

LASA expresses concern about threats against scholars working in Latin America

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The Executive Council of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is concerned that many academics working in Latin America, because of the nature of their research, have increasingly faced instances of harassment and other forms of aggression, intimidation, and threats to their safety and well-being. In the vast majority of cases, scholars subjected to intimidation and attacks do not receive adequate protection from state institutions and relevant authorities in the countries where these threats unfold. Furthermore, in some occasions, academic institutions also fail to provide the necessary support needed. The protection and preservation of human rights were foundational in the creation of LASA in 1966 and have remained a guiding value in our members' scholarship and activism. Human rights are at stake in the current wave of attacks and threats against scholars working in and on Latin America.

Increasingly, together with human rights activists, scholars also constitute a group at risk, with a rising number of threats and harassment perpetrated against them. However, there does not seem to be a clear awareness of the seriousness and extent of this situation. LASA seeks to raise awareness of this problem and urge key stakeholders to address it as an urgent priority. In particular, LASA calls on governments, academic institutions, and international bodies to bolster institutional mechanisms to fully guarantee the exercise of academic freedom as well as the human rights and personal integrity of scholars engaged in research in and on Latin America.

A report prepared by scholars based on a workshop held at the XXXVI International Congress of LASA in Barcelona in 2018 demonstrates that many scholars, including LASA's own members, have suffered or are currently experiencing different forms of harassment, threats and attacks to their physical integrity and personal security. This has affected scholars living and working throughout the region, including Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay.

Scholars working on the following research topics are being especially targeted: human rights violations and transitional justice, especially the responsibility of the State and other non-state actors; the role of extractive industries and mega-development projects and their socio-environmental impact; inequality and poverty; indigenous peoples and rights; and gender and sexuality-based violence. The modalities of harassments and aggression are varied. Some of the cases brought to LASA's attention encompassed the following: death threats to researchers working on accountability for crimes against humanity in Uruguay, physical attacks and theft of documentation and gathered data committed against researchers and lawyers working on corporate criminal cases accountability for dictatorship-era crimes in Argentina, and campaigns of stigmatization and discredit in the press against academics collaborating with local NGOs in Colombia. These are just a few examples. Other issues of concern arise from responses by some academic institutions, including threat of dismissal, blocking of publications or rejection of research proposals whose themes are perceived as inconvenient.

LASA extends its solidarity to all those scholars who have experienced these unacceptable attacks and encourages the relevant political and judicial authorities to fully investigate such incidents, so that individuals responsible can be brought to justice and such attacks cease once and for all.

LASA also welcomes the establishment of the international scholarly network “Academics under Threat / Académicos y Académicas en Riesgo” and encourages all interested members of the association to join the network to work together to address this problem. For more information see: <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=ACADEMICSUNDERTHREAT>.

About LASA

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is the largest professional association in the world for individuals and institutions engaged in the study of Latin America. With over 12,000 members, over 65% of whom reside outside the United States, LASA is the one association that brings together experts on Latin America from all disciplines and diverse occupational endeavors, across the globe. LASA's mission is to foster intellectual discussion, research, and teaching on Latin America, the Caribbean, and its people throughout the Americas, promote the interests of its diverse membership, and encourage civic engagement through network building and public debate.

If you wish to interview a LASA Executive Council member, you can contact the LASA communications office at (412) 648-7929 or lasa@lasaweb.org.

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