

# Protecting and Promoting the Human Rights of Scientists, Scholars, and Students Around the World

Globally, attacks on scientists, scholars, and students occur with alarming frequency. Attacks are carried out by state and non-state entities, in open and closed societies, using a range of methods. Attacks not only harm the individuals and institutions directly targeted; they undermine higher education systems and shrink everyone's space to think, question, and share ideas freely. (*Free to Think 2018: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project*)

## Attacks on higher education include:

**Killings | Violence | Disappearances  
Imprisonment | Wrongful prosecution  
Loss of position | Expulsion from study  
Improper travel restrictions | University  
closures | Military occupation of campuses**

While attacks differ across states and regions and by severity and type, these kind of attacks share a common motivation: to control or silence higher education institutions and personnel.

<b>Reported Attacks on Higher Education*</b> <i>September 1, 2017 – August 31, 2018</i>	
Killings, Violence, Disappearances	79
Imprisonment	88
Prosecution	60
Loss of Position	22
Travel Restrictions	15
Other	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>
<small>*Source: <i>Free to Think 2018: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project</i>. Note: The incidents included in this report (294 reported attacks in 47 countries) are only a small portion of all incidents involving attacks on higher education over the previous year.</small>	

## Recent and ongoing cases

**Dr. Hatoon al-Fassi** is an Associate Professor of women's history at King Saud University who was arrested and detained in 2018 for her women's rights activism. Saudi authorities have not disclosed any evidentiary basis for her detention and her location is unknown.

**Dr. Ilham Tohti** was a Uyghur economics professor at Beijing's Minzu University, where he was known for his research on Uyghur-Han relations as well as his activism for the implementation of regional autonomy laws in China. In 2014, after a two-day trial, Tohti was found guilty of "separatism" and sentenced to life in prison.

**Turkish scholars**, administrators, and students who endorsed a 2016 petition critical of state military actions have been fired, imprisoned, prosecuted, expelled, and denied the ability to travel internationally for research/conferences.

**Mexico's missing students:** In 2014, 43 students from a teachers' college in rural southern Mexico disappeared *en route* to Mexico City for a demonstration. This case of forced disappearance remains unsolved.

**Gender studies programs** were effectively banned at Hungarian universities in 2018. Central European University has also been forced to relocate its American-accredited programs (the bulk of its operation) from Budapest to Vienna.

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## An invitation to learn more

On March 22, 2019, SPSSI co-sponsored a congressional briefing on the topic of protecting and promoting the human rights of scientists, scholars, and students around the world.

Speakers included:

- *Theresa Harris, JD* (Moderator), American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)
- *Rebecca Everly, JD, PhD*, National Academies Committee on Human Rights
- *Robert Quinn, JD*, Scholars at Risk
- *Olga Hünler, PhD*, Department of Anthropology and Cultural Research, University of Bremen
- *Eugene Chudnovsky, PhD*, Committee of Concerned Scientists; Lehman College
- *Teng Biao, PhD*, U.S.-Asia Law Institute, New York University; Institute for China's Democratic Transition

To watch a recording of the congressional briefing, please visit: [www.youtube.com/spssi](http://www.youtube.com/spssi)

## About the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues

Founded in 1936, SPSSI is an association of scientists from psychology and related fields and others who share a common interest in research on the psychological aspects of important social and policy issues. SPSSI has consultative status as a nongovernmental organization with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and is a member of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Coalition.

SPSSI regularly sponsors policy-focused events on Capitol Hill and at United Nations Headquarters in New York City.

## References

Scholars at Risk. (2018, October). *Free to Think 2018: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project*. Retrieved from <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2018> (ISBN: 9780999484401)

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. (n.d.) *Defending Freedoms Project*. Retrieved from <https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/defending-freedoms-project>

Download a PDF of this brief at:

<https://www.spssi.org/rightsofscientistsbriefing>

*"In a globalized world, the future prosperity and security of any nation depends on its ability to be a knowledge-based, innovative society and to a considerable extent on the work of its scientists, engineers, academics, and researchers."*

*-AAAS Science & Human Rights Coalition member associations, in a 2016 statement*