

LASA expresses concern over repression and threats to academic freedom in Peru

January 2023

The Executive Council of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) expresses its outrage over the brutal repression that the State of Peru has deployed in response to social protest and citizen demonstrations since December 8, 2022. As an academic association, LASA is particularly concerned about the brutal police repression on Jan. 21 at the hemisphere's oldest public university, the National University of San Marcos, in which police stormed the gates of the university, and in an [arbitrary and violent fashion](#), began to raid dorm rooms, fire tear gas, and question and detain students and visitors. The police intervened without the presence of a public prosecutor, as required by law, and for several hours prevented lawyers, human rights defenders and representatives of the Ombudsman's Office from entering the campus and speaking with those being detained.

San Marcos students invited protesters from different provinces of Peru who traveled to Lima to participate in anti-government demonstrations to camp out at the university campus. The University's rector, Jeri Gloria Ramón Ruffner de Vega, was [not supportive](#) of the protesters' presence on campus, in contrast to the rectors of other public universities in Lima who welcomed their compatriots to stay on their campuses while in Lima. On Jan. 20, the University Rectorate [solicited](#) police action in the face of what it stated were acts of violence against university police and the illegal takeover of the university's entry points by students and other unidentified persons. This led to the police intervention on Jan. 21. More than [200 individuals](#) were detained and sent to the bureau of the police's division against terrorism, DIRCOTE. The fact that all of these individuals save one have since been released reflects the arbitrary nature of the police intervention in San Marcos.

While the government of Peru declared a state of emergency on January 14, the [Inter-American Principles on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy](#) adopted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights establishes that any intervention by security forces cannot be used by States for the purpose of "suppressing or denying, denaturalizing or depriving of real content academic freedom, university autonomy or, in general, the rights guaranteed by the American Convention on Human Rights." Even under a state of emergency, any police intervention "must comply with the standards of proportionality, reasonableness, legality and necessity." None of these safeguards were fulfilled by the Peruvian police.

To date, in the context of ongoing social protests, [55 civilians have been killed](#), 46 as the result of wounds caused by gunfire, which human rights groups [attribute](#) to the Peruvian security forces. LASA expresses its alarm over this disproportionate use of lethal force by the police and armed forces against civilians. We also abhor the deaths of other civilians in incidents related to road blockades and the death of one police official; as well as the 1200 wounded and the arbitrary detention of hundreds

more. The violations of human rights, the death of civilians in several provinces of the country, and militarization as a response to maintain public order, are facts of extreme gravity.

LASA applauds the firm statements expressing concern about these police abuses by the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) and the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#). We call on the Peruvian authorities to fully investigate this police action and sanction those responsible for the abuses committed. We urge the Rector of San Marcos to take immediate measures to guarantee academic freedom and to protect the safety of the university's students, staff and faculty. LASA also calls on the Peruvian authorities to guarantee and uphold the fundamental rights of its citizens, including the right to engage in peaceful mobilization and protest. We strongly condemn the use of violence on the part of some demonstrators or other groups seeking to take advantage of the social unrest, but we find it wholly counterproductive for the Peruvian government and media to repeatedly label all protesters as criminals or violent extremists.

Finally, LASA believes that the present crisis is political in nature and must be addressed through dialogue, rather than through repression. We urge the Peruvian authorities to pursue dialogue, to respect academic freedom and the right of citizens to engage in peaceful protest, and to cease the excessive use of lethal force.

About LASA

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is the world's largest professional association constituted by individuals and institutions devoted to the study of Latin America and the Caribbean. LASA currently has over 12,000 members from around the world and a committee that defends academic freedom and human rights.

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

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