

Allow me to start our rapporteur input from yesterday's online workshop "(Re-)Constructing Solidarity – Connecting Academic Freedom Worldwide", jointly organised by Dr. Sarah Wessel and colleagues from BUA's BCGE and the co2libri initiative, which brought to you in hybrid mode via a pre-recorded statement from my dear colleague Prof. Khoo Ying Hooi from Universiti Malaya, and by me standing in front of you, with some soundbites from thinkers on the issue at hand, scholar(ship) at risk, academic freedom and the challenge to defend it, to support it to enable it as an independent human right, as argued by the UN Special Rapporteur on Education, as a key fundamental freedom to safeguard open, inclusive, democratic societies. The late Ngugi wa Thiong'o, an intellectual giant as argued by ZMO Vice Director Prof. Kai Kresse, faced himself various challenges in terms of academic freedom and coined the notion of "hunted / haunted scholarship", stressing the value of those and/or what is termed as scholar(ship) at risk: "In their beginnings, ideas which have changed the world were profoundly fugitives. (...) I am thinking of it as that which a ruling or conquering authority deems wild, not domesticated by official limits and prescriptions. The authority actively hounds the scholar, seizes her work or both. Unfortunately, hunting down scholars or artists and their work is not a metaphor". Similarly, Khoo Ying Hooi argued about a year ago: "Academic freedom is not a luxury, it is a necessity for intellectual progress", further emphasizing with inter-/transdisciplinary perspective that "at the core of every university is knowledge production, and the production of knowledge is never neutral. Decisions about what is taught, which research is funded and whose perspectives are prioritised are deeply political". And that is where the issues, dimensions, challenges of academic freedom and scholar(ship) at risk are entangled and interconnected when it comes to addressing them.

Khoo Ying Hooi, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of International and Strategic Studies at Universiti Malaya. Her research focuses on the intersectionality of power, human rights, democratisation, and civil society in Southeast Asia. She is the author of "The Bersih Movement and Democratisation in Malaysia" (SIRD/ ISEAS/ Lexington Books, 2020), and has co-edited volumes, such as "Marginalisation and Human Rights in Southeast Asia" (Routledge, 2022). Ying Hooi has received several fellowships, one to the Institute of Asian and African

Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Beyond academia, Ying Hooi previously headed the International Issues and Cooperation Division at the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM).

Furthermore, Professor Khoo Ying Hooi is actively involved with SEACAF, the Southeast Asian Coalition for Academic Freedom, one of several national, regional or international networks and initiatives organising for and defending academic freedom, from which the 30 workshop participants came from yesterday, including scholars at risk, namely Off University, the African Consortium of Higher Education Researchers, the Norwegian Students and Academics Assistance Fund SAIH, British Society for Middle Eastern Studies' Academic Freedom Committee, the Coalition of Academic Freedom in Latin America, Germany-based Academy in Exile and the US-based Scholar at Risk Network, among others.

Let me return to SEACAF, the Southeast Asian Coalition for Academic Freedom, founded in 12/2024 to defend and promote academic freedom in the Southeast Asian region and is an insightful decentred, multi-layered practice of (re-)constructing solidarity in defence of academic freedom. It is hosted by the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies at Mahidol University, in Thailand, and the aim is to establish a regional hub for scholars at risk in the Philippines. In addition, SEACAF is currently supported by the international, US-based Scholar at Risk Network, thus builds upon the existing strong regional networks of academics as well as on existing academic freedom committees and like-minded initiatives in order to build a collaborative, supportive infrastructure of solidarity across the region. Country chapters include Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, among others, collaborating transregionally on the pillars of (1) **membership and coalition-building** across various academic networks and stakeholders; (2) **research and monitoring**, in particular related to region-centred research as well as developing monitoring indicators; apart from (3) **advocacy and training** at various levels among different stakeholders and academic community members. Subsequently, SEACAF aims to raise public awareness among national and regional actors, including fellow scholars across disciplines, university administration and science management. It develops a regional principle of academic freedom, based on the Surabaya Principle of Academic

Freedom, 2017, as well as a decentred, context-sensitive monitoring system to assist local stakeholders in reporting incidents and coordinating necessary interventions across various levels and borders – geographic or disciplinary-ones.

Key principles of SEACAF's understanding to defend academic freedom are:

- integrity and ethical scholarship (critical inquiry, evidence-based scholarship),
- solidarity and collaboration and mutual support across and within the region
- autonomy and institutional independence, i.e., free from state control, corporate interests and ideological constraints
- diversity, inclusivity and equity, i.e., enable a platform for all voices, in particular those marginalised and those in fear or discriminated
- accountability and transparency, i.e., openness, responsibility, and ethical governance in research, policy advocacy, and institutional partnerships

Let us now listen to Khoo Ying Hooi's report and take on our workshop yesterday, focussed on how to achieve critical literacy when addressing academic freedom challenges, to quote Asli Telli, at the individual, collective as well as institutional level, given that academic freedom requires an interdependent, multi-layered and rights-centred approach, not only but, particularly, at the institutional level.

### AFTER THE VIDEO

I would like to end with a quote from a participating fellow scholar, a scholar at risk, displaced repeatedly with family who stresses the need for flexible, hybrid, caring, sustained infrastructures of solidarities at the individual, collective and institutional levels and across scholarly academic communities and organizational entities.

Solidarity in the context of academic freedom should not be understood as mere empathy or sympathy. It goes beyond sentiment and requires sustained action, partnership, and shared responsibility.

Scholars at risk face not only professional disruption in their home countries, but also deep personal instability and uncertainty, especially those with families. These challenges are often intensified by restrictive and unpredictable visa regimes.

Given these constraints, a more strategic and flexible approach is needed in how we support displaced scholars. Hybrid or virtual fellowship models could offer a more resilient and inclusive way forward, allowing continued academic engagement without being entirely dependent on physical mobility.

And I would like to add that solidarity and academic freedom should be an integral, indispensable part of our understanding of “a University of Excellence, a University for Society”, of academic excellence and subsequent performance assessments of critical knowledge productions needed for a world of complex, protracted poly-crises, even and especially in times of shrinking or closing spaces and funding lines, as flagged today by DAAD president Prof. Mukherjee in response to the large and all-encompassing funding cuts at the horizon for Germany’s Global South university cooperations. Thank you!

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## Surabaya Principles of Academic Freedom

KIKA \_ Kaukus Indonesia untuk Kebebasan Akademik [ Dec 6, 2017, endorsed by SEAHRN, 25 April 2018 in Kota Kinabalu ]

- (1) Academic freedom is a fundamental freedom needed to develop the autonomy of academic institutions;
- (2) The academic community; those who are engaged in academic activities, have full freedom in developing community service, education, research, and publishing academic results in accordance with scientific principles;
- (3) Members of the academic community who work as educators have the freedom in the classroom to conduct their course using scientific methods and respecting values of humanity;
- (4) The academic community should possess scientific integrity for humanity in developing a responsible academic culture and should be free from any restrictions and disciplinary actions;

(5) Public authorities have an obligation to respect, protect and ensure measures to guarantee academic freedom.