

# INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK of Academies & Scholarly Societies



## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

February 26, 2025

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We, members of the Executive Committee of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies (IHRN), are concerned about the serious challenges facing scientists and researchers in the United States. The IHRN is an alliance of national honorary scientific societies that defends the fundamental rights and academic freedom of scientists and scholars worldwide. We also speak out because scientific research is a common good that transcends borders and political boundaries.

Recent executive orders issued by the U.S. administration seek to curtail projects on issues such as diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, including scientific research projects on these topics. The executive orders, which are broad, ambiguously worded, and threaten litigation for non-compliance, have led to significant uncertainty and fear within the U.S. scientific community. Recent reports have highlighted the concerns of many U.S. colleagues that evidence-based research on a range of topics, from health disparities to genomics and neuroscience, may lead to government retaliation.<sup>1</sup> Some colleagues have expressed confusion about whether even the collection of representative data samples is prohibited. The widespread removal of scientific and public health information from government websites has only exacerbated this fear and confusion.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Rebecca Everly**

We are concerned that the developments outlined above are having a chilling effect on scientific research in the United States and pressuring scientists to engage in self-censorship. At the same time, we are alarmed by continuing reports that many U.S. researchers are subjected to harassment and intimidation from members of the public due to their scientific work. The ability of researchers to conduct their work without fear and intimidation is essential for science and society. International human rights law affords strong protection for academic freedom, including the freedom to research and publish, and forbids political coercion of scholars. As the former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression has emphasized, restrictions on academic freedom are “ancient tools to limit the sharing of information and knowledge and the questioning of received wisdom, and contemporary tools to repress information

## FOUNDING MEMBERS

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**Max Perutz\*** – *United Kingdom*

**Pieter van Dijk** – *Netherlands*

**Torsten Wiesel\*** – *USA*

(\*Nobel Laureate)

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<sup>1</sup> For example, <<https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/07/nx-s1-5289912/unprecedented-white-house-moves-to-control-science-funding-worry-researchers>> and <<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/science-research-policy/2025/02/03/how-trumps-executive-orders-are-disrupting>>.

and ideas that Governments often find threatening. Yet, without academic freedom, all societies lose one of the essential elements of democratic self-governance: the capacity for self-reflection, for knowledge generation and for a constant search for improvements of people's lives and social conditions."<sup>2</sup>

We express our strong support for U.S. scientists and scholars during these challenging times and reject all efforts to undermine academic freedom in the United States and globally.

**Executive Committee**  
**International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies**

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<sup>2</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, A/75/261 (28 July 2020).