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Academic Freedom in Africa Under Siege

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Introduction

The conditions of academic freedom have steadily deteriorated in Africa throughout the 1980s, and today we have little reason to assume that any major improvement will occur, short of an active mobilization by the academic community internationally to help remedy this situation.

Arrests of teachers, students, banning of academic unions, censorship of scholarly materials, closing of universities, prevention of public debate and assembly, and, in many cases, disappearances and torture of teachers and students are the order of the day in many countries. These restrictions of academic freedom have also an economic dimension. In the wake of the debt crisis and the application of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), the right to education is increasingly nullified in Africa. Few can afford to continue to study while the academic infrastructure has deteriorated. Lack of books, journals, even pencils and paper is a common feature of academic life in Africa. Fees have been introduced at all educational levels—even primary elementary schools—at the insistence of international banks like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

There is a deep connection between economic and political crisis. For many of the arrests stem from criticism of government policies, beginning with those that directly affect academic life. In Nigeria, for example, teachers have been persecuted for voicing their disapproval of the conditionalities of a World Bank loan to the university system. In Zaire, students have been massacred at Lubumbashi, in the wake of protest against dismal conditions of in the campuses. Similarly, there was a crisis at the University of Dar Es Salaam, which led to the closure of the university from May 1989 to January 1990, stems from protest against the conditions of academic work. In Uganda, two students were shot dead by police during a demonstration protesting the government's cutting of the paper subsidy which helped students purchase of one ream of paper during a semester.

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l over Africa students and teachers are mobilizing to defend their rights. In November 1990 at University in Kampala (Uganda), a Pan-African conference was held resulting in a Declaration mic Rights. It was patterned on the World University Service Lima Declaration of 1988 and e following articles, resolutions and recommendations among others:

* Every person has the right to education and participation in intellectual activity.

* No African intellectual shall in any way be persecuted, harassed or intimidated for reasons only of his