

## HUMAN RIGHTS CONVERSATION

# ACADEMIC FREEDOM UNDER SIEGE

24 MARCH 2025, 13:15-14:45

VILLA MOYNIER, 120B RUE DE LAUSANNE, GENEVA AND ONLINE

Academic freedom is the foundation of quality education, research, and innovation. It encompasses both the individual's and the wider society's ability to reflect, challenge existing concepts, generate new ideas and knowledge, disseminate and apply them. Safeguarding academic freedom is crucial, as it contributes to democratic governance and the realization of human rights. Protected under international human rights frameworks and national legal systems, it ensures that academic institutions remain spaces where diverse perspectives can develop and spread without undue interference or restriction.

This Human Rights Conversation, co-organized with Scholars at Risk, will highlight the significance of academic freedom, explore its legal foundations, and examine the concrete threats it faces. It aims to foster discussions on potential solutions and encourage a collective commitment to preserving academic integrity, emphasizing that safeguarding this fundamental right is essential to ensuring that education remains a beacon of free thought and knowledge advancement for the benefit of society as a whole.



Despite its importance, academic freedom is increasingly under threat worldwide. Political interference, often driven by ideological censorship and implemented through restrictive laws and policy measures, continues to undermine independent research, teaching and sharing of ideas. These limitations continue to infringe upon the right to education and restrict academic freedom across the globe, and more intensely in societies grappling with undemocratic governance and restrictive political systems. In recent years, these trends have taken hold to an alarming degree in countries considered part of the liberal and democratic world, highlighting a concerning shift toward policies that limit intellectual and academic freedoms. The consequences are evident in the suppression of topics that were once integral to curricula, administrative attacks targeting particular areas of study or entire institutions, retaliation against academics, and a gradual narrowing of open and critical discussions within the academic community, as well as among the general public. In many cases, authorities seek to reshape curricula and impose ideological controls that undermine the overall development of critical thinking.

The Human Rights Committee tackled academic freedom and the threats it faces in its work, albeit not in a consistent manner. Its recent Concluding observations of the second periodic report of Türkiye for example underlined persistent restrictions on the rights of academics, among other groups, including limitations on freedom of movement, dismissals without due process, political persecution, and reprisals. The Committee recognized that these restrictions undermine scholars' ability to engage in independent research and free expression, which are essential for democratic discourse. In line with international human rights obligations, the Committee urged Türkiye to uphold academic freedom by ensuring that scholars can work without fear of persecution, harassment, or intimidation.

Strong legal protections at both national and international levels are crucial for safeguarding and promoting academic freedom. However, fully protecting academic freedom requires concrete measures and mechanisms to protect academics and scientists facing threats and pressures, as well as ensuring institutional autonomy to uphold the integrity of education and research.

## SPEAKERS

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### **Farida Shaheed**

UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

### **Yvonne Donders**

Professor at the University of Amsterdam and Member of the UN Human Rights Committee

### **Jesse Levine**

Senior Advocacy Officer at Scholars at Risk

## MODERATION

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### **Felix Kirchmeier**

Executive Director, Geneva Human Rights Platform

## ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS CONVERSATIONS

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Human Rights Conversations are a series of events, hosted by the Geneva Human Rights Platform, aimed at discussing contemporary issues and challenges related to the promotion and protection of human rights in Geneva and beyond.

## REGISTRATION

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Register to attend:

<https://bit.ly/4huVi87>

