

To: National Member contact points
Presidents and Secretaries General of International Unions
Interdisciplinary Body contact points
Regional Offices

6 August, 2009

Dear Colleagues,

Re. Security vetting procedures and the Principle of Universalityⁱ

The Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Scienceⁱⁱ has considered recently two different situations in which security concerns have resulted in the implementation of policies and procedures that are strongly discriminatory against academics or students of specific nationalities or origins. These actions are contrary to the Principle of Universality and, as such, should actively be opposed by all ICSU Members.

In several European countries, including France, the Netherlands and Sweden, scientists and students from Iran are systematically being refused work visas and/or study positions. This is a reaction to international concern over the potential proliferation of nuclear weapons technology and UN resolution 1737, as a result of which certain broad areas of science are considered as 'sensitive'. The policies and practices that have been adopted in these European countries effectively discriminate against all Iranian scientists or students with an interest in certain scientific fields, particularly within physics, engineering and maths. They cast the net widely and ignore the fact that the very large majority of these individuals surely have no interest in nuclear weapons technologies.

Another area of the World where policies based on national security concerns are resulting in discrimination against academics and students is the Middle East (http://www.icsu.org/Gestion/img/ICSU_DOC_DOWNLOAD/2347_DD_FILE_Israel-Palestine_17-2-09.pdf). The Israeli army has developed criteria for granting Palestinian post-graduate students entry permits to study at Israeli universities that are so restrictive as to effectively prohibit any entries. For example, these criteria include a stipulation that applications will be considered only if there is no practical alternative to studying in Israel and that Palestinians will not be allowed to study professions that have the potential to be used against Israel. Recently, the Israeli High Court of Justice accepted the army's criteria, including a statement that, the army, "may refuse, at its own discretion....to consider an applicant even if the student meets

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the criteria”. Israeli universities have protested that the application of these criteria “constitutes a gross and harmful intervention by military elements in purely academic considerations.”

In considering these and similar discriminatory practices, CFRS reaffirms the following position:

It is evident that selection of students and scientists must take place in the academic world, but such selection processes should not be applied collectively on the basis of such factors as nationality or ethnicity. Instead, selection should normally be made individually, and be based on the qualifications and academic ability of the applicants. In situations where security screening is deemed necessary, for example for courses specifically designed for military personnel, this also should be carried out at the individual level. Academic Institutions should have the primary responsibility and freedom to select students and staff, without political or military interference. In cases where selected individuals are refused entry and/or work visas, the reasons for this should be made clear to both the individual and the host institution.

International collaboration and openness in science education and research are critical to address the shared global challenges that we all face. Any policies or mechanisms that support discrimination on the basis of nationality in the selection processes of science represent a serious threat to the future of global scientific collaboration as a whole. All ICSU Members have a responsibility to engage, as appropriate, with the relevant authorities to ensure that such discrimination does not occur and that the Principle of Universality of Science is upheld.



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i This letter is the responsibility of the Committee on Freedom and Responsibility in the conduct of Science (CFRS) which is a policy committee of the International Council for Science (ICSU). It does not necessarily reflect the views of individual ICSU Member organizations.

ii See http://www.icsu.org/5_abouticsu/STRUCT_Comm_Poli.html#CFRS for the membership and terms of reference for CFRS.