

FSS Update



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to facilitate networking and information exchange among CSOs and researchers

Workshop on Academic Freedom in East African Universities



(Ethiopia Office), the Network for Education and Academic Rights (NEAR, UK) and Scholars at Risk (SAR, USA). Previous such multinational events have been held in Amman (Jordan), St. Petersburg (Russia), and Vilnius (Lithuania), and planning continues for other regions. Nearly 40 scholars drawn from higher educations and research centers in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda participated in the Addis Ababa workshop.

The workshop kicked off with introductory remarks by the representatives of four of the co-sponsors, i.e., FSS, NEAR, OSSREA and SAR. Following this, three participants provided overviews of relevant instruments issued at different times to promote academic freedom. These included highlights of the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, presented by Patience Awopegba of UNESCO; highlights of the Dar es Salaam and Kampala Recommendations, presented by Osmane Sene of West African Research Center (WARC); and highlights of the Recommendation of the National Conference on Academic Freedom in Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions, presented by Taye Assefa of FSS. In addition, Nizam Assaf of Arab Society for Academic Freedom (Jordan), Gueorgui Kassianov of Interna-

A workshop titled, “Rethinking Academic Freedom in East African Universities”, was held at the Ghion Hotel in Addis Ababa from 21st to 23rd October 2008. The workshop had two objectives: to share experiences in the regional dimension of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, and to contribute to the development of effective tools and strategies for promoting these values worldwide.

The two and half day workshop was co-sponsored by Forum for Social Studies (FSS), Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA, based in Ethiopia), the British Council



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tional Renaissance Foundation (Ukraine) and Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua of University of Ghana, shared their experiences by briefly describing the efforts made to promote academic freedom in their respective regions and/or countries.

Other presentations focused on the situation of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in universities in East Africa. The presentations revolved mainly around the following themes:

- Academic freedom and peer review,
- Public funding and academic freedom,
- E-learning and academic freedom,
- Policy reforms and academic freedom,
- Donor-funded research and academic freedom,
- Impacts of commercialisation on academic freedom,
- Linkage between academic freedom and the struggle for democracy, and
- Impacts of resource constraints on academic freedom.

Most of the presentations showed that, while the level, forms and sources varied, infringements on academic freedom and institutional autonomy are widespread and frequent, including even in contexts where the constitutional framework appeared to be liberal. These infringements have in turn contributed to the precipitation of brain drain, decline of staff morale, decrease of research and publication outputs, deterioration of academic quality and

production of poorly qualified graduates. Participants noted that violations of academic freedom were not necessarily always externally driven; the members of the academic community were also responsible for some of the infringements. Further, academic staff have not always lived up to their social responsibilities.

The second and third days of the workshop were devoted to developing and improving proposals for addressing challenges to the full exercise of academic freedom and

institutional autonomy. Participants reviewed the “Common Framework for Analysis and Stages of Response”, a strategy developed by NEAR and SAR based on their combined experiences and 2000 reported threats to higher education communities in 110 countries. The Framework for Analysis lists two broad categories of concerns: at the Individual level and at the Institutional level.

Concerns identified at the **Individual level** include:

Professional concerns such as:

- Denial of access or permissions
- Discrimination
- Ideological pressure & censorship
- Arbitrary dismissal.

Public concerns such as:

- Confiscation of notes & computer files
- Surveillance
- Arrest on false charges
- Detention without trial
- Exile.

Personhood concerns such as:

- Physical or sexual assault
- Torture
- Disappearance
- Extrajudicial killing.

Concerns at the Institutional level are of two types depending on the gravity of the restrictive measure. At one level are concerns related to content-based limits to curricula or research, limits on university autonomy, interference with staff/student unions' affairs, corruption, etc. At the other level are con-

cerns leading to disruption of the normal teaching-learning process, such as closing of universities and suppression of strikes or protests.

For each level of concern, the strategy identifies possible means of response, which starts with individual concerns that could be addressed using intra-university procedures and mechanisms, and moves up to local or national mechanisms, and then goes up to the Regional mechanisms and UN/global channels and mechanisms, if no solution is found at lower levels.



During the discussions on the framework analysis and the responses, participants pointed out that the framework seemed to focus on academic staff and left out the students. They also identified other concerns such as self-censorship to avoid retribution, lack of representation in institutional decision-making structures at various levels, denial of participation or consultation in curriculum revision, program development and policy-making processes at the institutional level, police raids and occupation of campuses, externally prescribed courses and teaching methodologies.

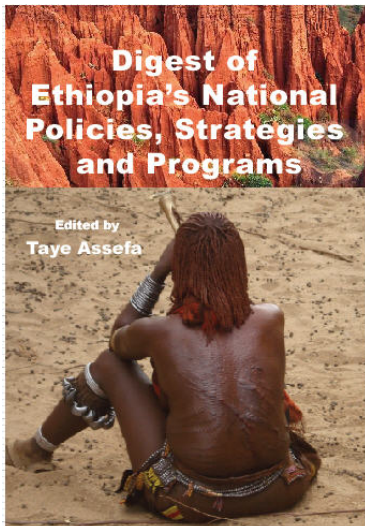
Concerning the mechanisms for promoting academic freedom and institutional autonomy, participants pointed out the need to consider not only responses to infringements but also proactive measures to enhance and strengthen these values. Suggestions to this end included:

- the launch of e-newsletters and journals dedicated to academic freedom and institutional autonomy,
- regular seminars and workshops to share experiences and information,
- training for university leaders and managers to enhance their awareness,
- dissemination of national, regional and international instruments on academic freedom such as the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation,

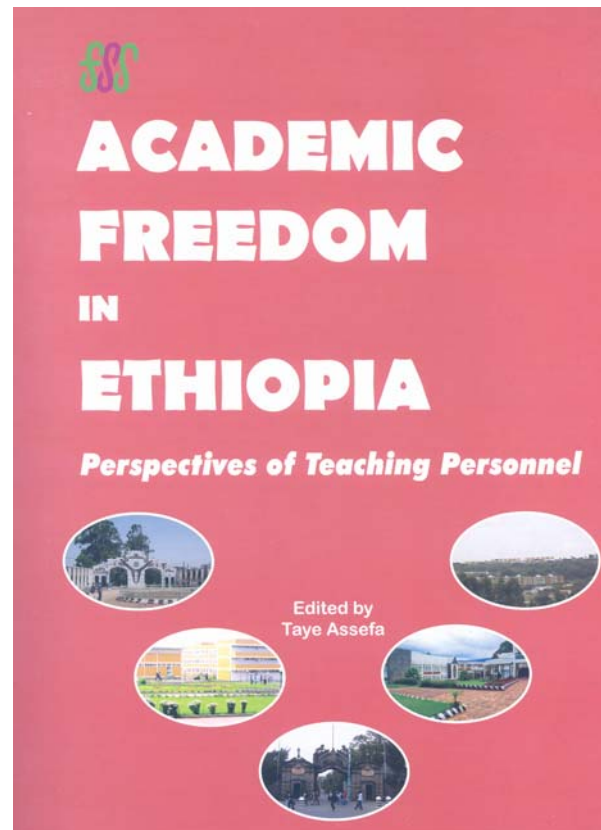
- media reviews of academic freedom issues,
- inter-university collaboration to promote academic freedom and institutional autonomy,
- Sensitising staff and student unions on the promotion of academic freedom,
- launch of academic freedom day to raise public awareness,
- formation of a website or blog dedicated to academic freedom issues,
- establishment of national working groups for dialogue and research on academic freedom and institutional autonomy,
- Networking and collaboration with regional and international organisations such as CODESRIA, WARC, SAR, NEAR and AAU (Association of African Universities) to strengthen research and advocacy on academic freedom.

The conference was concluded with an agreement among participants to strengthen networking among themselves to promote academic freedom. To this end, they elected contact persons for West Africa, the Horn of Africa and East Africa.

New Publications from FSS



The (Amharic and English) digest briefly reviews a selection of major policies, strategies and programs adopted by the Government of Ethiopia in the post-1991 period. It provides an overview of the salient features and elements of the policies, strategies and programs, gaps in their conceptualization, achievements and challenges in their implementation and the way forward. The reviews cover the Social sector (e.g., food security, population, education, women), Economic sector (agriculture, finance, energy, industry, trade and investment, water, environment), and Governance sector (civil service, justice system, and urban development).



This book examines the status of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and teaching personnel in Ethiopian higher education institutions. It provides the results of case studies of seven major public universities and four private colleges using the UNESCO General Conference's November 1997 "Recommendation concerning the status of higher education teaching personnel" as a benchmark. It also presents three other studies focusing on crosscutting issues such as teacher assessment, social dialogue and TESO, and impacts of massification.