talked about threats and attacks against him following an article he wrote on covert lobbying activities in Indonesia. He has been made a target through threats on social media and newspaper articles. Having received no support from his university, he stated that the commercialisation of higher education increasingly leads to management being concerned about the reputation of the university and not so much about the researchers and their academic freedom. He also addressed the dilemma between the constant pressure on academics to be active on the internet, blogs and media and the lack of support by the university in the face of risks brought by these platforms.

Corinne gave the example of UK Cabinet Office proposals which aimed to prevent organisations receiving government grants to lobby for policy or legislative change.[3] Following criticism by academic institutions and NGOs, it was announced that the restrictions will not apply to academic researchers, but restrictions remain in force for other civil society organisations during election periods under the so-called 'Lobbying Act' adopted in 2014.

Session 2: Strategies to protect human rights researchers and academics at risk

The second session of the workshop focused on the current risks and challenges facing academics and human rights researchers and the existing protection mechanisms. The workshop participants were invited to reflect on the following questions:

- What are the existing protection options for academics and human rights researchers at risk?
- Do the international mechanisms provide effective protection?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the higher education institutions in protection of academic freedom and scholars at risk?

3   UK Cabinet Office, 'Government announces new clause to be inserted into grant agreements', Press Release, 6 February 2016, available at: <www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-new-clause-to-be-inserted-into-grant-agreements> (accessed 31 May 2017).

- What are the barriers preventing effective protection and support to those at risk?

The first speaker in the second session was **Sinead O'Gorman**, European Director of Scholars at Risk, which has an international network of over 450 higher education institutions. Sinead outlined some of SAR's response strategies. The core of SAR's mission is to protect individual scholars from threats and risks against their liberty, as well as prevention of attacks on higher education and promotion of academic freedom. Sinead stated that until recently SAR spent around 80 per cent of its time and resources working on the emergency relocation spectrum, assisting academics who have no other option but to flee from their country. SAR's protection strategy is to work with universities across its network to set up temporary positions, usually ranging from six months to two years at a host institution in a safe place for the academic to continue their work until it is safe to return or move to a second location, or return to a border region, which is increasingly happening. Through its advice and referral services and signposting SAR assists scholars for much longer periods of time than their placements alone. It can amount to five to seven years for one person and sometimes longer.

> "Responsible states, higher education leaders, and civil society are called to respond to this crisis — to reject the use of violence to restrict peaceful expression, and to reaffirm publicly their support for the principle that critical discourse is not disloyalty, that ideas are not crimes."
>
> *Scholars at Risk,* Free to Think *2016*

Sinead also gave information on SAR's documentation of human rights violations and violations of academic freedom around the world. In its *Free to Think* report, the first trend SAR documented is violent attacks against university communities including examples of Pakistan, Yemen and Syria. SAR's first response strategy is to urge further documentation of such attacks. Sinead stated that the most effective tool of oppressive regimes is not necessarily violence but isolation so documentation of violations and attacks help scholars to no longer feel they are alone in their experiences. She stated that for the academic freedom monitoring project, SAR is always looking for more partnerships with human rights researchers and centres.

The second trend documented by SAR's *Free to Think* report is the conflation of critical discourse with disloyalty. Turkey is one of the examples here. SAR issued a joint statement with different higher education institutions across Europe and beyond to condemn what is happening in Turkey. SAR has undertaken some very limited trial monitoring, an area for possible further

expansion. SAR's primary work in support of scholars from Turkey has been to place individuals at host institutions as well as advocating on behalf of those facing prosecution, imprisonment or travel restrictions. The third trend noted in the F2T report is wrongful prosecutions and imprisonment as well as travel restrictions, particularly in Egypt, but also Yemen and Bahrain.

SAR also organizes a student advocacy seminar, as well as a new programme to raise awareness about threats to peaceful student expressions, including in particular the right to peaceful assembly. The project aims to bring different student unions and groups together to talk about various issues and to draft a charter in which students commit to non-violent protest. In all its activities, SAR works at the intersection between higher education and human rights communities. Sinead also mentioned that while there are well-developed protection tools for the human rights defenders, these are not yet widely used within the higher education sector.

> "The number of applications for urgent help from Cara rose from 3–4 per week to 15–20 per week by June 2016."
>
> *Cara, Annual Report 2015/2016*

The next speaker in the second session was **Stephen Wordsworth**, Executive Director of Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara). Cara was founded in 1933 as a direct response to the Nazis coming to power in Germany and the expulsion of academics, particularly those who were Jewish, from German universities. It has a twofold function: providing relief from suffering and defence of learning and science. Between 1933 and 1939, Cara supported 2,000 academics, either supporting them to rebuild their careers in the UK or in another safe country. Over 80 years later Cara still supports academics at risk. Its focus has changed from Eastern Europe and South Africa to Latin America and now mostly Middle East and North Africa. This year, Syria and Turkey have constituted the majority of their work. Stephen highlighted that female academics face further risks including from extremist groups. Thirty per cent of the academics Cara supports are female.

Cara works closely with a network of 115 universities in the UK and others in Europe and elsewhere in order to help academics at risk to reach a place where they can work in safety and rebuild their lives and careers. Stephen stated that most of the academics they support are very clear that they want to go back: for example, 95 per cent of the Iraqi academics Cara supported went back after the war and were involved in rebuilding their country.

Cara also runs regional projects to help at-risk academics who choose to work on in their home countries, or in the surrounding region, despite the risks. Cara's Iraq (2006–12) and Zimbabwe (2009–13) Programmes helped

academics who were in the country or in the near neighbourhood to remain connected with each other and with academics elsewhere in the world, raising funding for research projects and helping them to develop their research skills. Cara has recently launched a similar project for Syria, working with a number of universities in the region. Stephen stated that such projects help academics to avoid deskilling and to find ways to build networks so they can go back with developed skills.

Stephen also highlighted the work of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), set up in 2010 by organisations including Cara, Scholar Rescue Fund, higher education organisations, Human Rights Watch, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNHCR. The main aims of the coalition are undertaking research, advocacy and monitoring work. In April 2016, Robert Quinn, Director of SAR, launched at UNESCO some GCPEA Principles of State Responsibility to Protect Higher Education from Attack and in December 2016 Stephen, also GCPEA Vice Chair, launched at UNESCO guidelines on implementing these principles. The guidelines offers advice to states and to higher education institutions on how they can work together. The Principles do not create new legal obligations; instead they highlight existing obligations under international treaties. The Principles have been endorsed by higher education associations representing over 1,200 universities, 120,000 researchers, and 11 million students in 57 countries. The main question for states, Stephen added, is whether they see higher education as a valuable resource or as a threat.

Principles of state responsibility to protect higher education from attack

States should:

- abstain from direct or complicit involvement in attacks on higher education;

- protect higher education against present and future attacks;

- assist victims of attacks;

- deter future attacks, including by investigating attacks and holding perpetrators accountable.

The third speaker was **Susi Bascon**, director of Peace Brigades International UK (PBI UK). PBI has been providing international protection for human rights defenders at risk for 35 years. It has multi-layered strategies of advocacy and protection; some of these involve the physical presence of

international observatory. PBI currently has 45 volunteers in seven different countries in Latin America, Africa and Indonesia. The presence of these volunteers represents the concerns with which the international community is following human rights violations in specific countries but that concern is not enough to stop some attacks and human rights violations. Susi mentioned that they have developed sophisticated international advocacy strategies to help and support not only volunteers but also human rights activists.

Adan Guillermo López Lone accompanied Susi in the workshop and is one of the HRDs that PBI has been supporting. In his case, the role of PBI includes monitoring and documenting the case, PBI officers on-the-ground accompany him and his organisation, follow his case closely, alert the international community and share information. As part of this campaign, PBI has met with judges in the UK from Court of Appeals to the Supreme Court, as well as government offices including the Foreign Office. This is only one example of the range of advocacy tools PBI uses to enhance political and working space of the HRDs it is accompanying.

PBI also works with embassies and UN agencies in the field. Susi stated that PBI's strategy, while they issue statements, is not public denouncement. Much of their work takes place behind the scenes through diplomatic efforts. Their main aim is to prevent further attack before it happens and their strategies are developed depending on specific contexts. Susi gave the example of their work in Kenya, where they developed good relationships with women in the slums of Nairobi. In the human rights community in Nairobi there is a big gap between grassroots groups, which are quite poor and often not very well educated and those in the capital who have jobs, more contacts and increased visibility. Mainly focused on supporting women in slums, PBI has built its protection strategy to ensure that some elements are aimed at increasing the visibility, credibility and legitimacy of these individuals. It has created an online toolkit which was developed in consultation with hundreds of women HRDs. The main aim of the toolkit is to identify the women's protection needs and the risks they have been facing. To fill gaps in terms of knowledge, understanding of international mechanisms and protection systems, PBI also provided capacity building and training. Susi added that PBI works in partnerships, coalitions and networks, as being isolated is one of the highest risks for HRDs.

PBI works with the corporate sector, with companies such as Lush that follow strict ethical principles. In their partnership with Lush, they provided the company with cocoa beans that the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó have been growing and ran a campaign over a week, throughout all their shops, giving information on the community and they asked people to sign petitions (25,000 signatures gained), which was followed by an event at House of Lords.

Following Susi Bascon of PBI UK, **Adan Guillermo López Lone,** an HRD and a judge from Honduras, talked about his case. He gave the example of academics and researchers in Honduras who in recent years were forced out of their universities, received threats and were forced into exile into neighbouring countries in Central America and also in Europe. A very important role was played by the universities especially the Autonomous University of Honduras, which has been working very hard in order to try to change the governance structures of the university. Faced by the university authorities, who are particularly, conservative, dozens of students involved in these attempts to democratise the university are being prosecuted. They are accused of two charges in particular: dissent and an accusation of occupying university property.

Guillermo stated that he was working as a judge in Honduras until the 2009 coup. Together with a group of judges, they protested the coup and opposed the political catastrophe the coup represented i.e. the destruction of the country's democratic institutions. As a result, he was arbitrarily sacked from his post. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights condemned Honduras for violating his rights yet the decision of the court to reinstate him to his position has not been implemented. Guillermo emphasised the significance of the judgment as it strengthened the principle of independence of judiciary, the principle of rule of law and the role of legal system in good governance. As in the case of academics, it is also the role of judges to support freedom of expression, association and assembly and to oppose arbitrary actions of the state. Guillermo called academics at risk to use international protection mechanisms including the UN system, regional systems, UN special rapporteurs on freedom of expression, on human rights defenders, and the UN working group on arbitrary detentions. He emphasised the importance of documentation and sharing information with UN mechanisms.

In the ensuing discussion, Corinne highlighted that litigation and international protection mechanisms could be used as protection tools by academics at risk as well. Among these tools is the submission of urgent communications to UN special rapporteurs who can respond to governments with letters of concern regarding specific individuals at imminent risk of detention or imprisonment.

Other protection strategies brought forward by the workshop participants during the discussion included the role of diaspora networks which could help raise the visibility of human rights defenders, scholars and students at risk at an international level. Sinead (SAR) added that academics at risk in their new host countries have provided a major source of support in both social and practical terms for new scholars. Likewise, Alice shared her findings from her research on HRDs in five countries, which show that the most support HRDs at risk get is from the local community including friends,

family, colleagues and fellow HRDs, rather than NGOs or the UN. Hence she emphasised the importance in strengthening local levels of support.

Alice added that emergency grants mechanisms provided by organisations like Frontline Defenders, Protect Defenders (an EU HRD mechanism), Urgent Action Fund for women HRDs could also apply to academics at risk as well. While in some cases international relocation is required, she stated that there could be cases where it could be useful to explore local within-country opportunities. Likewise, while asylum is appropriate in some cases, in other cases, temporary protection initiatives might work better, as many do not necessarily wish to leave indefinitely. She highlighted that there is a need to explore and persuade governments to create such temporary permits in addition to the right to asylum. Susi from PBI has also argued that there is a misunderstanding that HRDs and academics at risk coming to European countries want to stay indefinitely. She said that in her 20 years at PBI only one human rights defender ended up staying permanently in the US.

Several challenges were brought forward by the workshop participants in terms of protection tools available to academics at risk. A representative from Academics for Peace UK highlighted the varying degrees of vulnerability among the academics at risk in Turkey, and that those in smaller cities have been under bigger threat both in terms of investigations but also in social and cultural pressures they face. He raised a question on whether the criteria to evaluate applications by academics at risk are taking into account these different vulnerabilities, regardless of different levels of academic excellence.

Another challenge that was discussed with regards to relocation programs were issues regarding visa arrangements and asylum claims. There have been some cases where even if the scholar at risk or HRD has been found a host organisation, their visa applications were rejected by governments, including the UK. Pressurising governments to implement guidelines to protect academics and HRDs at risk and enabling governmental cooperation were some action points discussed by the participants.

Rising attacks against academics and increasing numbers of applications to organisations like SAR and Cara make it difficult to cope with the current demand. The scale of current response is not meeting the scale of the problem. Sinead stated that SAR is currently receiving about 150 applications a month, the majority from Turkey. While it is sometimes easier to place scholars who are well-networked, have good language skills, who have completed PhDs and a number of publications, and those who have prior contacts with host institutions, SAR and Cara are working hard to increase the numbers of placements they can arrange. Stephen (Cara) mentioned that once they receive an application including an outline of

the situation and academic references, they try to make a match between the scholar and a host institution. The application process also depends on what the host institution can provide. The timeframe from first contact to arrival in Cara cases range from three to six months.

Susi from PBI highlighted the significance of online tools that could help academics who are not as privileged and networked as others to find temporary protection schemes and scholarships. She gave the example of shelter cities, which is a UK-funded project. There are cities in countries such as Utrecht in The Netherlands where there are temporary shelter spaces for HRDs. This is a scheme which could be considered for academics. Corinne added that there has been an annual conference of the Association of Human Rights Institutes in Utrecht this year where a declaration on academic freedom was signed.

Session 3: Tools to prevent risks and threats against human rights researchers and academics

The third session of the workshop aimed to reflect on the tools to prevent risks against human rights researchers and scholars and the methods/tools that NGOs have used. The speakers and workshop participants explored the following questions:

- What are the methods and tools to identify, assess and prevent risks before and during research?
- How can we ensure data protection?
- What is the role of information and digital technologies in prevention of risk?
- How can we use social media and traditional media to prevent risk?
- How can universities and NGOs better ensure the protection of their staff when conducting research on human rights?
- What are the strategies towards more collaborative, effective and creative campaigning and advocacy?

Hannah Smith from the [Tactical Technology Collective](#) (Tactical Tech) talked about how to use digital technologies to prevent risk reminding the workshop participants that the use of digital technologies themselves could also lead to certain risks. While visibility can increase our safety in some ways, it could also expose us to risk in other ways. Digital risks faced by academics and HRDs show differences from country to country and depending on their level of engagement. These include surveillance, data loss, harassment (on- and off-line), malware, phishing and compromised identity/loss of anonymity.

Tactical Technology Collective formed in 2003, started to help NGOs use technology better to further their causes. A large part of their work has been integrating digital security within broader protection strategies. Hannah gave information on the Holistic Security Project of the organisation which brings together physical, psycho-social and digital security elements. The project has culminated in a website and a manual. The strategy manual aims to help HRDs to evaluate their situation, identify the risks they face and develop strategies for digital and physical security. It integrates self-care, well-being, digital security, and information security into traditional security management practices. The project recognises that digital security trainers working with HRDs exposed to trauma or risk need to cross the bridges between digital security and psychological wellbeing. Thus it aims to incorporate practices which engage and create a safe space during training to allow a positive space to acknowledge experiences of the participants in the room.

Holistic Security Manual:

https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/

Security in a Box – Digital Security Tools and Tactics:

https://securityinabox.org/en/

Me and My Shadow – Control my Data:

https://myshadow.org/

Ononymous.org – Collection of digital security training materials:
https://ononymous.org/

Tactical Tech helps researchers to think about how to secure sensitive data and communication with communities at risk, how to ensure safety and anonymity of communities or individuals they work with and how to protect ourselves from surveillance. The Me and My Shadow project aims to help researchers explore and minimise their 'digital shadows', that is the information traces they leave behind when they use the internet and mobile phones. Another project Tactical Tech developed with Frontline Defenders, Security in a Box, provides more in-depth advice on researchers at higher risk about email encryption, protecting computers from malware and hackers etc.

The second speaker in the third session was **Eva Blum Dumontet** from Privacy International. Privacy International is an organisation undertaking investigation and research on surveillance by governments and also how

companies use our data. One of its programs focuses on the Global South, supporting activists and organisations in various countries through capacity building activities and research. Eva specifically talked about the case of Hisham Almiraat in Morocco and conveyed his messages to the workshop participants. Hisham Almiraat, who is the founder of the Digital Rights Association, is currently facing a trial in Morocco together with six other people for his work as a researcher. In 2011 he co-founded a digital media outlet to document the protests that were taking place in Morocco during the Arab Spring. He was targeted with spyware designed by the Italian surveillance company Hacking Team, which allows the attacker to gain complete remote access to the targets' computers. Privacy International has been working on his case and other victims of surveillance in Morocco. Yet they faced pressure from the Moroccan government trying to prevent the events they organised with academics and fellow researchers. One of the issues that Hisham Almiraat wanted to raise for the workshop participants was the case of Maati Monjib, a historian and a HRD, and to call for solidarity from the international academic community.

Eva also stated that while using encryption sometimes provides security, in places where it is banned it can put the researchers and their resources at risk. It is also crucial for the sources to fully realise the amount of risk associated with the research or data. Likewise, social media could also be a source of risk for researchers and activists. Eva stated that:

> *One thing to bear in mind is that it is a very inexpensive source of surveillance for governments. Equipment used for social media surveillance is inexpensive and we have seen it was used in Egypt and in the US against the Black Lives Matter movement. In Thailand whatever you posted on Facebook in the past couple of years is now a liability.*

Thus while social media could be a tool for advocacy, it also poses risks. It must also be noted that it is not only what you post but also metadata including the location and the time which could be used against you.

With regards to the tools to identify, assess and prevent risks, Alice stated that the ethics applications process at universities, despite the long bureaucratic process and existing problems within the system, could be a helpful way of forcing researchers to think about whether the potential value of research and the risks involved match. It is also a process used to think about the potential risks to subjects who will be interviewed, the risk to researchers, and the risk to data. Alice added that the process helps us to think if we are encrypting or password protecting our data and where we will store it etc. On the other hand there are usually lots of uncertainties researchers have to deal with and things do not always go according to plan. Besides, those

doing human rights research know that they have to work on sensitive issues and in dangerous places. There is always a tension between the risks involved and the significance of the issue to be researched. In addition to the risk assessment process, developing judgement and implementing ethics principles are crucial.

Moataz suggested that Giulio Regeni's case has also shown the importance of security awareness for PhD students before going to difficult and sensitive countries. Organisations like Safer Edge support organisations in addressing safety and security needs by providing training and designing risk management systems. Steve McCann, director of Safer Edge, stated that they started working with academics and HRDs in recent years and are supporting universities to design policies for risk management and improve their duty of care systems.

Hannah highlighted that the digital element of security is often overlooked in traditional protection strategies. One aim of Tactical Tech is to raise awareness of digital security and change the perceptions of it.

Session 4 (roundtable discussion): The way forward

The final session of the workshop aimed to further discuss issues raised during the workshops and reflect on the following questions:

- How can we enable effective collaboration between organisations providing support and protection to human rights researchers and academics at risk?

- How can we promote collective and proactive tools and strategies for the protection of the human rights of academics, students and practitioners?

As Nathalie Losekoot from Sigrid Rausing Trust stated, EU guidelines on human rights defenders include a very broad definition which include journalists, and people who protect human rights. But despite that proximity, there is a gap between academia and journalists and traditional HRDs, hence a gap in the protection tools and mechanisms they use. This gap has been one of the motivating factors for the organisation of this workshop which brought together both HRDs and academics.

Marianne from Amnesty International further added that some HRDs do not necessarily self-identify as such, however, we could work on their behalf and their cases could be transmitted to the Special Rapporteurs on HRDs, on freedom of expression, and on freedom of assembly and association. It is crucial to make sure information on what these mechanisms are and how they can be employed confidentially is made widely available. Marianne also

reminded the workshop participants that there is a new option within the UN system which civil society, academics or journalists could use, namely the new Assistant Secretary General, whose mandate includes a special responsibility for reprisals against human rights defenders and others.

Susi (PBI UK) stated that while it is crucial to learn from each other through such events, there is a need for capacity building or training programs on protection tools available to researchers at risk. This would help to share the experiences built in the human rights field by HRDs and NGOs with academics at risk.

Zafer Yilmaz, himself an academic at risk from Ankara University in Turkey, stated that the crackdown on academics in Turkey showed that academics were not well prepared for such attacks and did not have tools to express themselves in the national and international public spheres. Trade unions and human rights NGOs played an important role but academics did not have special local institutional structures to protect academic freedom and to support them and others working in universities. Zafer added that the Turkey case highlighted the importance of local institutions helping academics at risk alongside the support of the international community.

The workshop in that sense achieved its aim of bringing together scholars and human rights practitioners to reflect on tools to protect researchers at risk and tools to prevent risk. It helped to establish a dialogue between these two groups, to share information on how to utilise existing regional and international protection mechanisms for HRDs for academics at risk.

Appendix 1

List of speakers

Moderator: Dr Corinne Lennox, Human Rights Consortium, School of Advanced Study, University of London

- Dr Alice Nah, Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York
- Yeşim Yaprak Yıldız, Human Rights Consortium, School of Advanced Study, University of London
- Sinead O'Gorman, Scholars at Risk
- Stephen Wordsworth, Council for At-Risk Academics
- Susi Bascon, Peace Brigades International UK
- Adán Guillermo López Lone, Association of Judges for Democracy
- Hannah Smith, Tactical Technology Collective
- Eva Blum-Dumontet, Privacy International

Participating organisations include:

- Amnesty International (AI)
- Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR), University of York
- Council for At-Risk Academics (Cara)
- Frontline Defenders
- Human Rights Consortium (HRC), School of Advanced Study
- Peace Brigades International UK (PBI UK)
- Privacy International
- Safer Edge
- Scholars at Risk (SAR)
- Sigrid Rausing Trust
- Tactical Technology Collective (Tactical Tech)

Appendix 2

List of organisations providing emergency grants for academics and HRDs at risk

Council for At-Risk Academics

www.cara.ngo

Scholars at Risk Network

www.scholarsatrisk.org

Institute of International Education Scholar Rescue Fund

www.scholarrescuefund.org

Alexander von Humboldt Foundation's Philipp Schwartz Initiative

www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/philipp-schwartz-initiative-en.html

University of York Centre for Applied Human Rights Protective Fellowship Scheme

www.york.ac.uk/cahr/defenders/protective-fellowship/

Frontline Defenders

www.frontlinedefenders.org

Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders

www.emhrf.org

Protect Defenders EU

www.protectdefenders.eu/en/

Urgent Action Fund for Women Human Rights Defenders

https://urgentactionfund.org

Digital Defenders Partnership

www.digitaldefenders.org

International Cities of Refuge Network

www.icorn.org

Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'homme (AEDH)

www.aedh.org/en/home/what-we-do/emergency-fund-for-human-rights-defenders

Prisoners of Conscience Appeal Fund

www.prisonersofconscience.org/grants/default.aspx

Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (Joint Program of the FIDH-OMCT)

www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/form_emergencyassistance_hrd_eng.pdf

International and Regional Mechanisms for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

United National Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

www.protecting-defenders.org/en

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/human-rights-defenders

Organization of American States: Inter-American Commission Rapporteurship on Human Rights Defenders

www.oas.org/en/iachr/defenders/default.asp

African Commission, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Africa

www.achpr.org/mechanisms/human-rights-defenders/

Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack

www.protectingeducation.org