

KIKA-SAR Recommendation for Pre-Session 41  
Universal Periodic Review, UN

**Protecting the Academic Freedom of Indonesia's Higher Education,  
Scientific and Research Communities**

On behalf of the Indonesian Caucus for Academic Freedom (KIKA) and Scholars at Risk (SAR), I join you here today to raise our concern over a pattern of repression targeting outspoken scholars and students and other systemic pressures that threaten academic freedom and the development of Indonesian higher education.

Founded in December 2017, KIKA is a national coalition of researchers and students who convene to discuss the state of academic freedom and opportunities to support the higher education community. SAR is an international network of higher education institutions and individuals committed to supporting at-risk scholars and promoting academic freedom around the world, including through advocacy before the UN and other international institutions.

As discussed in our joint UPR submission, Indonesian state authorities have relied on laws like the controversial Electronic Information and Transaction Law, which contains a criminal defamation component, to punish scholars for expressing criticism of the government, offering expertise in legal proceedings, and speaking about research findings in public. Students frequently faced arrest and police violence for protesting injustices and decrying corruption, as well as university disciplinary actions for raising purportedly controversial questions and ideas. These incidents raise serious concerns over scholars' and students'

academic freedom and everyone's right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in Indonesia.

Other laws threaten to harm the functioning of higher education throughout Indonesia. A so-called "Science Law", passed in 2019, threatens to shrink the scope of permissible research and the space for international academic exchange. And 2020's Job Creation legislation threatens to erode the autonomy of national research institutes, since it replaced the science law which allows the plural institution systems for research. This is because the mandate of Presidential Decree No. 78/2021 concerning the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) actually shows three dominant characters due to integration, namely bureaucratization, centralization and control, compared to efforts to develop and strengthen research institutions.

Furthermore, Indonesia's rector appointment system threatens university autonomy by giving the minister of education disproportionate voting power, effectively giving control over major aspects of university policymaking to political actors outside the university.

The pressures we've seen on higher education during this reporting period are consistent with a decline in academic freedom overall. And indeed, the Academic Freedom Index – which measures the level of academic freedom in countries around the world – confirms that after reforms following the end of the Suharto regime in 1998, protection for academic freedom has declined.

This is a dangerous trend, and we urge that States intervene to protect and promote academic freedom throughout Indonesia. Not only because the freedom of Indonesian scientists, scholars and even students is at

stake. But because a healthy higher education space benefits all of Indonesia – inside and outside the campus gates. Universities promote social justice and human rights, ensure scientific advancement, and model democratic progress. Thriving universities will allow Indonesia to collaborate and compete with other top universities around the world, helping to foster national prosperity and advancement. And universities are the spaces where solutions to the world’s most pressing problems – from authoritarianism and public corruption to environmental collapse – are debated and developed. So every one of us has a stake in protecting academic freedom in Indonesia.

Therefore, KIKA and SAR urge UN member states to call on Indonesia to

- (1) Publicly commit to protecting and promoting academic freedom, university autonomy, and rights that are fundamental to higher education communities, especially freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association;
- (2) Refrain from the use of force or legal actions intended to restrict or punish scholars’ and students’ exercise of academic freedom and related rights;
- (3) Investigate violations of scholars’ and students’ academic freedom and related rights, and hold perpetrators accountable;
- (4) Establish an ombudsperson tasked with receiving and responding to academic freedom concerns at public and private higher education institutions;
- (5) Revise the ITE Law and Science Law to conform to national and international legal standards and obligations relating to academic freedom and freedom of expression; and
- (6) Strengthen university autonomy and reduce the risk of corruption in state higher education institutions, including by allowing university senates greater control over rector appointments.