

LASA Statement of Concern Regarding Attacks on Brazilian Public Universities

Over the past year, government authorities in Brazil have taken actions that have been widely interpreted as intended to intimidate or demoralize administrators, faculty, and students at the nation's public universities, raising concerns about academic freedom in the most populous nation in Latin America. As the world's largest association of academics engaged in research on Latin America with 12,000 dues-paying members, and given our commitment to academic freedom, the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) expresses its concern over these actions and calls upon Brazilian authorities to investigate them, bring those responsible to account, and to take all measures necessary to guarantee academic freedom in Brazil.

Some of the actions that have come to our attention include:

- On November 29, 2016, a lecture at the Federal University of Pará in Belém on the environmental and social effects of mining along the Xingu River was abruptly terminated when Mayor Dirceu Biancardi of the municipality of Senador José Porfírio, accompanied by 40 other people, broke into the lecture hall and threatened to imprison the organizer of the event, Professor Rosa Acevedo of the Núcleo de Altos Estudos Amazônicos (NAEA, Institute for Advanced Amazonian Studies) and the other speakers.¹
- On December 9, 2016, nearly 70 federal police agents intervened in the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, leading to the forcible detention or arrest of six individuals, including four faculty, all involved in a health education extension program that was being investigated for misuse of fellowship funds.²
- On February 13, 2017, 180 federal police agents intervened in the Federal University of Paraná, in Curitiba, issuing arrest warrants for 20 individuals suspected of misuse of funds earmarked for scientific research and temporarily imprisoning 12 of them. According to Rector Ricardo Marcelo Fonseca and his predecessor, the university had already implemented its own internal investigation of these allegations.³
- Overall, in the month of February 2017, authorities arrested eight public university administrators, and issued 29 temporary detention orders and 36 arrest warrants against faculty and staff in universities in the states of Paraná, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Rio de Janeiro, due to allegations of misuse of funds.⁴
- On September 14, 2017, the Rector of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, Luiz Carlos Cancellier de Olivo, was arrested on charges of obstructing an investigation into the alleged misuse of university funds. He was held in prison overnight but was soon released by a judge, who found that he posed no threat to the ongoing investigation. However, Cancellier de Olivo was prohibited by the police from setting foot on campus, and images of him wearing a prison uniform circulated on social media, causing him serious distress. Following these events, Cancellier de Olivo, who was 59 years old, killed himself.⁵
- On December 6, 2017, police officials intervened in the Federal University of Minas Gerais, purportedly to investigate allegations that funds for a memorial to victims of the dictatorship had been inappropriately funneled to research on that issue. The following day, the university Rector, Jaime Arturo Ramirez, was arrested at his home and briefly imprisoned, along with two other colleagues.⁶

These raids, detentions, and imprisonments have occurred despite the fact that federal universities operate under the aegis of the Tribunal de Contas da União (Government Accounting Board) and the Controladoria Geral (Comptroller General), a circumstance that should both protect the

principle of university autonomy and preclude the need for police raids on university campuses or against university officials.

LASA expresses its profound concern over the actions carried out by police and judicial forces against Brazilian public universities which ignore due process and violate multiple constitutional norms, including the guarantee of autonomy for Brazilian universities, based on Article 207 of the Constitution.

In light of this, LASA affirms its solidarity with the faculty, students, and administrators of Brazilian public universities and their demand that their elected leadership be respected and treated with dignity, and that any inquiry into alleged wrongdoing be conducted in accordance with the rule of law and with regard to the principle of academic freedom.

LASA furthermore calls upon Brazilian political and judicial officials to adopt measures to respect the autonomy of Brazil's universities and fully respect academic freedom, which is essential to the functioning of a community of scholars.

Miami, December 17, 2017

Notes

- ¹ "MPF investiga denúncia de intimidação e ameaça durante evento na UFPA que debatia impacto de mineradora," November 30, 2017, Portal G1 Pará, <https://g1.globo.com/pa/para/noticia/mpf-investiga-denuncia-de-intimidacao-e-ameaca-durante-evento-que-debatia-impacto-de-mineradora-na-ufpa.ghtml>.
- ² "Operações policiais em universidades aumentam temor de cruzada contra o ensino superior," December 15, 2017, *El País Brasil*, https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/12/13/politica/1513178766_195360.html.
- ³ "Reitor da UFPR diz que há controle de bolsas e auxílios, mas assume falhas," February 16, 2017, Portal G1 Paraná, <http://g1.globo.com/pr/parana/noticia/2017/02/reitor-da-ufpr-diz-que-ha-controle-de-bolsas-de-estudo-mas-assume-falhas.html>.
- ⁴ Ricardo Marcelo Fonseca, "Um ano de ataques contra as universidades públicas brasileiras," December 6, 2017, Site da Universidade Federal do Paraná, <http://www.ufpr.br/portalufpr/blog/noticias/nota-do-reitor-ricardo-marcelo-fonseca-um-ano-de-ataques-contra-as-universidades-publicas-brasileiras>.
- ⁵ "Morte de Cancellier escancara arbitrio do Judiciário e irresponsabilidade da mídia," October 10, 2017, *Justificando*, <http://justificando.com/2017/10/10/morte-de-cancellier-escancara-arbitrio-do-judiciario-e-irresponsabilidade-da-midia/>.
- ⁶ "PF conduz reitor e vice da UFMG para depor sobre suposta fraude em obras," *Folha de São Paulo*, December 6, 2017, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/educacao/2017/12/1941094-pf-conduz-reitor-e-vice-da-ufmg-para-depor-sobre-suposta-fraude-em-obras.shtml>. See also "Andifes manifesta indignação contra mais uma operação da PF em universidade pública," *Notícias da UFSC*, December 6, 2017, <http://noticias.ufsc.br/tags/andifes/>; and "Operação na UFMG repete equívocos de ofensiva na UFSC, afirma conselho técnico da Capes," Site da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, December 7, 2017, <https://ufmg.br/comunicacao/noticias/operacao-na-ufmg-repete-equivocos-de-ofensiva-na-ufsc-afirma-conselho-tecnico-da-capes>. //