



# WORLDVIEWS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

A Monograph Series

## The Rescue of Science & Learning

Allan E. Goodman



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# **The Rescue of Science & Learning**



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## *Worldviews for the 21st Century: A Monograph Series*

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# The Rescue of Science & Learning

Allan E. Goodman

The Institute of International Education (IIE) has been rescuing scholars since its establishment in 1919. For almost a century now, we have found that professors on the front lines of their disciplines often find themselves on the front lines of civil wars and sectarian conflicts as repressive governments and terrorists seek to re-write history and re-make their societies.

Consider this excerpt from a memoir written by IIE's first president, Stephen Duggan, reflecting on the work of the Emergency Committee for Displaced European Scholars he and Edward R. Murrow set up in the 1930s to save the lives of scholars targeted by the Nazis:

“The lot of displaced ... Professors ... was indeed harsh. University employment was forbidden, and libraries and research facilities were closed to them. Many were incarcerated. One world-renowned medical scientist was taken into ‘protective custody.’..., while his youngest son was beaten in prison because pressure was brought from the outside to release his father.”

“The record of another scholar states: ‘He was removed from his Directorship... He was not allowed to use the library or museum, even though many of the most significant objects in the museum had been procured by him. Finally, all his property was confiscated, and he was obliged to borrow three thousand dollars from his friends to get out ...’”

Strikingly, the narrative could be just as easily said about the situations facing scholars in Syria, Iraq and the many other places where the Institute's Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF) is working today.

What has also surprised me so much about our work in the IIE-SRF is the range of threats scholars today find themselves facing.

I expected, of course, that the reasoned opponents of particular governments and political parties would be harassed, imprisoned, and otherwise silenced. This has always happened. But the attacks on scholars in Iraq have gone far beyond this and involved many malefactors. And the assassination of scholars has proved to be a particularly effective weapon of terrorists and armed sectarian militia who find that because of the extensive communities scholars serve – ranging from hundreds of students to thousands of patients in a clinic in the case of medical professors – killing them has far-reaching consequences. And in other regions, we have seen political parties aim their violence at the most respected scholars, regardless of discipline, in order to silence entire universities or gain their acquiescence.

In all this, I must also confess that we have avoided grappling with what constitutes a universally applicable definition of academic freedom. Originally, I thought it would be possible to develop an index similar to those used to expose corruption and the absence of press freedom as a means of deterring attacks on individual scholars and their home institutions. So far, this has not been possible, in part because we are so very busy. But at a more fundamental level, we had great difficulty actually defining academic freedom and especially doing so in a way that did not impose our values, presuppose that it could really only exist in countries of a certain means and history, or that appeared to condemn self-censorship and those who chose that path in order to advance research and serve students in their national academies.

What really sealed the fate of the effort was when I inquired of the American Association of University Professors if any of their members felt their academic freedom had been infringed. The answer was that the association was then processing over 1,800 complaints annually. If the incidence and appearance of threats to academic freedom was so apparently large in America, I concluded that perhaps all of us have a great deal of work to do before we had the standing to set standards for others.

As a consequence, at the IIE-SRF we have only two criteria when considering a case or request for help. Is the person a scholar? And what is the level of the threat that person is facing? Level here is to us more significant than nature or source. Since we have limited funds, we aim to help those facing the gravest threats.

What have we accomplished?

It is important to say “we” here because many academies have rallied to our cause. IIE-SRF scholars are placed at over 300 colleges and universities in 40 countries, with more joining us to become partner safe havens every week. Each host also matches our grants – and sometimes goes considerably beyond that to care for the scholar and his or her entire family. To date, these contributions have totaled more than \$9 million, in addition to the \$24 million in funds we have provided.

The results can perhaps best be illustrated by a few examples.

A physicist specializing in laser technology was persecuted in Belarus because he did not want to use this technology to develop weapons. On an IIE-SRF fellowship at Rice University, he was able to explore medical uses, including most recently developing a rapid malaria test that uses a laser pulse, eliminating the need to draw blood. The technology can be used in a device powered by a car battery and is rugged enough to work in dusty villages. With a fiber-optic probe attached to a finger or ear lobe, the device could screen one person every 20 seconds for less than 50 cents each. If that happened, it could revolutionize malaria diagnosis and save millions of lives. And this same scholar is using his expertise in nanotechnology to find a way of destroying cancer cells. If those experiments are successful, they will change the world.

In Nigeria, a microbiologist leading the charge to eradicate epidemic viruses plaguing her country faced intensifying sectarian violence perpetrated by a militant Islamic group carrying out targeted attacks on Christians. Forced to temporarily leave her leadership post

and professorship at her home university, she stayed in the region and found respite through her IIE-SRF fellowship at a prominent university in South Africa, where she conducted research on a virus that regularly claims the lives of infants and young children in developing countries. Through her work, she fostered a formal relationship for collaboration between her hosting institution and her home university in Nigeria. A second IIE-SRF fellowship led her to undertake an appointment in Kenya and lend her expertise to researching a virus that has been afflicting Sub-Saharan and North Africa for the last decade. Hers is an example of a scholar escaping life-threatening circumstances to remain in her home region and continue to contribute to the advancement of science.

Let me tell you about another physicist on our fellowship, again with a specialization in nanotechnology, hosted in the United Kingdom (UK). An Iraqi scholar, he worked with UK research partners to find a nanoparticle that could help with treating cataracts non-surgically. That's not all to his story; he returned to Iraq and is now the president of one of Iraq's leading public universities.

So, our scholars do return, and back home they often do remarkable things.

Several years ago, an IIE-SRF fellowship enabled a highly threatened Burmese scholar of public health to spend a year at a U.S. university studying the adverse effects of authoritarian regimes on public health. Widely known for a landmark book on medical ethics, he returned home recently to a remarkably more open country. In addition to his teaching, practice and research, he is fostering university networks, expanding health services and establishing a Burmese chapter of Physicians for Human Rights – basically helping to open up that country.

Returning to their home country is a very personal decision that scholars make. However, of the more than 530 scholars that our program has rescued in the past 11 years, I have only heard one scholar say that she would never go back home. In her case, her

husband was brutally murdered by terrorists in front of her while they were on their way to their campus. He was also a university professor. Indeed, about half of all we have helped so far have returned to their countries even when they still faced considerable threats.

The idea behind the Institute is to promote peace through international educational exchange.

In the case of our Scholar Rescue work, we are fortunate to be able to leverage our networks to help. England's poet laureate John Masefield once noted, "There are few earthly things more beautiful than a university" because they "welcome thinkers in distress and exile." If you think about it, no other institutions really do that as part of their fundamental reason for being. And, until world peace comes, this function of our academies is needed just as much today as in the era when our Institute was founded.

*Dr. Allan E. Goodman is the sixth President of the Institute of International Education (IIE), the leading not-for-profit organization in the field of international educational exchange and development training. IIE conducts research on international academic mobility and administers the Fulbright program sponsored by the United States Department of State, as well as over 250 other corporate, government and privately-sponsored programs. Previously, Goodman was Executive Dean of the School of Foreign Service and Professor at Georgetown University; served as Presidential Briefing Coordinator for the Director of Central Intelligence in the Carter Administration; and was the first American professor to lecture at the Foreign Affairs College of Beijing; helped create the first U.S. academic exchange program with the Moscow Diplomatic Academy for the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs; and developed the diplomatic training program of the Foreign Ministry of Vietnam.*