

GUIDELINES FOR DECISION-MAKING ON THE ISSUE OF ASSAf STATEMENTS ON CONFLICT

1. Preamble

ASSAf has not, in the past, issued statements concerning conflict. It has focussed on scientific affairs and, in its capacity as an independent body, dedicated to using science for the benefit of society, it has exercised caution in terms of any perceived entry into the political area. However, in the present decade (2020-2030) there is mounting evidence of the impact of conflict on scientists and on the practice of science.

2. What is science?

For present purposes, the definition of science is taken from the 2017 UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers¹ (reproduced in Appendix 1).

3. Is the issuing of statements on conflict within the ASSAf mandate?

In terms of conflict in the international context, it is clear that the ASSAf mandate covers aspects affecting science and scientists only. The following notes are quoted.

From the ASSAf Act 67 of 2001 as amended, the objectives of the Academy include

- s3(c) to promote the optimum development of the intellectual capacity of all people; and
- s3 (e) to link South Africa with scientific communities of the highest levels, in particular within the Southern African Development Community, the rest of Africa and internationally.

Among the strategic goals of ASSAf is the *promotion of national, regional and international linkages*.

In terms of conflict in the South African context, the following note is also relevant.

- *Vision: Through its Membership which represents the collective voice of the most active scholars in all fields of scholarly enquiry, ASSAf aims to generate evidence-based solutions to national problems.*

4. Guidelines or rules?

The following guidelines are proposed. It is noted that circumstances may arise in the near future, or in the long term, in which these guidelines should be reconsidered, since not all scenarios can be foreseen. It is likely that tensions will rise as an effect of global change. These recommendations should therefore be reviewed regularly.

¹ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260889>

5. When should statements on conflict be issued?

We suggest that statements can be considered under the following circumstances.

1. There is evidence of significant impact of a given conflict on scientific freedoms²: freedom of movement, of association, of expression and communication, or of access to data and information. These constitute a constraint on the practice of science, on the consideration and adoption of recommendations made based on scientific evidence, and therefore on the impact of science for society.
2. There is evidence of impact on scientific infrastructure, including scientific collections, laboratories, libraries, digital resources, or communications.
3. The consequences of the conflict are widespread or global: a wide group of scientists is restricted or at risk.
4. Scientific and technical expertise is specifically required in understanding the physical consequences of the conflict. Examples include but are not confined to nuclear or biological hazards.
5. Scientific expertise is required in understanding the societal consequences of the conflict. Examples include but are not confined to food security, water security, human security and migration.
6. We adopt the following principles for monitoring and response from the International Science Council (ISC) Procedures for addressing threats to scientific freedom⁴.
 - a. The issue(s) must be concerned substantially with science, or with the freedom of individuals as a consequence of pursuing scientific activities (human rights cases which happen to involve a scientist are generally out of scope);
 - b. The issue should generally be one for which ASSAf can take a public view for transparency and maximum impact and for which there is a feasible pathway to impact. However, this does not preclude initiating non-public action where this is more appropriate, or taking stances even if positive influence is unlikely;
 - c. There should be sufficient evidence available to support a defensible ASSAf position and which enables ASSAf's views to be stated in a way which avoids perception of advocacy or uninformed opinion.
7. The following further principles will be observed.
 - a. ASSAf statements will remain within the ambit of the mandate, as recorded in Act 67 of 2001 as amended, and shall not bring the Academy into disrepute.
 - b. Conflicts should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Not every conflict requires a statement from ASSAf.
 - c. If condemnation of a conflict is to be considered, care must be taken to condemn the conflict and not the parties to the conflict.
 - d. The broad spectrum of reaction from ASSAf Members is to be considered as far as possible. In terms of statements, it is possible that ASSAf may be considered by some to be too political, and by others to be avoiding recognition of relevant realities. ASSAf's opinions expressed in statements will remain evidence-based and objective.

² <https://council.science/what-we-do/freedoms-and-responsibilities-of-scientists/>

6. What structures support the decision?

Proposals for statements may be put before Council for consideration.

- a. Council may task its members to draft a statement and may call for editing.
- b. The decision on the issuing of a statement is made by Council.
- c. Members of Council will keep in mind that statements are frequently made in response to new events, and that both timing and balanced consideration of the issues and principles above are critical.
- d. Reaction to statements will be monitored, and will be evaluated by Council.

Appendix 1 How shall we use the word “science” in this context?

Suggested usage from the 2017 UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers³

1(a)(i) The term ‘science’ signifies the enterprise whereby humankind, acting individually or in small or large groups, makes an organized attempt, in cooperation and in competition, by means of the objective study of observed phenomena and its validation through sharing of findings and data and through peer review, to discover and master the chain of causalities, relations or interactions; brings together in a coordinated form subsystems of knowledge by means of systematic reflection and conceptualization; and thereby furnishes itself with the opportunity of using, to its own advantage, understanding of the processes and phenomena occurring in nature and society.

Appendix 2 The Principle of Freedom and Responsibility in Science, ISC Statute 7

The Principle of Freedom and Responsibility in Science⁴

The free and responsible practice of science is fundamental to scientific advancement and human and environmental well-being. Such practice, in all its aspects, requires freedom of movement, association, expression and communication for scientists, as well as equitable access to data, information and other resources for research. It requires responsibility at all levels to carry out and communicate scientific work with integrity, respect, fairness, trustworthiness, and transparency, recognizing its benefits and possible harms. In advocating the free and responsible practice of science, the Council promotes equitable opportunities for access to science and its benefits, and opposes discrimination based on such factors as ethnic origin, religion, citizenship, language, political or other opinion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability or age.

ISC Scientific freedoms⁵

For science to progress efficiently and for its benefits to be shared equitably, scientists must be afforded scientific freedoms. This includes individual freedom of enquiry and exchange of ideas, freedom to reach scientifically defensible conclusions, and institutional freedom to apply collectively scientific standards of validity, replicability and accuracy.

The ISC seeks to uphold four fundamental scientific freedoms:

- Freedom of movement;
- Freedom of association;
- Freedom of expression and communication; and
- Freedom of access to data and information

These freedoms are threatened by attacks on the values of science and through individual cases of discrimination, harassment or restriction of movement. Such threats can be based on factors related to ethnic origin, religion, citizenship, language, political or other opinion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability or age.

³ UNESCO, Records of the General Conference, 39th session Paris, 30 October – 14 November 2017, Volume 1, Resolutions <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260889>

⁴The Principle of Freedom and Responsibility in Science https://council.science/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ISC-Statutes-and-Rules-of-Procedure_02.2021.pdf

⁵ <https://council.science/what-we-do/freedoms-and-responsibilities-of-scientists/>