



**HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
CONSORTIUM**

**SCHOOL OF  
ADVANCED STUDY  
UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON**

**HRRN**  
Human Rights Researchers Network  
Scholars • Students • Practitioners

## **STRATEGIES TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCHERS AND ACADEMICS AT RISK: A WORKSHOP FOR ACADEMICS, STUDENTS AND NGOs**

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2016

10.30am to 1.30pm

School of Advanced Study, Senate House, London

Human rights researchers and academics often work under difficult and dangerous circumstances across the world. 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 create 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, Scholars at Risk network (SAR) reports 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, and 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 conflict zones in the Middle East. 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 3-4 per week in 2015 to 15-20 per week by June 2016, which show the urgency of the situation. Over 220, with 300 family members, are already being helped, but many more are in urgent need of support.

In addition to international mechanisms recognising and protecting 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 including advocacy, training, grants and fellowships. There is a growing need for more collaborative and creative strategies taking into account diverging need in different contexts. As Alice Nah and others argue in [\*Critical Perspectives on the Security and Protection of Human Rights Defenders\*](#), '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'.

This workshop aims to contribute to the efforts to develop strategies to protect and promote the rights of human rights practitioners and academics at risk in their conduct of research. It aims to bring together researchers in academic institutions and NGOs to reflect on creative tactics to prevent attacks and improve the conditions of researchers worldwide.

### **Speakers:**

**Adán Guillermo López Lone** HRD from Honduras, Association of Judges for Democracy

**Dr Alice Nah** Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York

**Eva Blum-Dumontet** Privacy International

**Danna Ingleton** Amnesty International (via skype)

**Hannah Smith** Tactical Technology Collective

**Sinead O’Gorman** Scholars at Risk

**Stephen Wordsworth CMG LVO** Council for At-Risk Academics

**Susi Bascon** Peace Brigades International UK