

Annual Report 2020 - 2021

Monitoring

SCHOLARS AT RISK

SAR uOttawa



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Cover photo:

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Key Achievements



Reported Cases

In Canada: 5
In Mexico: 3
In Haiti: 2
In Venezuela: 2
In Brazil: 1
In Colombia: 2
TOTAL: 15

Advocacy Actions

Amicus 2
Webinars 4
Reports for the UN 1
Reports for the IACHR 1
Micro campaigns 1
OpEds 3 (English, Spanish, and French)
Workshops 2
TOTAL: 13

UofO Students Involved: 8

Interamerican Principles of Academic Freedom

On December 9, 2021, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, together with the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (Re-desca) and the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (RELE), adopted and presented the Inter-American Principles on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy.

These principles are the result of several months of work by members of the Academic Network, of which the Human Rights and Education Center and all members of Scholars at Risk in the Americas' project were active participants.

The Center's role was to ensure that the text included the regional reality that our team has monitored, studied, and analyzed over the years as it has tracked cases of academic freedom violations, created advocacy strategies to work with local and regional actors, and mobilized legal resources to protect the right to academic freedom in the region.

The intention of these principles is to become a tool to defend the right to academic freedom, protect academic communities, and maintain democratic societies. The next step for us is to help implement these Principles in the region.

Americas' Hub on Academic Freedom

University of Ottawa's Human Rights Research and Education Centre (HRREC), along with the University of Monterrey and Scholars at Risk, has officially launched a two-year project to increase awareness and advocacy in defense of academic freedom across the Americas. The main purpose is to move forward the discourse around academic freedom by generating clear and regionally tailored guidelines, foster direct advocacy, and position the Americas as global leaders on the development of relevant human rights norms and standards to protect higher education spaces and academic communities.

The project will be rooted in the building of a sustainable network of advocates and experts throughout the hemisphere (the "Americas Hub"), which will be well-positioned to identify crises and situations of concern and help generate locally or regionally tailored advocacy responses.

The work of this project will revolve around two main areas. The first focuses on network building with key national and regional higher education institutions, associations, academics, and civil society organizations, seeking opportunities to promote the importance of academic freedom in the region and monitor attacks on higher education addressing national political, legal, and cultural realities.

The second focuses on outreach to the Inter-American Human Rights System (which includes the Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights) aimed at developing an official statement or recommendation on academic freedom, as well as advocacy efforts before national/regional bodies to advance relevant human rights protections. The elaboration and implementation of the Interamerican Principles is part of this.

Gender Violence at Universities during Covid



The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to light a significant ascent of gender violence and femicide in the Americas. According to the Gender Equality Observatory (2020), which tracks various indicators surrounding gender violence and femicide in the region, “in most Latin American countries, 2 out of 3 femicides occur in the context of relationships between partners or ex-partners”. The cases of femicide, while previously high, have increased given the Covid-19 pandemic due to economic and power inequalities and the lockdown. The UN Women (2021) calls this a “shadow pandemic” of gender violence and femicide alongside the pandemic of Covid-19.

These issues can be tracked in several cases that picture a trend of multiple edges: giant protests and demonstrations against gender violence and sexual assault at Latin American universities, the censorship suffered by academics because they have collaborated or led research reports reporting the topic, and the collective force pushed by Latin American students that have demanded that the universities took action against gender violence.

Protests and Demonstrations

In February 2021 a series of protests were held in the agricultural state Portuguesa of Venezuela, protesting the murder of three young women (Bangkok Post, 2021). These protests chanted “Not one more” and held signs crying out for change in the country. According to an article, a 22-year-old psychology student in Venezuela said she is “very afraid” and that “being alive should not be an achievement” (Bangkok Post, 2021). Protests with mainly young women underline the need for policy changes that support and protect women from violence.

The International Women’s Day, March 8th saw thousands of protests in Latin America against gender-based violence (The Nation, 2021). These protests saw nearly a million women gather in Santiago, Chile to show the power of these movements (The Nation, 2021). The chant

during this protest was “A Rapist in Your Path” or “un violador en tu camino” (IndustriALL Global Union, 2020).

It also sparked another series of protests in Mexico City’s main streets. Protestors called for the Government of Mexico to finally take action against gender-based violence (The Rio Times, 2021). The protests came after government figures suggested that 939 women had been killed due to femicide in 2020 (The Rio Times, 2021).

On that same day, several protests were also held around Haiti, in Port-au-Prince, Plateau Central, and Cap-Haitian (ActionAid, 2021). These protests were held to fight back against the soaring levels of gender violence, rape, abuse, and assault since the beginning of the pandemic and lockdowns.

The movement has grown big since 2019 when women across Latin America manifested against gender violence. Brazil had #NãoéNão (“No is No”), Argentina #NiUnaMenos (“Not One Less”), Chile #EducaciónNoSexista (“Non-sexist Education”), Mexico #NoMeCuidanMeViolan (“They don’t take care of me, they rape me”), Colombia #NoEsNormal (“It isn’t normal”). In order to see a change in the rates of gender violence and femicide, these groups have used online advocacy to gain greater support. Through social media posts, videos of protests, and online campaigns to raise awareness and funds, these student groups have effectively made femicide and gender violence a known issue in Latin America.

The protests and public demonstrations have also left a noticeable impact on the fight against gender violence. The demonstrations call out aggressors in public and make themselves noticeable. This makes it far more difficult for institutions, aggressors, and governments to ignore the growing cases of gender violence.

Censorship Against Academics

The Feminist and Gender Affairs Commission of Anthropology of the National University of Colombia - Las que luchan - with advice from the Colombian academic Mónica Godoy, who is a graduate of the same program, published in its

blog three reports on sexual violence in the Anthropology Program in 2020. The reports present accounts of possible victims against at least seven professors of the Department of Anthropology and one of Sociology of the National University.

The reports were constructed with qualitative information based on the autobiographical accounts of various experiences of sexual violence lived by women and men, when they were students at the University. All of them stated that they were victims or direct witnesses of aggression or inappropriate behavior on the part of some of those professors. Behind each autobiographical account collected there was a complaint that was brought to the attention of the Attorney General's Office of Colombia and the Oversight Office of the National University of Colombia, but to date, there is no information on the progress of these investigations.

It is noteworthy that since 2017, by rector's resolution, the Protocol for the prevention and attention of cases of gender-based violence and sexual violence at the National University of Colombia came into force, where the rights of the victimized persons, the guidelines and routes for attention, and the procedure for registration of cases are established. According to the published reports and even though the cases were registered with the University, the protocol seems not to have been used in the cases denounced in the reports and its guidelines have not been put into practice.

After the publication of the second report, the only Sociology professor denounced as aggressor filed a judicial action against the academic Mónica Godoy requesting the non-dissemination of the third report and the retraction of the researcher. The judge granted the plaintiff the violation of his right to a good name and honor. Monica Godoy is ordered to remove the publications of the allegations from social networks and is prohibited from speaking in the future in any media about it.

Silencing mechanisms against academics and students who defend victims of sexual and gender-based violence are widely used in university environments. Laws of slander, libel, and defamation were used in this case to silence Professor Mónica Godoy Ferro, her co-researchers, and the victims mentioned in the reports. These laws, especially

when used against victims of gender/sexual violence, punish the victims rather than the perpetrators. According to the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, defamation lawsuits against victims of gender-based/sexual violence are forms of gender-based/sexual violence, as threatening victims with prosecution is a clear attempt to silence them or prevent them from reporting their experiences, resulting in revictimization and impunity.

A Collective Force

Although the world has turned to virtual teaching/learning due to the pandemic, the number of cases of gender/sexual violence has not decreased (Expansión Política, 2021). However, the voice of student movements has been sounded loud, clear, and has accomplished tremendous milestones: in Argentina, it pushed the legalization of abortion; in Mexico, it promoted the inclusion of recordings of virtual classes as undeniable evidence in case of inappropriate behavior by professors; and in Chile, it urged the adoption of a new law that mandates that all institutions have regulation and a comprehensive policy for the prevention, investigation, punishment, and eradication of sexual harassment.

Now in Chile, three years after the most massive feminist marches, an important part of their demands were transformed into law. On September 15, Law No. 21.369 was published in the Official Gazette, which regulates sexual harassment, violence, and gender discrimination in all higher education establishments, both university, and technical-professional. The purpose of the regulation is to create safe campuses. The law includes all members of higher education: students, academics, administrative, and other staff. It condemns any type of misconduct, whether verbal or physical and whether in person, virtual or telematic. Those universities that do not comply with the law could even lose their accreditation (La Tercera, 2021).

Photo: efeminista.com

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Apathy Towards Racism at Canadian Universities



In December 2020, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) published a letter titled “Letter to Universities and Colleges on Racism and Other Human Rights Concerns” in response to grievances from Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) students about institutional apathy and inaction towards racial discrimination and xenophobia at Canadian universities (especially in Ontario). The letter calls on university authorities to implement measures to “create and sustain equitable and inclusive education environments”. Additionally, the letter calls on university authorities to fulfill their legal obligation to “examine the conditions, challenges, and impediments to a respectful learning environment”. According to the OHRC, if university authorities fail to address incidents of racial discrimination, then anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and other forms of racism will continue to prosper and threaten the safety and wellbeing of BIPOC students (Letter to Universities and Colleges on Racism, 2020).

Incidents of Racial Discrimination

Incidents of racial discrimination at Ontario and Canadian universities range from racial slurs in classrooms and online meetings to discriminatory treatment.

Racial Slurs in Classrooms

In September 2020, University of Ottawa Professor Verushka Lieutenant-Duval was placed on administrative suspension after using the N-word in class to explain how some marginalized groups had re-appropriated racial slurs (Friesen, 2020). The professor apologized for using the N-word; however, students in the class reported that the professor went on to discuss with the class whether the N-word should be used in an academic context, which made many students feel that the professor was both “insensitive” and “ignorant” to the “current social climate and the meaning behind the racial slur” (Holland & Dutil, 2020).

A student responded to Professor Verushka Lieutenant-Duval’s Twitter apology with the following tweet, reflecting a majority of the criticism aimed at the professor via social media (Holland & Dutil, 2020): “In 2020 after the Black Lives Matter movement, this is willful ignorance and disrespect. For a professor to use such language and excuse herself via potentially opening an avenue for discussion is

manipulative. The conversation has BEEN had. This is not excusable for an educator.”

In response to the incident, the University of Ottawa’s Student Union (UOSU) released a statement to the Fulcrum, explaining that the use of racial slurs in class makes BIPOC students feel unwelcome and uncomfortable at the university (as cited in Holland & Dutil, 2020): “This demonstrates the need for anti-oppression training for our professors, as well as more culturally competent staff. We often say that racism has no place on our campus, yet it seems to have been enrolled into our classrooms. Incidents like these make racialized students feel unwelcome and question their belonging to the uOttawa community”.

A similar incident took place at the University of Windsor in October 2020. Professor Ashley Glasburn-Falzetti used the N-word in class to explain to students that they would encounter offensive language in an assigned book (Grassa & Aziz, 2020). The professor apologized for using the N-word; however, many students were dissatisfied with the apology. In a statement to the CBC, student Josh Lamers explained that Black students are expected to forgive racism without being offered any substantive solutions or actions for change (Grassa & Aziz, 2020): “There are systemic and institutional ways in which these kind of moments are accepted as fact about Black life on campus, that we just have to accept that these moments happen and that we just have to forgive without asking for substantive remedy and repair”.

Student and faculty members of Researchers, Academics, and Advocates of Colour for Equity in Solidarity (RAACES) also responded to the incident in a letter to University of Windsor authorities, explaining that the use of the N-word in class contributes to an unsafe learning environment for Black students and faculty (Grassa & Aziz, 2020): “This is the latest manifestation of anti-Blackness at the University of Windsor. In this incident, Blackness was used as a tool to educate white students. The action was hurtful and violent to Black students. As Black, Indigenous and faculty of colour we feel affronted also. These actions continue to create an unsafe environment for Black students and faculty.”

Discriminatory Treatment

After the June-2019-Jamal-Boyce incident at the University of Ottawa, where discriminatory treatment

played a role in the arrest of Student Jamal Boyce for skateboarding on campus (Gillis, Crawford, & Joanne Laucius, 2020), the university changed its policy on carding, encouraging campus security officers to demand identification less often and to inform people that they have a right to refuse (U of O issues new security policy, 2020).

Despite the new policy, student Wiliston Mason was blocked from entering his residence for not providing identification only a few months later (Mussa, 2020). A 2020 report written by Dana J. Campbell of Rubin Thomlinson LLP and commissioned by the University of Ottawa's Human Rights Office found that racial discrimination played a role in the incident (Dutil, C., 2020): "Having completed the investigation, I found that Mr. Mason was subject to racial discrimination . . . I found that Mr. Mason's race was a factor, though potentially not the only factor, which led to him being stopped by (the security guard) as he tried to enter his residence."

Similarly, in December 2020, student Jordan Afolabi faced discriminatory treatment at the University of Windsor after an altercation with another student. According to the CBC, Jordan Afolabi was "banned from campus by the university during the investigation, while the other student, later deemed to be the aggressor in the fight, was allowed to continue attending classes." (UWindsor apologizes to Black student, 2020). An independent adjudicator found that university authorities mishandled the incident, and that Jordan Afolabi was "treated in stark contrast compared to the student he was defending himself against." (UWindsor apologizes to Black student, 2020). Jordan Afolabi believes that Anti-Black racism played a role in his discriminatory treatment and expressed concern that "the Black student community is not safe [on campus]". (UWindsor apologizes to Black student, 2020).

Demonstrations Against Racial Discrimination

In response to incidents of racial discrimination, student-organized protests have erupted on university campuses and social media.

Student Protests on Campus

In December 2020, students from the Black Student Leaders' Association (BSLA) protested anti-Black racism at the University of Ottawa through a 5-day sit in (Michael, 2020). The students demanded that university authorities adopt an effective and concrete

action plan on racial discrimination. The protest was sparked by the aftermath of the September 2020 N-word incident involving Professor Verushka Lieutenant-Duval incident, after 34 University of Ottawa professors signed a letter supporting the professor and the use of the N-word in an academic context. Soon after, University of Ottawa President Jacques Frémont created the "Action Committee on Anti-Racism and Inclusion" (Michael, 2020). BIPOC students such as Yanaminah Thullah, co-President of BSLA, expressed that they were not consulted in the creation of the committee (Michael, 2020).

After several "unproductive meetings" between students and the newly created "Action Committee on Anti-Racism and Inclusion", a protest took place and student protestors released the following demands (Michael, 2020):

- The introduction of an anti-racism office at the university and autonomy for the human rights department.
- A Black, Indigenous and People of Colour anti-racism officer at the executive level, with their own staff and funds.
- The implementation of a mandatory anti-racism course for all undergraduate students.
- Calling for the university administration to commit to hiring Black professors who specialize in Critical Race Theory, and adjacent specializations.

Members of the Caucus of Black, Indigenous and Racialized Professors and Librarians at the University of Ottawa wrote a letter in support of the student protestors, explaining that the creation of the committee was a way of delaying the implementation of already existing recommendations proposed by Black, Indigenous, and BIPOC academics and communities (Nagra, 2020): "The BIPOC Caucus questions the need for another committee on systemic racism on campus when there is so much literature and knowledge on these issues. We are concerned the committee is a means to avoid or to delay implementing the many recommendations contained in the University's own reports as well as those proposed by BIPOC communities. BIPOC communities are exhausted with committees, discussions, delays and the many ways our labour and time are exploited so that the University can create an image of supporting anti-racist work through performative acts."

Student Protests on Social Media

During the COVID-19 pandemic, dozens of Instagram

accounts were created by BIPOC students to share experiences and incidents of racial discrimination at Canadian universities, including Western University, Queen's University, York University, McGill University, Concordia University, Dalhousie University, University of Ottawa, and University of British Columbia (Bowden, 2020). Some of the incidents mentioned were:

"A Communications Professor who taught CMN4166 made a series of racially-charged comments throughout the semester. He once pointed at a table where Asia students were seated and called it the 'Asia table'. He had displayed an image of a woman in a hijab who was cosplaying and said that if he wanted to see "that" referring to Muslim women), he could just go to Kanata. He also stated that Arabs didn't allow women to drink coffee because they (Arabs) thought it was a man's drink. Not once did he single out the white students. - Honours Bachelors in Communications" (Instagram.com/untolduottawa)

"I was in a group project with few students, and while we were working on the assignment a casual discussion about York University having more people of colour came up. I pointed out how Schulich barely has any black students, and one of my group members responded saying 'yeah because black people don't work hard enough... of course they wouldn't get into a school like this.'" I was shocked and said nothing, but I wish I did. No one said anything and we changed topics. BBA, 2022." (Instagram.com/silencedatschulich)

"For my 4th year Capstone course, I took International Business. Our {proof} demonstrated extensive interest and knowledge an international relationships and business in foreign countries. They were also quite the rambler. During class one day, they went off-topic (as per usual) and started a conversation in which they said the words, 'the ghetto'. Another student in the class, clearly appalled by the prof's insensitive use of the word, asked the professor to 'please define what a ghetto is.' The professor, without skipping a beat, said (and I will never forget!), 'The ghetto is where Black people live'." (Instagram.com/saunderunspoken)

"I've always grown up being proud of being Asian; eager to embrace my culture. I am unequivocally myself at all times and that's why Smith was such a crappy experience for me. I failed to assimilate, and adopt the common practice of 'being white' to fit in. I've never had a problem making friends until

I came to Queens. I've never felt so out of place. Being different is a detriment at Smith, and diversity & inclusion is not celebrated". (Instagram.com/stolen-bysmith)

According to York University Professor Enakshi Dua, social media is a powerful platform for BIPOC students to organize and combat hostility towards racialized groups, as many Canadian universities have ineffective mechanisms for reporting incidents of discrimination (Bowden, 2020). However, many BIPOC students face aggressive online threats in response to publicizing their experiences of discrimination, which places a significant toll on their mental health.

Focusing on Solutions

According to the OHRC, it is problematic that BIPOC students have felt the need to independently address racism on their university campuses when "the primary responsibility for addressing human rights issues at their institutions does not rest with them (many of these students are just a few years out of high school)." (Letter to Universities and Colleges, 2020). Indeed, BIPOC students have been at the forefront of combatting racial discrimination through countless hours of mobilizing, demonstrating, and researching actions for change, while also managing university assignments and deadlines.

Canadian universities are equipped with the knowledge and the resources to effectively address incidents of racial discrimination. Since the mid-1990s, universities across Canada have created task forces - mainly lead by student and faculty volunteers - to publish reports on how to mitigate systemic racism (Deckard et al., 2021). Deckard et al. (2021) find that the recommendations outlined in these reports are markedly similar:

- Build (through targeted recruitment) and retain (through active intervention) a diverse community in which students of all races are represented in proportion to the community, and all cultures are respected.
- Increase hiring and promotion of racialized community members, so that faculty and administration, particularly, reflect the communities their universities serve.
- Systematically collect race-based data to facilitate the benchmarking of equity goals.
- Support research curricula, centres and funding around racialization.

- Create a clear and cogent anti-racist policy that streamlines the human rights process for those experiencing racism at the university.
- Build, staff, resource, and empower a human rights or equity diversity and inclusion office with a mandate to train for and administer an equitable community in which to work and learn.
- Create a mentorship program to facilitate the success of students, staff and faculty.

Institutional unwillingness to carry out these recommendations is an infringement of Canadian universities' positive obligation to implement "robust policies, protocols, and complaint mechanisms to ensure human rights are fully recognized and respected" (Letter to Universities and Colleges on Racism, 2020). According to the OHRC, this positive obligation not only involves acknowledging human rights issues, but also taking proactive measures to "eliminate any such discriminatory elements." (Letter to Universities and Colleges on Racism, 2020).

Photo: leanincanada.com

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Universities during COVID



On March 11, 2020, Covid-19 was declared a pandemic, and people worldwide had to face unprecedented conditions: lockdowns, remote work, virtual education, massive job losses, copious company closures, collapses of health care systems, etc. As of January 2022, there have been 305,914,601 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 5,486,304 deaths (WHO, 2022). The social, economic, and health crisis is generalized.

This pandemic seems to also have had devastating effects in higher education: in our monitoring, economic issues, and the lack of inclusiveness of the online model of teaching and learning are the most notorious. First, the widespread economic crisis is one of the main factors affecting university education in times of pandemic: from education budget cuts to desertions, universities have been victims of COVID. Governments in the region have taken advantage of the crisis to interfere in university autonomy, cut spending, and rethink budgets. In addition, due to the cessation of work activities, families have had to prioritize food and health, making it impossible for many to pay for higher education studies, or to acquire technological devices and services to remain connected to classes. In Colombia and Honduras, several students reported having to drop out of college to become the principal breadwinners of their families because their relatives have lost their jobs due to COVID (Escobedo, 2021).

Second, the emergence of an online model of teaching and learning has presented several inconveniences. Virtual classes became a must in many countries of the region without considering the precarious economic conditions of many households and the technological gap. For instance, Universidad de Chile has reported difficulties in continuing its online classes, since most of its students do not have computers or tablets, some of its professors do not have the required technological competencies to organize and conduct virtual classes, and more than 76 thousand families do not have internet. (Hurtado, 2020) Venezuela has faced the same issue during the pandemic since it has the worst Internet speed score in the entire American continent, ranking 174 out of 176 worldwide, not to mention the power outages that go from 6 to 18 hours daily, which make connectivity to remote classrooms even more difficult for those who are lucky enough to have a computer at home (Aula Abierta, 2021).

Many universities in the Americas have faced unparalleled predicaments in the last two years. Our monitoring talks about repression to voices that demand better solutions, censorship to science and research, and institutions at risk due to vandalism.

Repression to Protestors in Colombia

In late November 2019, hundreds of thousands of Colombian pensioners, students, social leaders, and union members took the streets of the country's main cities to protest over labour, pension, and tax reforms being discussed in the Colombian National Congress, the killings of grass-roots leaders, the lack of financial support of public universities, and the government's alleged failure to implement the peace process. The movement grew as other sectors joined in and the rallies across the country became one of the biggest mass demonstrations in recent years. Protests have continued during the pandemic.

On April 23, 2021, police stormed the Universidad del Valle campus and fired tear gas at student protesters in an effort to evict them from campus (SAR 2021). Student protesters occupied administrative facilities at the Universidad del Valle seeking academic guarantees that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as providing technical equipment so students can engage in remote learning. According to the rector of the university, Édgar Varela, police attempted to urge the students to peacefully evacuate the premises. Video footage from the police raid shows students standing under an outdoor overhang in front of a building at the university when a line of police officers descends on the students and begins firing tear gas. One report by Infobae noted that stun grenades were also used. Available sources do not indicate that students responded with violence. Following the event, Varela defended his actions, saying that the occupying students had prevented access to the university to other students and university administrators. Students took to social media to denounce the actions of the rector and police. They further reported that several students were injured.

Repression has not only come from the government but professors. During a virtual class at the Universidad del Rosario Law School, in May 2021, María Camila Guerrero had changed her profile photo to a graphic that supported the national strike protesters which read, "How difficult to study while my people are being killed." In a video from class, Professor Éd-

gar Ramírez Baquero can be heard telling Guerrero to remove the profile image, that the student had to learn to respect the professor's class, and that the image was disrespectful. After scolding Guerrero for several minutes, Professor Baquero ordered Guerrero to log out of the class after she did not remove the image. After Guerrero posted a video of and complaint about the incident to Twitter, the university reacted on Twitter stating that it rejected "all manifestations of violence and discrimination" and reiterating its commitment to respecting a diversity of opinions and open dialogue. The university later released an official statement indicating that Professor Baquero had been terminated from his position at the Law School (SAR, 2021).

Censorship in Brazil and Venezuela

On March 2, 2021, the Brazilian Comptroller General's Office adopted a resolution prohibiting two university professors from publicly criticizing the federal government for a period of two years. This resolution, known as *termo de ajustamento de conduta*, was adopted after a Federal Deputy filed a complaint against both professors, requesting their dismissal. What motivated this reprimand? On January 7, professors Pedro Rodrigues Curi Hallal and Eraldo dos Santos Pinheiro participated in an activity at the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPEl) disseminated through social networks. In this presentation, they criticized the appointment of the new rector, chosen by President Jair Bolsonaro, despite having received the lowest number of votes of the final list proposed to elect the new rector. They also reproached the handling of the pandemic that, by the end of January 2021, had caused the death of approximately 200,000 people in Brazil.

The decision of the Comptroller's Office shows the control bodies as entities that can be used by governments to silence critics in public matters: in this case, the appointment of university authorities and the handling of the coronavirus pandemic in Brazil. This censorship is contrary to the American Convention on Human Rights (IACHR) and affects freedom of expression and university autonomy as well as academic freedom (Arango & Herencia-Carrasco, 2021).

The situation in Venezuela is not far behind. In May 2020, Diosdado Cabello, president of the National Constituent Assembly, threatened members of the Academy of Physical, Mathematical and Natural

Sciences (ACFIMAN) with the operation "tun tun" for the publication of a recent report where they warned the public about a possible increase of COVID-19 cases in Venezuela and the fact that the government was allegedly leaving between 63% and 95% active cases unreported. According to Aula Abierta (2020-2), operation "tun tun" is the name given to the operations (such as detentions without a court order) carried out by the State security forces, mainly against activists, politicians, or journalists who have become uncomfortable for the government for denouncing various issues.

Vandalism in Venezuela

Since the beginning of the social isolation due to COVID-19 in Venezuela, many reports have come up denouncing security violations at different campuses across the country. In 2020, Aula Abierta (2020-1) gathered information about 175 incidents and the number is on the rise. "Among the most affected higher education institutions are the Universidad del Zulia with at least 35 incidents; Universidad de Oriente with 28; Universidad de Los Andes with 18; and Universidad Central de Venezuela with 16".

Of the 175 documented acts of vandalism, at least 10 affected research activities and 17 student services. These incidents ranged from the theft of materials and equipment to physical damage to the facilities and fires that caused the loss of databases with historical information on scientific research work and copies of unique books in the country.

Various organizations that defend human rights in Venezuela, as well as student movements, university professors, and civil society, have carried out protests to raise their voices against those acts of destruction that affect the entire university community. University students have requested the National Assembly to "apply urgent measures for the cessation of the attack on university campuses". Likewise, the Venezuelan Association of University Rectors (AVERU) recently denounced that "criminal gangs", with absolute impunity, have been destroying public patrimony, pointing out the case of the Oceanographic Institute of the Universidad de Oriente (UDO), which was looted and burned.

Photo: theguardian.com

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