

APS
Committee on International Freedom of Scientists (CIFS)

Annual Report for 2008

Submitted by Pavel Podvig, Chair
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CIFS Members, 2008

Pavel Podvig, *Chair*
Juan Gallardo, *Past Chair*
Andrew Grosso
Andy Kent
Yousef Makdisi
Noemi Mirkin
Michael Ramsey-Musolf, *Vice Chair*
Khaled Sallam
Sally Seidel (through June)
Valerii Vinokour

The Committee on International Freedom of Scientists followed a wide range of issues during 2008. In addition to monitoring individual cases of human rights abuses, CIFS was involved in the efforts to establish the Science and Human Rights Coalition, which was created under the auspices of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

China

In April, CIFS learned about biochemist Wo Weihan who had been sentenced to death for espionage; he was accused of providing military secrets to Taiwan. CIFS joined efforts to urge China to drop the death sentence against Wo. Unfortunately, the Chinese government did not respond to these appeals and Wo was executed in November.

Nuclear Weapons Expert Hua Di (a Chinese citizen and U.S. resident) was conditionally released from prison after 10 years. Before his imprisonment, Hua Di had been a researcher at the Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford University. During a trip to China in 1998, he was arrested on charges of revealing state secrets and was subsequently sentenced to 10 years in prison.

CIFS continues to monitor the cases of Jin Haike and Yang Zili who were detained and arrested in 2001. They were sentenced in 2003 to 10 and 8 years in prison, respectively, for “inciting subversion of state power” because of political views that they posted on the Internet.

Gaza Students

CIFS wrote to the Israeli Prime Minister Olmert on two occasions in 2008 to express concern

that Palestinian students were being prevented from leaving Gaza in order to pursue their education abroad. Due to limited higher education opportunities throughout the Palestinian territory (there are no doctoral programs and masters programs are limited), many Palestinian students must travel abroad to pursue their studies. Yet, severe restrictions on the movement of people in and out of Gaza since 2007 have essentially banned students there from pursuing their educations. CIFS asked that the students be granted permission to leave Gaza and stressed that such action would be an “important step to building peace and security in the region.”

Iraq

The Committee continued to monitor the violence that has been targeted at academics in Iraq for several years. CIFS member Khaled Sallam wrote an article about this situation that was published in the May issue of *APS News*. In addition, CIFS corresponded with the President of the Iraqi Association of University Lecturers (who is also the head of the physics department at Al-Nahrain University). He described in great detail the violence to which Iraqi academics have been subjected.

Russia

In 2008, CIFS asked Russian President Medvedev to pardon physicist Valentin Danilov and arms control researcher Igor Sutyagin in light of the poor health of both and the fact that they have served the majority of their sentences. As a result of their professional scientific work with foreign scientists, both men had been branded as spies, found guilty of treason, and issued lengthy sentences.

CIFS also learned of another case involving a Russian scientist, Igor Reshetin, who was sentenced to more than eleven years for alleged violations of export control regulations. Like the cases of Sutyagin and Danilov, the charges against Reshetin appear related to what might be considered normal scientific cooperation. CIFS asked President Medvedev to reconsider the charges against Reshetin and the harsh sentence.

In February 2008, CIFS wrote a letter to the Russian government in support of the campaign to prevent closure of the European University in St.-Petersburg. The situation was resolved and the university was not closed.

Saudi Arabia

In May, CIFS learned of the arrest and detainment, without charge, of political scientist Matrouk al-Faleh. Dr. al-Faleh was arrested after he publicly criticized the prison conditions of two human rights activists. His university then terminated his job. After being held in a maximum security prison for eight months, al-Faleh was released in January 2009.

CIFS was particularly concerned about the detainment this professor because Saudi Arabia is currently building the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), which it intends to be an international research university. In light of the ramifications that al-Faleh’s arrest could potentially have for other academics who teach in Saudi Arabia—including those who come from abroad to teach at KAUST—CIFS wrote to the U.S. members of the KAUST International Advisory Council. CIFS encouraged them to use their influence to ensure that

professors working at KAUST will have the right to freedom of expression protected.

United States

U.S. citizen and physicist Abdel-Moniem Ali El-Ganayni had his security clearance revoked in 2008 by the Department of Energy (DOE). This ultimately led to the loss of his job. The decision to revoke his clearance was allegedly the result of concerns raised by government officials about El-Ganayni's activities that were related to his religious beliefs. However, El-Ganayni was never able to learn from the DOE the precise nature of the circumstances that led to the revocation of his clearance. El-Ganayni was also unsuccessful in his attempt to appeal the decision. As a result, he and his wife left the United States and returned to his native Egypt.

Spain-Brazil Immigration Dispute

In March, APS was contacted by the Brazilian physical society concerning a Brazilian student who was detained at a Spanish airport--and subsequently deported--while on her way to a scientific conference in Portugal. Apparently, there had been a sudden increase in the number of Brazilian citizens who were being denied entry to Spain, this student was one of the casualties, and the society was protesting. CIFS was able to learn from the office of the Spanish interior minister that the student did not have the proper documentation to enter the Europe Union. That office indicated to CIFS that it intended to ensure that information concerning the requirements to travel to Europe was more fully disseminated. CIFS shared this information with the Brazilian physical society.

AAAS Human Rights Coalition

In 2007, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) laid the ground work for the establishment of a Science and Human Rights Coalition. At that time, several scientific associations and societies (including APS/CIFS) participated in meetings to work on activities that the coalition might take on. CIFS proposed that the coalition include a component that addresses the rights of individual scientists. This proposal was accepted and the Welfare of Scientists Working Group was created (the coalition has five working groups). The coalition was officially "launched" during a three-day event in January 2009 at AAAS headquarters. The broader scientific human rights community was invited to join the coalition at that time. CIFS will make a recommendation concerning whether APS should officially join.

Other

In 2008, CIFS began inviting a representative of the Forum on Graduate Student Affairs (FGSA) to attend CIFS meetings. CIFS also established a wiki that committee members can access in order to monitor and provide updates on the committee's activities.