

# “Defending the University: Academic Freedom in Central and Eastern Europe”

15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the European Humanities University and Scholars at Risk Network Meeting and Symposium

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## Network for Education and Academic Rights (NEAR)

### *Action Alerts and Campaigns*

#### • **Introduction - NEAR and CARA**

Through the wonderful work of CARA, it became apparent that academics, teachers, students and unionists all over the world were being subjected to breaches of academic freedom. These breaches, ranging from the curtailment of research activities to detention and murder, demand wider attention and visibility. It was this in mind that NEAR was born.

NEAR - Membership based international NGO, which facilitates international collaboration between orgs active in issues of academic freedom and educational rights.

NEAR was launched by UNESCO in 2001 and since then has successfully defended the rights of many in the education sector including scholars, teachers and institutions themselves.

On behalf of all the members in the network, NEAR acts as an effective clearing house, facilitating the rapid global transfer of international academic and educational rights abuses through its website.

#### • **Action Alerts**

- NEAR brings international attention to violations of academic freedom and educational rights through its ACTION ALERT PROGRAMME. This is NEAR’s primary function.
- NEAR believes an Action Alert does 2 things – (i) informs its audience of a violation or an abuse of academic freedom or educational human right; (ii) invites the reader to take effective action.
- It is a message that we send out asking for a specific action to be taken on a current issue. It invites people to take part in the democratic process.
- The process of writing such an Alert is as follows:-
  - (i) we receive information about a particular violation of academic freedom, (usually from a member organisation or from the media);
  - (ii) write a short concise synopsis of the situation using various balanced sources;
  - (iii) invite readers to take a specific action (such as writing letters to the government or representative); and then

(iv) post the alert on our website and disseminate it to all members and all subscribers.

### **Alert Composition**

- The 'Breach' – we are very careful to be concise, provide a balanced argument, avoid emotive language and have faith that the facts will make the impact. Unsubstantiated claims and vague hypotheses will only hurt the credibility of the info provided.
- The 'Action' – we ask our audience to take a simple, clearly defined and rationally chosen action. If we'd like people to write a letter to representative in government, then we would often provide a sample letter. If we'd like people to make a telephone call we would normally advise how to conduct the conversation. It is also a good idea to mention international treaties – more often than not, a government is often in breach of a charter to which they are a signatory.

- Beauty of the internet is that these alerts can be forwarded on to more individuals with relative ease.

- Anyone can subscribe to the NEAR email alerts and/or become an individual supporter/member of NEAR. If you'd like to receive NEAR alerts please visit our website.

### **• Campaigns**

- In especially serious situations – such as where many academics or institutions are involved or where the threat is particularly severe or prolonged – NEAR sometimes organises focused campaigns to build greater awareness and solidarity within the global higher education community.
- NEAR will gather alerts, articles, publications and other information sources and post them collectively on the NEAR website on the Campaigns Page – the materials are made available to all member organisations, which provides a useful source of information for other orgs engaged in campaigning activities.
- Campaigns may also include events, publications, in-depth research reports and visits to policy makers or other key stakeholders.

### **Conclusion**

Alerts and Campaigns are the 2 main functions of NEAR.

NEAR is also working in collaboration with SAR on the International Academic Freedom Workshops, which we saw yesterday morning.

Many thanks.