

## Global Campaign for Education - World Assembly Johannesburg

### 2022 Resolution in Support of Protecting Students as Human Rights Activists

*European Students Union*

*Global Student Forum*

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### **Background**

1. Human Rights according to the UN definition encompass: *“Rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination”*
2. The student movement believes that education is not a privilege, but a human right fundamental for the advancement of other human rights. Students and their movements have been fighting not only for what we consider to be our inherent rights but have also historically supported many other social movements reclaiming their own rights.
3. Students have led social movements within and beyond the walls of education raising critical questions within the classroom which transcend into society. As a consequence, their acts and voices are increasingly met with surveillance, vicious policing, criminalisation, and killings. Public and policy discourse increasingly frame students and academics as enemies of the state, as terrorists and ‘dangerous subjects’ to be feared. The Scholars at Risk annual report Free to Think 2022 documented 130 attacks on student expression affecting thousands of students’ lives. The previous year SAR reported 140 attacks on student expression, such as violent attacks, arrests and prosecutions as well as other disciplinary measures. However, the Belarus Student Association documented 492 incidents of detained students and 160 incidents of students being expelled due to their pro-democracy activism from [October 2020 to June 2021](#) alone showing the large number of uncounted incidents on student expression. Students and school children are continuously deprived of access to education and are risking their lives and futures to fight for more just societies and access to quality education.
4. Recently, ESU and GSF have been informed of the names of at least 60 **Iranian students** who have been detained by the Iranian Government without any information about their whereabouts or their state of health. These detentions happened right after thousands of Iranian citizens

demonstrated to protest the murder of Mahsa Amini. This is following years of students being arrested for their non-violent, pro-democratic activism, exemplified by e.g. student Leila Hosseinzadeh who was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and a two-year ban on internet activities for her nonviolent activism in support of imprisoned fellow student-activists.

5. The Taliban's takeover of **Afghanistan** reversed two decades of education progress, especially in regard to female school children and students of higher education. The Taliban authorities-imposed policies and practices that systematically deny female students and scholars their right to education and academic freedom. On June 17, 2022, Taliban forces reportedly arrested 30 female students at Takhar University. According to Hashte Subh, Taliban forces arrested the students for leaving their university dormitory without the Taliban's permission.

6. The All Burma Federation of Student Unions in **Myanmar** called for action and support after Waiyan Phyo Moe, Vice President of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions, and Laybyay Soe Moe, responsible of student rights of the university of Yangon Student Union, have been reported to be severely beaten, tortured and in ill condition along with 89 other political prisoners. In **Colombia**, In April 2022, several student leaders and human rights activists at the Universidad del Valle (Univalle) began receiving death threats for their leadership activities and activism. This was after, August 24 2021, when men on a motorcycle shot and killed Esteban Mosquera, a prominent student activist and student journalist from the University of Cauca, who brought attention to income inequality, the cost of education and violent crackdowns on student protests in the country.

7. In **Zimbabwe**, on February 26, 2021, police arrested six student leaders for their participation in a press conference demanding the release of a jailed student leader named Makomborero Haruzivishe. Later, on March 3, 2021, authorities arrested four students for participating in a protest calling for a fair bail ruling for two imprisoned student leaders. On 12 September 2022, heavily armed police officers were deployed around the University of Zimbabwe, where students were demonstrating against exorbitant fee increments. Hundreds of students were physically hurt and 14 students arrested.

8. In **Hong Kong**, two students were suspended by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) for organizing a memorial commemorating the life of a student who died during one of the 2019 pro-democracy protests. These are few of the many horrific examples of how student leaders, student activists and student researchers are purposefully, repeatedly and harshfully targeted due to their pro-democratic activities as human right defenders in all parts of the world.

9. Most recently we have also seen the continuous violation of students' rights in **eSwatini** formerly known as Swaziland and the suppression of academic freedom with the arrest of the president of the eSwatini National Students Union (SINUS), Colani Maseko during a fees must fall protest. He was detained for over two weeks without any charges and brutally assaulted. In the same vein, Sakhile Nxumalo, the Secretary for Campaigns of SINUS was abducted for demanding the immediate release of Colani Maseko. Student leaders are key stakeholders in the education community and their advocacy should be embraced as opposed to being crumpled and over and over intimidated.

10. As human rights defenders, students should be granted the protection they are so often refused. Students are reported to authorities, killed, kidnapped, persecuted, jailed, expelled, black-listed and silenced. The freedom of assembly and association is denied to students across the planet. Educational institutions should be open to encompassing all expressions of student life, but spaces for political activism, debate and mobilization are frequently being denied. Limitations to the political freedom of learners were aggravated by the pandemic, but in some cases, they are continuing with the end of restrictions. Education remains a source of cultural indoctrination and social oppression for students from minority cultures. This is evidenced in the treatment of **Tibetan**

and **Uyghur** youth in China, **Kurdish** children in Turkey, students from ethnic minorities in India, and the indigenous students of **West Papua** who suffer from Indonesian occupation. Degrading behavior continues towards minority and indigenous students in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, and parts of the West, with reports of strip-searches and arbitrary arrests, abductions, and killings.

11. In recent years, in Latin America and the Caribbean there has been a latent concern about the negative response of many States to the claims and demands of students and the educational community in general to have greater involvement in the public debate regarding decision-making on educational policies and on the defense of human rights in general. There is a progressive closure of dialogue between the state and the educational community in various countries and, furthermore, an increase of criminalisation, police repression, political persecution, use of lethal weapons, raids, arbitrary detentions, prosecution, amongst others, of students in different countries in the region has been observed. There have been many examples of these terrible situations in recent years such as the following: In Chile, practices of persecution and human rights violations against organised students have been recorded through the application of the Safe Classroom Law, in which Special Forces were authorised to enter schools under their administration using physical violence and abuse of power against the learners, as it occurred in the National Institute of Barros Arana, in the N°1 High School, in the Carmela Carvajal High School and in the N°743 High School. The aim was to criminalise the youth and students and invalidate the educational and social demands that were being made in open demonstrations. In Honduras, there has been an increase of cases of violence, murder, criminalisation and persecution of students who mobilised throughout the country to fight for their rights, such as public transport, free student tickets, reforms and a larger budget assigned to education. According to data from the National Violence Observatory, from January 2010 to May 2018, 1,522 students from all levels of education have been killed during protests, strikes, and violence acts carried out by armed groups. In Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan Observatory for Academic Freedom and Education Quality recorded the number of Nicaraguan universities and teacher training students that had been affected from 2018 to 2022, amongst which the number of expelled students per year was 207, of which 43 were Agrarian students and 195 students were sanctioned students holding scholarships; and only in 2018 the number of students killed in the socio-political conflict was 45, mostly young people. In Colombia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) documented 108 murders of human rights defenders, including 15 women and two members of the LGBTIQ+ population; even the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has also expressed its concern about the stigmatisation in the media of these student protests, in which students were labelled as "vandals", "guerrillas" or "terrorists".<sup>1</sup>

## Resolution

### The World Assembly calls on the GCE to:

1. Promote Student at Risk programmes and scholarships to protect students as human rights defenders and to ensure their right to education and counteract brain-drain and antidemocratic activities.
2. Promote monitoring mechanisms and methodologies to strengthen evidence-based data to investigate and document a coherent picture of the human rights violations' students face.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://redclade.org/wp-content/uploads/CLADE\\_Criminalizacion\\_completo.pdf](https://redclade.org/wp-content/uploads/CLADE_Criminalizacion_completo.pdf)  
(<https://observatorionic.org/>)

3. Promote the creation of a safety net to protect students at risk through rapid response mechanisms, allyship and support.
4. Promote the right of students to express, assemble and organize, and grant their effective implementation.
5. Ensure student representation in decision making processes relating to education policy making and governance as well as other issues affecting students' lives at all levels.
6. Endorse student activism as part of the ecosystem of education and essential to academic freedom and quality education
  
7. Provide students with digital training to protect themselves online to counteract states' increasing use of online surveillance
8. Support an educational environment for cultural and social inclusion to uphold indigenous and minority cultures
9. Promote the radical reform of segregated educational systems, to eliminate any discrimination
10. Protect and advocate for students' rights as human rights

