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Statement on threats to the autonomy of academies of science as mechanisms for science advice





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15 December 2023

A joint statement by the International Science Council (ISC) and the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP) on threats to the autonomy of academies of science as mechanisms for science advice

Merit-based scholarly academies of sciences, medicine and engineering are fundamental components of national and international advisory systems for governments, public interest organizations, and the public. A critical foundation of their work is independence from political, commercial, or other vested interests. For myriad reasons, not all academies attempt to, or have the capacity to, fulfil their roles in providing impartial advice to policymakers and publics. However, as two global science organizations that support an active and engaged role for national academies in science diplomacy, the ISC and IAP are deeply concerned by the global trend of increasing state interference in the autonomy of national academies.

This interference manifests, for example, through attempts to influence member-selection processes and undermine the independence of academies' scientific advice. Such state-led actions against national academies mirror a broader climate in which the value of, and trust in, science to assist societal decision making is compromised by the politicization of scientific issues; the suppression or distortion of scientific evidence; restrictions on free communication and expression; restrictions on choice of research topics, and funding constraints.

State pressure on the autonomy of academies – and their individual members – risks compromising the ability of academies to inform on important scientific issues affecting humanity and the planet, to provide valid and ethically sound science policy advice, and to develop rigorous research agendas. In turn, this may result in an erosion of public trust in science and evidence-based decision-making. This not only represents a grave threat to the integrity of national science advisory systems, but also to the development of sustainable societies as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and other international targets.

Governments have a critical role to play in creating an enabling environment for the free and responsible practice of science. In this time of unprecedented global polycrisis affecting humanity and the planet, defending the scientific freedoms and responsibilities of national academies, as well as individual scientists, is more important than ever. The IAP and ISC urge all governments to uphold the principles of freedom and responsibility in science by protecting the autonomy of their national academies, including through the adoption of legal frameworks to safeguard against state, industrial and commercial and other interference.

About the IAP and ISC overleaf:

International Science Council (ISC): The ISC is a non-governmental organization that works globally to catalyse and convene scientific expertise, advice, and influence on issues of major concern to both science and society. The ISC has a unique global membership that brings together 45 international scientific Unions and Associations, over 140 national and regional scientific organizations including Academies and Research Councils and 60 international Federations and Societies, as well as Young Academies and Associations.

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InterAcademy Partnership (IAP): Under the umbrella of the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP), some 150 national, regional and global member academies work together to support the vital role of science in seeking evidence-based solutions to the world's most challenging problems. In particular, IAP harnesses the expertise of the world's scientific, medical and engineering leaders to advance sound policies, improve public health, promote excellence in science education, and achieve other critical development goals. IAP academy members constitute more than 30,000 leading scientists, engineers and health professionals in over 100 countries. A central focus of IAP's mission is to reach out to society and participate in discussions on critical global issues in which science plays a crucial role, and since its inception in 1993, IAP has been producing statements on issues of fundamental importance to humanity. These statements – which are released only once they have been endorsed by the majority of IAP members – are not only a reflection of the major issues that confront society but are also evidence of IAP's ongoing commitment to society. More information about IAP can be found at www.interacademies.org, on Twitter at @IAPartnership, on LinkedIn and YouTube.

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