

LASA's statement in defense of academic freedom in Paraguay

May 2021

Considerations

1. On March 2021 CADEP (Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya), a leading economic think tank in Paraguay, published a study entitled *Tobacco Oversupply in Paraguay and its Cross-Border Impacts*. The study was conducted jointly with the Health Policy Center of the University of Illinois–Chicago and funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies. CADEP has a long trajectory and established recognition for its research in the social sciences, nationally and internationally. Furthermore, CADEP has always shown its commitment to democratic consolidation in Paraguay.
2. In response to the report's publication, and criticizing its findings on April 30, 2021, the Unión Tabacalera del Paraguay sued CADEP and a Judge ordered it to turn over its database and all related protocols and research materials for judicial examination. The imputation is that CADEP's researchers are criminally liable for failing to inform the authorities of the tax evasion reported in their research.
3. The Chairman of the Unión Tabacalera del Paraguay is the right-hand man of former president Horacio Cartes, who owns the largest tobacco company in Paraguay, TABESA (Tabacalera del Este S.A.). Independent observers will coincide in considering Cartes as the most powerful man in Paraguay due to his immense fortune and political power and his deep connections and influence in the Judiciary.

LASA's statement

1. The generation, elaboration, and publication of evidence-based reports and their conclusions are essential in scholarly research. Threatening academic institutions and researchers with legal actions for their legitimate activities constitutes a clear case of intimidation and an attempt to curtail academic freedom. It is also a potent and unacceptable threat to scholars who may want to do research on this or similar issues in the future.
2. In a free society, an academic report is criticized or refuted by another scholarly report when new evidence warrants it. In the academic world there is no place for legal actions that put the well-being, even the freedom, of researchers at risk. In a democracy, judges do not judge scholarly work. Academia and its peer review process do, according to their scholarly merits.

3. This legal action to which CADEP has been subjected severely undermines academic freedom and inflicts a devastating blow to scholars concerned with public health issues or who publish reports critical of powerful business interests. It endangers the workings of democracy by seeking to silence civil society.

4. LASA raises its voice of concern over this grave infringement of academic freedom and calls for the immediate termination of this legal action. All debates over the findings of this report, or any other, should only be conducted in the appropriate academic fora, but not through judicialization and intimidation.

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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