Report

Workshop Report: (Re-)Constructing Solidarity – Connecting Academic Freedom Worldwide

As part of the Berlin Brandenburg Academic Freedom Week 2026, the Berlin Center for Global Engagement (BCGE) of the Berlin University Alliance, together with co2libri – Conceptual Collaboration: Living Borderless Research Interaction, organized the online workshop "(Re-)Constructing Solidarity – Connecting Academic Freedom Worldwide." Bringing together around 30 participants from different regions, the workshop created a transregional space for exchange among scholars, academic freedom initiatives, and science-policy actors committed to defending academic freedom worldwide.

The workshop addressed a pressing global challenge: the rise of authoritarianism and the shrinking space for critical scholarship. In response, numerous regional and international initiatives, networks, and coalitions have emerged in recent years to support scholars at risk and to defend the conditions for free research, teaching, and public debate. Participants reflected on practical lessons from these efforts and discussed how universities can move from reactive support to sustained, institutionally embedded solidarity.

In her video statement, Prof. Khoo Ying Hooi of Universiti Malaya summarized the workshop and stressed that academic freedom is not a luxury, but a necessity for intellectual progress. As highlighted in the discussion, academic freedom should be understood as an independent human right and as a fundamental freedom that helps safeguard open, inclusive, and democratic societies. The workshop also emphasized that knowledge production is never neutral: decisions about what is taught, what research is funded, and whose perspectives are prioritized are deeply political. This makes threats to academic freedom inseparable from broader struggles over power, rights, and democratic participation.

The video statement was introduced at the public panel discussion "Academic Freedom at Risk: European Universities between Resilience and Responsibility" by Prof. Andrea Fleschenberg dos Ramos Pinéu of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and co2libri. She underlined the need for flexible, hybrid, caring, and sustained infrastructures of solidarity at the individual, collective, and institutional levels, and across scholarly communities and organizations. The statement can be read here. "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", stated Prof. Andrea Fleschenberg dos Ramos Pinéu.

A key insight of the workshop was that solidarity must go beyond expressions of sympathy. It requires sustained action, partnership, and shared responsibility. Scholars at risk often face not only professional repression, but also repeated displacement, deep personal insecurity, family-related pressures, and restrictive visa regimes. In this context, participants highlighted the importance of more strategic and flexible forms of

support, including hybrid and virtual fellowship models that allow continued academic engagement even when physical mobility is limited.

The workshop also highlighted the role of regional coalitions such as the Southeast Asian Coalition for Academic Freedom (SEACAF), which brings together academics and institutions to build collaborative support structures, strengthen monitoring and research, and advance advocacy and training. More broadly, the exchange showed that protecting academic freedom requires interdependent, multi-layered, and context-sensitive approaches across regions, disciplines, and institutions.

Overall, the workshop made clear that academic freedom is a shared global responsibility. Universities have an important role to play—not only by responding to immediate threats, but by making solidarity, institutional responsibility, and the protection of critical knowledge production an integral part of their mission.