



Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) Communiqué for Human Rights Day

20 March 2024

Violent conflict, and its impact on the human, social and physical infrastructure of higher education and scholarship, has been rising over several years. The escalation of violence has resulted in appalling levels of mortality, injury and trauma. Universities, schools, hospitals and libraries have been destroyed, proper health care, teaching and research are impossible, and students and university staff have been killed, injured and detained.

As a participating member of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (IHRN), ASSAf supported the statement of concern and the call for compliance with international humanitarian law issued on 18 October, 2023. In addition, Council has carefully deliberated on these issues, mindful of the diverse perspectives of ASSAf Members, and indeed Council. We unanimously agree that the recent surge in intolerable violations of human rights requires a response. In particular, Council condemns actions that jeopardise the academic project of promoting knowledge, research, and learning. Further, Council re-affirms its commitment to the Human Rights Principles of the UN and calls for respect for the judgements of the International Court of Justice and other international statutory bodies.

We believe that this response must go beyond the current conflicts and address systematic violations by governments and societies due to, among others, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and political intolerance. To this end, Council has appointed a panel of experts to lead a consultative process that will result in an ASSAf Statement on these intolerable violations of human rights. The panel of experts have been requested to assist with appropriate definitions and terminology to provide ASSAf with conceptual clarity when dealing with the different forms of human rights violations. This process will include webinars, stakeholder engagement, written input and the preparation of a draft document to be circulated to the ASSAf Members for comment and approval. The process will begin immediately, and the statement issue is anticipated on 09/09/2024, the International Day to Protect Education from Attack.

Council of the Academy of Science of South Africa



About the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf)

The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) was inaugurated in May 1996. It was formed in response to the need for an Academy of Science consonant with the dawn of democracy in South Africa: activist in its mission of using science and scholarship for the benefit of society, with a mandate encompassing all scholarly disciplines that use an open-minded and evidence-based approach to build knowledge. ASSAf thus adopted in its name the term 'science' in the singular as reflecting a common way of enquiring rather than an aggregation of different disciplines. Its members are elected on the basis of a combination of two principal criteria, academic excellence and significant contributions to society. The Parliament of South Africa passed the Academy of Science of South Africa Act (No 67 of 2001), which came into force on 15 May 2002. This made ASSAf the only academy of science in South Africa officially recognised by government and representing the country in the international community of science academies and elsewhere.

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