Joint Submission to the
Universal Periodic Review of Indonesia by
Scholars at Risk and the Indonesian Caucus for Academic Freedom

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Introduction

1. This submission to the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Indonesia was prepared by Scholars at Risk and the Indonesian Caucus for Academic Freedom.

2. Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of higher education institutions and individuals dedicated to protecting threatened scholars, preventing attacks on higher education communities, and promoting academic freedom worldwide.1 As part of its advocacy work, SAR monitors and analyzes attacks on higher education around the world, including within Indonesia, through its Academic Freedom Monitoring Project.2 SAR has Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC (2013) and welcomes the opportunity provided by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights to comment on conditions relating to academic freedom and attacks on higher education communities in Indonesia.

3. Indonesian Caucus for Academic Freedom (KIKA) is a national coalition of researchers and students who are concerned about human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially those related to academic freedom. KIKA was initiated on December 6, 2017 and became a consolidated organization in 2018. This organization meets annually to discuss academic freedom developments in Indonesia. Currently, KIKA has nine special task forces that, respectively, address (1) anti-sexual violence on campus; (2) academic integrity and culture; (3) freedom of expression; (4) student movements and student journalism; (5) policy orientation for higher education; (6) anti-corruption and anti-oligarch movement; (7) agrarian and environmental issues; (8) lecturer union; and (9) civil society and legal aid movement. KIKA has four autonomous branches at local levels, in Aceh, Papua, Bali, and East Kalimantan.

4. This submission focuses on Indonesia’s compliance with its obligations under international law to protect and promote academic freedom and related rights within its territory.

Applicable Legal Standards

5. Indonesia is bound by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

6. Academic freedom is independently and interdependently grounded in the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to education, and the right to the benefits of science, as articulated, respectively, in ICCPR Article 19, and ICESCR Articles 13 and 15(3).

7. As the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has affirmed, “the right to education can only be enjoyed if accompanied by the academic freedom of staff and students.”3

8. In a recent report on academic freedom, the United Nations special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression reaffirmed the standards articulated by the CESCR, stating:

[A]cademic freedom should be understood to include the freedom of individuals, as members of academic communities (e.g., faculty, students, staff, scholars, administrators and community participants) or in their own pursuits, to conduct activities involving the
discovery and transmission of information and ideas, and to do so with the full protection of human rights law.  

9. The special rapporteur explicitly recognized that academic freedom involves protections for institutional autonomy and self-governance: “States are under a positive obligation to create a general enabling environment for seeking, receiving and imparting information and ideas. Institutional protection and autonomy are a part of that enabling environment.”

10. UNESCO, the specialized United Nations agency whose mandate includes higher education, research, and human rights, has likewise defined institutional autonomy as “that degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision making by institutions of higher education regarding their academic work, standards, management and related activities consistent with systems of public accountability, especially in respect of funding provided by the state, and respect for academic freedom and human rights.”

11. Indonesia is a member state of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) whose Human Rights Declaration provides for the right to education (Article 31), the right to “enjoy [...] the benefits of scientific progress and its applications” (Article 32), and freedom of opinion and expression (Article 23).

12. Indonesia’s constitution provides for the right to education (Article 31), the right to “benefit from science and technology, arts and culture” (Article 28C), freedoms of expression, association, and assembly (Article 28E(2-3)), and freedom of thought and conscience (Article 28I(1)). Although it does not provide explicit protections for the right to academic freedom, Indonesia’s Higher Education Law (2012) states that the “implementation of academic freedom, freedom of academic expression and scientific autonomy in Tertiary Education Institutions is the personal responsibility of the Academic Civitas [lecturers and students] and shall be protected and facilitated by the management of Tertiary Education Institutions.”

13. The Surabaya Principles on Academic Freedom, which were drafted by members of the Indonesian academic community in December 2017, declare that: (1) Academic freedom is a fundamental freedom needed to develop the autonomy of academic institutions; (2) The academic community, those who are engaged in academic activities, have full freedom in developing community service, education, research, and publishing academic results in accordance with scientific principles; (3) Members of the academic community who work as educators have the freedom in the classroom to conduct their course using scientific methods and respecting values of humanity; (4) The academic community should possess scientific integrity for humanity in developing a responsible academic culture and should be free from any restrictions and disciplinary actions; and (5) Public authorities have an obligation to respect, protect, and ensure measures to guarantee academic freedom. The Surabaya Principles were endorsed by the Southeast Asian Human Rights Studies Network (SEAHRN) in April 2018 and referenced in a report on freedom of opinion and expression issued by the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission in 2021. It also bears mentioning that the Surabaya Principles have been cited in the defense of academics subjected to lawsuits and other legal actions, including Basuki Wasis (see para. 33) and Saiful Mahdi (see para. 37).
Discussion

14. Academic freedom conditions improved significantly following the end of the Suharto regime in 1998, with expert-rated scores of respect for academic freedom rising from 0.23 in 1997 to 0.75 in 2000, according to the Academic Freedom Index (AFi).\textsuperscript{14} In 2021, that level of respect fell to 0.65 amidst reporting from scholars, rights experts, and the media indicating troubling conditions for the higher education and scientific communities. State authorities and public university administrations have repeatedly cracked down on students for peacefully speaking out over racial justice and corruption. Scholars have suffered prosecution, criminal investigations, lawsuits, and violent threats for their opinions and work. Meanwhile, laws intended to regulate digital communications and improve coordination across the scientific landscape are raising concerns over a shrinking space for critical research, opinions, and thought.

15. With the world’s fourth largest population and aspirations to improve higher education quality, the state of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and related values should be of great concern to Indonesia’s government and society at large. Attacks and restrictions on freedom of thought and inquiry discourage students and scholars from engaging with the national higher education community, raising serious consequences for the scientific, social, cultural, and economic progress and democratic society that so many in Indonesia desire.

16. This submission to the fourth cycle of Indonesia’s UPR describes targeted efforts to restrict or retaliate against students’ and scholars’ exercise of academic freedom and related rights, as well as broader pressures on academic expression, exchange, research, and university autonomy.

Attacks and restrictions on students’ academic freedom and free expression rights

17. During this UPR cycle, SAR and KIKA report incidents involving the use of force, detentions, arrests, and prosecutions of students, apparently intended to restrict or deter nonviolent expressive activity.\textsuperscript{15} Attacks on Papuan students have also raised serious concerns over racism experienced by members of the higher education community.\textsuperscript{16}

18. On July 6, 2018, hundreds of Indonesian military, police, and public order personnel conducted a raid of a university student dormitory in Surabaya, apparently to prevent the screening of Bloody Biak, a documentary on the Biak massacre by Indonesian security forces in Papua in 1998.\textsuperscript{17} Authorities reportedly learned of the screening via social media and from local residents and stated that their intention was to check students’ legal documents and to prevent “unspecified hidden activities.” Students claimed that security personnel failed to present a warrant, used violent force, and sexually harassed students.

19. On September 26, 2019, two university students were fatally shot during a protest over a corruption law.\textsuperscript{18} From September 24-30, police clashed with student protesters at demonstrations in Jakarta and elsewhere, using water cannons, live ammunition, and tear gas.\textsuperscript{19} During clashes on September 26, Halu Oleo University students Immawan Randi and Muhammad Yusuf Kardawi were struck by live bullets, both suspected of having been fired by police.\textsuperscript{20} The two were among five young demonstrators killed over the course of the protests.
20. Also in September 2019, police arrested four student-activists for their role in organizing anti-racism protests in response to a violent and racist police raid on a university dormitory in Surabaya weeks earlier, on August 17.\textsuperscript{21} \textbf{Cenderawasih University} student \textit{Ferry Gombo} and \textbf{Jayapura University of Science and Technology} students \textit{Alexander Gobai, Irwanus Uropmabin,} and \textit{Hengki Hilapok} were among a group of seven activists charged with treason. In June 2020, the four students were sentenced to ten months’ imprisonment.\textsuperscript{22}

21. On April 7, 2021, police briefly arrested three \textbf{Cenderawasih University} students who organized a protest over a controversial mining project in West Papua.\textsuperscript{23} As many as 300 police officers had been deployed in response to the protest in Jayapura. Police arrested the three students, \textit{Ayus Heluka, Herrian Soll,} and \textit{Asael Wanimbo}, on grounds that the protest was not properly registered. The students claimed that they had registered the protest, but police refused to provide confirmation.

22. On May 2, 2021, police beat and arrested a student leader during a demonstration commemorating National Education Day on the \textbf{Alauddin State Islamic University} campus.\textsuperscript{24} Students displayed a banner, gave speeches, and chanted, though reports also indicate that a tire was burned at one point and traffic had been disrupted. Police, including at least one plainclothes officer, took custody of a student, identified as \textit{Fajrul}, and violently beat him with a wooden stick.

23. On September 13, 2021, police briefly detained ten students who peacefully protested a visit by Indonesia’s president to the \textbf{Sebelas Maret University} campus for a higher education forum.\textsuperscript{25} Students displayed posters that criticized the human rights situation under the current administration.

24. On December 1, 2021, a day supporters of Papuan independence mark as their independence day, police arrested eight students during a peaceful demonstration.\textsuperscript{26} Students had raised the Morning Star flag—banned in Indonesia—above a stadium in Jayapura and marched to Papua Police Headquarters while calling for a referendum on Papuan independence. Two days later, Indonesian authorities announced that the eight students had been charged with treason and that they could face life imprisonment.

25. State university administrations also used their authority to punish or deter students’ nonviolent expressive and academic activity during this reporting period.

26. On March 20, 2019, \textbf{North Sumatra University} (USU) dismissed the student staff of a university newspaper, \textit{Suara USU}, for publishing a fictional story about a same-sex couple.\textsuperscript{27} The 18 students had refused to comply with the USU president’s order to take down the story, which he claimed “promoted homosexuality,” contained “pornography,” and contradicted USU’s values.

27. In June 2020, Indonesia’s \textbf{National University} expelled three students and suspended three others for their participation in campus protests demanding tuition fee cuts in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.\textsuperscript{28} The university accused the students of defamation and violating campus rules.

28. On November 16, 2020, \textbf{Semarang State University} suspended law student \textit{Frans Napitu} several days after he submitted to the government’s corruption watchdog agency a report accusing the rector of graft. The university accused Napitu of “violat[ing] student ethics and tarnish[ing] the university's reputation, including involvement with the Free Papua Movement,” according to \textit{The Jakarta Post}.\textsuperscript{29}
29. On June 27, 2021, administrators at the University of Indonesia summoned members of the Student Executive Board (SEB) for a satirical poster of President Jokowi Widodo that the group posted to social media. The administration said that the poster, which showed President Widodo with text reading “The King of Lip Service,” had violated several unspecified regulations and ordered the students to remove the content. The SEB chairperson noted that some of their members’ WhatsApp accounts had been hacked shortly following the publishing of the poster.

30. On March 20, 2022, the chancellor of the State Islamic Institute Ambon (IAIN Ambon) announced that the administration reported the chief editor, Yolanda Agne, and other editorial staff of the student news publication, Lintas, to the police. The decision was in response to Lintas’ special coverage of allegations of sexual harassment at IAIN Ambon. The chancellor purportedly reported the students to the police to allow them to investigate the allegations, and in announcing this publicly he sought to “restore” IAIN Ambon’s reputation. The editorial staff had declined the chancellor’s demand to turn over evidence that student journalists collected. According to Agne, the university had not established a special task force to investigate the allegations internally, as stipulated in a government regulation concerning sexual harassment in higher education settings. Prior to reporting the students to the police, the chancellor issued a letter ordering the suspension of Lintas’ operations, claiming the student newspaper was incompatible with the vision and mission of IAIN Ambon.

Suppression and punishment of scholars’ academic expression

31. Scholars in Indonesia have been targeted with criminal legal actions, civil suits, and violent threats and harassment in response to their academic expression.

32. In early April 2018, police initiated an investigation against Widjo Kongko, a government scientist of coastal, earthquake, and tsunami engineering, following his discussion of research findings on the potential for tsunamis along Indonesia’s southwestern coast. Police claimed that Kongko’s statements, made during a presentation that was reported by local media, caused concern among citizens in Pandeglang and “undermined the investment climate in the area.” Police dropped their investigation of Kongko after a local news outlet apologized for and adjusted their reporting of Kongko’s presentation, which was described as misleading.

33. Scholars have also faced civil lawsuits for providing expert testimony in legal proceedings. Considering the costs of mounting a defense and potential damages, these lawsuits threaten to chill scholars’ willingness to offer expert testimony, denying courts and the public of their expertise. During this reporting period, civil suits were brought against environmental expert Basuki Wasis, for his estimates of potential losses from environmental destruction, in 2018; professor of forestry Bambang Hero, for his testimony of the ecological damages resulting from a forest fire caused by a palm oil company, also in 2018; and law professor Eva Achjani Zulfa, for her expert testimony in an embezzlement case, in 2020.

34. In late May 2020, Ni’matul Huda, a constitutional law professor at the University of Islam Indonesia, received death threats apparently intended to deter her participation in a discussion about presidential impeachment that was to be hosted at Gajah Mada University. At roughly 11:00 PM on May 28, one day before the event, unidentified individuals visited Huda’s home demanding that she come
outside. The university discussion was canceled in light of violent threats against Huda as well as student organizers of the event.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Electronic Information and Transaction Law (ITE Law)}

35. The ITE Law, which regulates online information and transactions, also raises serious academic freedom concerns. The law has been criticized for containing vague descriptions of the activity it criminalizes, and for being used to punish or chill legitimate, nonviolent expressive and academic activity.\textsuperscript{42} Between 2016 and 2020, the Institute for Criminal Justice Reform reported 768 individuals charged under the ITE law; 744 defendants were convicted, with 88\% of those sentenced to time in prison.\textsuperscript{43}

36. The law’s defamation provision, Article 27(3), is of particular concern. The provision subjects to criminal liability “[a]ny [p]erson who knowingly and without authority distributes and/or transmits and/or causes to be accessible Electronic Information and/or Electronic Documents with contents of affronts and/or defamation.” Those convicted of defamation under the ITE Law can be sentenced to up to 4 years’ imprisonment and fined 750 million rupiah (today, roughly $52,250 USD).

37. On April 21, 2020, Indonesia’s Banda Aceh state court convicted \textit{Syiah Kuala University} lecturer \textbf{Saiful Mahdi} under Article 27(3), for criticizing the university’s hiring practices.\textsuperscript{44} The court sentenced Mahdi to three months’ imprisonment and fined him 10 million rupiah (then, roughly $2,000 USD). The case was prompted by a criminal complaint filed by the dean of the engineering faculty in response to comments Mahdi made in a private WhatsApp chat. KIKA has criticized the ruling on numerous grounds, including that Mahdi’s comments were protected from prosecution under Article 27(3), as they referred to a higher education institution, not an individual, and that the court never “properly tested” the substance of [Mahdi’s] comments.\textsuperscript{45} Mahdi served roughly half of his prison sentence before Indonesia’s House of Representatives granted him amnesty.

38. In September 2019, police began investigating \textbf{Ramsiah Tasruddin}, a lecturer in the Faculty of Da’wah and Communications (FDK) at \textit{Alauddin Islamic State University}, for defamation under the ITE Law.\textsuperscript{46} In 2017, a deputy dean of the FDK reported Ramsiah to the police in response to her criticism, via a faculty WhatsApp group, of a decision to close down the university’s broadcasting facilities. The opening of the criminal investigation upended Ramsiah’s appointment for a deanship within the FDK.\textsuperscript{47} In February 2022, police dropped the investigation, citing a lack of evidence.\textsuperscript{48}

39. As of this writing, \textbf{Haris Azhar}, executive director of Lokataru Law and Human Rights Office, a university lecturer, and a member of KIKA’s Advisory Board, and \textbf{Fatia Maulidiyanti}, coordinator of the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS) are being investigated under Article 27(3) for their participation in a talk show that was posted to YouTube.\textsuperscript{49} Azhar and Maulidiyanti had discussed the findings of a report about current and retired military officials’ alleged involvement in the mining industry in Papua, including claims that Luhut Pandjaitan, a retired army general and current government minister, owns shares in a company connected to the industry. Luhut reportedly filed the criminal complaint that prompted the police investigation.

40. Article 28(2), which criminalizes the dissemination of “information aimed at inflicting hatred or dissension on individuals and/or certain groups of community based on ethnic groups, religions, races,
and inter-groups,” has also been used to retaliate against nonviolent expressive activity. Offenses under Article 28(2) can result in up to 6 years’ imprisonment and fines up to 600 million rupiah (today, roughly $41,800 USD).

41. On March 7, 2019 police arrested State University of Jakarta sociologist Robertus Robet under the ITE Law for singing a song critical of the military and government during a protest. A video of the protest surfaced, leading police to arrest him for allegedly violating ITE Law Article 28(2) and Article 207 of the Criminal Code, for “insulting an authority.” After being released from detention, Robet faced threats online, leading him to flee with his family to Australia.

42. In June 2021, the government issued guidelines intended to guard against inappropriate and varying interpretations of the ITE Law; however, human rights groups complained that the guidelines are insufficient and that the law requires revisions in order to protect the right to freedom of expression. That same year, the government began drawing up changes to the ITE Law, including revisions that they purport would clarify definitions of offenses such as defamation. Despite these developments, there does not appear to have been a positive impact on law enforcement, considering recent cases such as those involving Haris Azhar and Fatia Maulidiyanti.

**Indonesia’s “Science Law”**

43. Law 11/2019 on the National System of Science and Technology (often referred to as the “Science Law”), enacted in November 2019, is purportedly intended to improve accountability and coordination of scientific research. It has been criticized for its potential to hamper research and international academic collaboration.

44. Under Article 85, the law establishes an ethics committee tasked with approving requests to conduct research or other activities considered “high risk” or “dangerous.” These include activities that could harm the environment or endanger public safety, but also activities that could threaten “social harmony” or “national security.” The law does not define these latter two terms, raising concerns that the ethics committee could refuse or deter requests to conduct a wide range of research activity and, as a result, deny Indonesians and the international community the benefits of that research. Researchers who violate Article 85 can be sentenced up to one year imprisonment or a maximum fine of two billion rupiah (today, roughly $139,390 USD).

45. Article 75 stipulates that international researchers seeking to conduct scientific work in Indonesia with the support of international funding must “produce outputs that benefit the Indonesian people.” This subjective language raises concerns that research permit requests could be denied on improper or arbitrary grounds, for example, to protect the interest of ethics committee members, rather than the public at large.

46. Under Article 48 of the law, the government established the National Research and Innovation Body (BRIN) law, replacing Indonesia’s research and technology funding bodies and establishing a steering committee that would gain significant control over the country’s research sector. In 2021, Indonesia’s former president and the current ruling party’s leader, Megawati Soekarnoputri, was appointed to chair BRIN’s steering committee. The appointment was criticized in part due to Megawati’s lack of an earned university degree and lack of experience in the research sector, but also for her leadership within a
government agency tasked with preserving and promoting the state ideology known as Pancasila. Politicization of BRIN’s leadership and the government’s push to align research with state ideology have raised further concerns over the future of science in Indonesia. These political concerns are compounded by reports of increased bureaucracy and restrictions on staffing that researchers claim impede important research efforts, including vaccine development, and result in a loss of talent.

**Autonomy and university leadership**

47. Academic freedom advocates have also raised concerns over the system for appointing rectors at state higher education institutions. In 2010, the government enacted a reform that improved university autonomy by giving state universities’ faculty senates a voice in rector appointments. Previously, appointments were fully at the president’s discretion. Under the 2010 reform, 65% of the votes are cast by the faculty senate, while the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology retains 35% of the votes and appoints a rector among three shortlisted candidates. Critics of the policy claim that the current system does not provide sufficient university autonomy and that the minister’s share of votes engenders corruption by making rectors beholden to the wishes of the minister and the ruling party. The risk of such corruption remains a serious and widespread concern despite oversight and intervention by Indonesia’s Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK).

**Recommendations**

SAR and KIKA respectfully urge UN member states to call on Indonesian authorities to:

48. Publicly commit to protecting and promoting academic freedom, university autonomy, and rights that are fundamental to higher education communities, especially freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association;

49. Refrain from the use of force or legal actions intended to restrict or punish scholars’ and students’ exercise of academic freedom and related rights;

50. Investigate violations of scholars’ and students’ academic freedom and related rights, and hold perpetrators accountable;

51. Revise the ITE Law and Science Law to conform to national and international legal standards and obligations relating to academic freedom and freedom of expression, including by clarifying language that may lead to overly broad interpretations or misapplications of these laws that would restrict or punish responsible, nonviolent academic activity or expression;

52. Establish an ombudsperson tasked with receiving and responding to academic freedom concerns at public and private higher education institutions; and

53. Strengthen university autonomy and reduce the risk of corruption in state higher education institutions, including by eliminating the 35% share of votes retained by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and allowing the faculty senate full control over voting for a slate of three finalists, from which the minister would make an appointment.
Endnotes

1 Learn more about SAR at www.scholarsatrisk.org.
2 Learn more about the Academic Freedom Monitoring Project at https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academic-freedom-monitoring-project/.
5 Ibid., para. 9.
14 The Academic Freedom Index (AFi) is a tool co-developed by the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi), the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), the V-Dem Institute, and SAR. Learn more about the AFi at https://www.fau.eu/2022/03/03/news/research/academic-freedom-on-the-decline/. Download the AFi dataset on the V-Dem website, at https://www.v-dem.net/vdemds.html.


20 Ivany Atina Arbi (October 16, 2019); Ikhwon Hastanto (October 30, 2019); and Tempo Magazine (December 30, 2019).


31 Ibid.

33 Ibid.


KIKI also notes a Constitutional Court interpretation of ITE Article 27(3) indicating that this provision can be applied in cases involving alleged defamation of individuals, not institutions. Herlambang Wiratraman, “Academic freedom: another victim of the ITE law?,” Indonesia at Melbourne, September 15, 2021, https://indonesiатhemobiz.unimelb.edu.au/academic-freedom-another-victim-of-the ITE-law/.


Ibid.


Ibid. and Herlambang Wiratraman (September 15, 2021).