

Statement on threats to Mexico's academic freedom

October 2021

The Latin American Studies Association (LASA) is deeply concerned about the threat to academic freedom, and human rights, resulting from the unsubstantiated accusations made by the General Prosecutor's Office against 31 Mexican scholars, members of Mexico's Scientific and Technological Consultative Forum (*Foro Consultivo Científico y Tecnológico*). The alleged accusations place the physical integrity and reputation of these scholars at risk, creating a hostile environment for research, and undermining public confidence in the Mexican academy as a whole.

The alleged offenses, which have been twice rejected by the courts, are directed against members of this Forum, as well as former public servants of the CONACYT (main funding agency for academic research and technological promotion).¹ The alleged offenses include, inter alia, organized crime and the use of illicit funds, and they carry stiff prison sentences. Such accusations are grossly disproportional to the matter at hand – namely, the management of public funds for the support and development of the science and technology policies, annually audited.

Regrettably, the Mexican General Prosecutor's Office has given every impression that it intends to proceed with these charges for a third time. If scholars fear that they can be charged with serious crimes simply for carrying out professional duties that are legally stipulated, then academic freedom will be in peril.

As the largest professional association in the world for individuals and institutions engaged in the study of Latin America, LASA cannot ignore violations of the academic freedom of our members, as well as attacks on the human rights that are essential for our members to undertake their professional activities free from threat, intimidation, and arbitrary sanctions. Academic research has a fundamental role to play in the struggle for justice and against corruption. We are, therefore, dismayed by the prospect that Mexico, a nation with great universities and vibrant communities of researchers, may see its academic human rights diminished.

¹ The Consultative Forum is the permanent autonomous advisory body of the Federal Executive branch, of the General Council of Scientific Research, Technological Development and Innovation (CGICDTI) and the National Council of Science and Technology's (CONACYT) Government Board. <https://www.foroconsultivo.org.mx/FCCyT/>

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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