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Report Calls Attention to Attacks on Freedom to Think

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Report Calls Attention to Attacks on Freedom to Think

June 23, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University, as a founding member of the Scholars at Risk Network, is among institutions calling attention to the release of *Free to Think*, a new report indicating that scholars, students and other members of higher education communities around the world regularly suffer violent and coercive attacks.

The report, released on Tuesday, June 23, represents over four years of monitoring and analysis by Scholars at Risk staff and researchers around the world in the Academic Freedom Monitoring Project.

“Attacks on universities and colleges are occurring with alarming frequency,” says Robert Quinn, executive director of Scholars at Risk. “They threaten the safety and well-being of scholars, students, administrators and staff; undermine the quality and accessibility of academic work and instruction, which denies everyone the benefits of expert knowledge and scientific and creative progress; and shrink the space where people can freely think and ask questions about complex and contentious issues.”

The report analyzes 333 attacks on higher education arising from 247 verified incidents in 65 countries between January 2011 and May 2015. The types of attacks include killings, violence and disappearances; false imprisonment and wrongful prosecution; loss of position and expulsion from study; restrictions on travel; and other attacks that significantly impair higher education.

“These types of attacks encompass the vast majority of violent or coercive conduct aimed at higher education communities today,” says Jesse Levine, advocacy officer and manager of the Monitoring Project.

Free to Think demonstrates the pressing need to raise awareness and document attacks on higher education:

- There is a crisis of attacks on higher education communities around the world.
- Attacks on universities, scholars and students are early warning signs of political, social and cultural insecurity.
- Universities and scholars are critical parts of national infrastructure that is essential to rebuilding conflict torn states.

The report calls on all stakeholders, including the international community, states, the higher education sector, civil society and the public at large to undertake concrete actions to increase protection for higher education communities, including documenting and investigating attacks, and holding perpetrators accountable.

“We hope this report will inspire everyone to do more to protect higher education and the freedom to think,” says Mr. Quinn.

Media inquiries should be made to Daniel Munier at scholarsatrisk@nyu.edu or (212) 992-9933.

About Scholars at Risk: *Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of more than 360 higher education institutions in 38 countries working to protect threatened scholars, promote academic freedom and prevent attacks on higher education communities around the world since 2000. SAR protects scholars suffering grave threats to their lives, liberty and well-being by arranging positions of sanctuary for those forced to flee, and advocating for scholars facing prosecution, imprisonment or other restrictions through the Scholars-in-Prison Project. SAR’s Academic Freedom Monitoring Project identifies and reports attacks on higher education to protect vulnerable scholars and students, hold perpetrators accountable and prevent future violations. Institutions or individuals interested in participating in network activities should visit www.scholarsatrisk.org or email scholarsatrisk@nyu.edu.*

