RESCUING SCHOLARS

Historical Perspectives, Contemporary Challenges
Conference Report and Plan of Action

Bellagio, Italy | November 11–15, 2013
August 34, 1942

Dear Mr. Apelgren,

It appears the only possibility of getting 
Mr. Nadau Elmo and Mr. Nasu, Indians out of 
Netherlands would be to have them cross through 
This plan would permit them to go to Lisbon where 
it is unlikely that they might get regular 
American visas. If this were not possible, they 
could get the American visas after they landed in 
Dionv.

We have handled this situation over with Mr. 
Kadiroly, who believes that this plan would work. It 
Involves additional expenses, probably $200 each. What 
feels this additional expense would be justified 
if we were to send these Indians to safety?

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]

Mr. Charles A. Apelgren, 
The Rockefeller Foundation, 
65 West 42nd Street, 
New York City.

R.C.A.

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ELECTRONIC NEWS
ELECTRONIC NEWS

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Throughout the twentieth century scholars and intellectuals have faced grim episodes of harassment, repression, violence, imprisonment and forced migration. When scholars were threatened during the Soviet Revolution in the 1910s, forced to flee Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, escaped Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War, and assailed by repressive regimes in Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, a cluster of organizations sprang up to assist them. In the first decades of the twenty-first century the task of scholar rescue continues. Today, both threats against individual scholars and large-scale crises involving entire systems of higher education persist in many regions of the world. Most prominently, the current upheavals in the Middle East have created an academic crisis that is as severe as any the world has ever witnessed.

To address the challenges of scholar rescue, the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) and the Institute of International Education’s Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF) organized a conference entitled “Rescuing Scholars: Historical Perspectives, Contemporary Challenges.” The gathering drew nineteen participants to the Rockefeller Foundation’s Bellagio Center in November, 2013. The participants included staff members of leading rescue organizations, historians who have studied episodes of rescue, academics who have hosted rescued scholars at their institutions, and scholars who have survived threats to their lives and work in Syria, Iraq, Burma, Kenya, and South Africa.

The meeting was the first in which the major rescue organizations had come together and been afforded an extended opportunity to discuss the possibilities of collaborative work, informed by the perspectives of both historians and scholars who had been assisted by rescue programs. Three and a half days of intense conversation yielded many insights and a plan of action. A nine-point plan aims to improve the mechanisms for helping scholars under direst threats and most in need of immediate aid. It looks toward the prevention of crises through the creation of early warning systems and stronger international advocacy. And it makes recommendations that point the way toward expanding the network of civil society organizations – academic and professional associations, networks of colleges and universities, and human rights groups, among others – that

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must be enlisted in the cause of saving individual scholars and, more generally, protecting the systems of higher education that produce and disseminate knowledge to the benefit of society.

The plan of action draws on powerful testimony from five scholars who had been compelled to leave their home countries. In three cases, scholars have been able to return from periods of exile even though the situations some of them face are far from settled. In two cases, scholars are still outside of their home countries, wanting desperately to return but unable to do so without risk to their lives and the lives of family members. While the threats the scholars faced differed in fundamental ways – ethnic and sectarian conflict, repressive regimes, and civil strife – they all felt that prior to their experiences they had little awareness of the help that outside rescue organizations could offer. It was only through serendipitous connections that they learned about organizations capable of offering assistance. Consequently, all felt that rescue efforts should be more widely known. And all agreed that a wider protective web of scholarly and academic associations, human rights organizations, and other groups concerned with higher education would have helped to alert the world to the dangerous circumstances they and their colleagues faced.

It was heartening to learn that all five scholars acquired valuable lessons from their time abroad, each becoming a more passionate advocate of scholarly freedom. They were also ardent proponents of what the Bellagio participants variously termed “university values” or “higher education values,” at the core of which reside academic freedom and the production, dissemination, and exchange of knowledge. Their identities as scholars – and as advocates for improving conditions in their home countries – were reinforced by their time abroad. In the final analysis, it was as scholars, plain and simple, unmodified by words such as “refugee” and “rescued,” that they wished to be known. Long-standing concerns about “brain drain,” which characterized episodes of rescue during the middle of the twentieth century, seemed to have given way to the benefits of “brain gain” as scholars testified about returning from exile with a renewed sense of academic and civic purpose, as well as international connections to encourage partnerships between their host and home universities.

Throughout the three and a half days of the Bellagio dialogue, historical continuities were underscored: the perennial fund-raising difficulties; the scut work of obtaining visas and arranging transportation; the efforts to negotiate cost-sharing with universities; the inevitable problems of adjustment that some scholars face when settling into unfamiliar institutional environments; the difficult decisions with regard to supporting family members; the entreaties to embassies and other

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governmental agencies for cooperation; and the reliance on complicated informal and sometimes underground networks, among many other continuing challenges.

But historical departures also became clear, especially about what has been learned from previous rescue initiatives when many rescued scholars who had settled far from home chose not to return. As one participant remarked, “If we were to write a book documenting such efforts over the past 90 years, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, the main difference would be that, today, we try to place scholars in safe havens as close to their home country as possible to encourage eventual return.”

Other significant differences also emerged. Rescue efforts are now undertaken with a far greater global awareness of the tools of the human rights movement and within a more robust network of human rights and civil society organizations. Potential allies can be found within that network. As one participant explained, “We need to move from casework to using human rights tools to pressure states to assume responsibility for protecting higher education and to hold people accountable.”

Since the end of World War II, systems of higher education have expanded throughout the world and transnational networks, both formal and informal, have served to link scholars globally. To a certain extent, mobility has erased traditional national boundaries. Modern technologies such as the internet and the relative ease of international transportation foster these networks. These technologies also offer many new opportunities, especially possibilities to share information immediately and to create early warning systems to alert the world about incipient crises.
The definition of “scholar” has also broadened. Unlike the 1930s it is not only the Nobel Laureate, the renowned scholar, or the most promising contributor to a European or American university who is deemed worthy of rescue. Rescue organizations are now asking which scholars will be essential to the well-being of their home countries, not who among them might be perceived in the West as the most eminent. Organizations have also sought to create mechanisms so that exiled scholars can continue to contribute to higher education in their home countries, for example, giving lectures remotely and upgrading professional skills in anticipation of their return.

Drawing on their archival explorations, primarily in the records of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation housed at the Rockefeller Archive Center, the historians of rescue offered a range of insights and often uncovered practical counsel. They described, for example, how Rockefeller programs had evolved in the 1930s and 1940s; how Ford Foundation programs responded to the divergent needs of Polish, Hungarian, and Czech scholars during the Cold War; and how Latin American scholars found refuge within the region when repressive regimes forced them to flee from Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. Having studied the lives of many refugee scholars, the historians frequently underscored the importance of personal contacts, informal connections, and professional networks. Individual agency also matters. It is perhaps best exemplified by an individual like Varian Fry, who stepped forward to mobilize the rescue of many who sought to flee the Nazi advance into France.

The historians pointed toward new avenues for research, including examining the distinctive challenges faced by female scholars; widening the perspective on rescue to understand the needs of scholars’ families; studying not just individual scholars but the sites of rescue where exiles congregate and receive assistance; and mapping the institutional landscape and including informal networks in the map. They also asked questions about the role of foundations (why have the major foundations neglected the issue of scholar oppression in recent years?). They asked about the
relationships between private philanthropy, governments, international agencies such as UNESCO, and civil society organizations (why don’t more collaborate on scholar rescue?). And they reflected on the US- and UK-centric nature of scholar rescue efforts (why don’t organizations from different countries besides the US and the UK engage in this work?).

There is clearly more to learn. As one participant remarked, “Repression of ideas works in remarkably similar ways. The sad questions from history are: Why haven’t we learned more since World War II? Why does this keep happening? What can we do better to prevent attacks?” In the end, those at the Bellagio conference agreed that there must be better mechanisms for documenting rescue efforts and telling personal stories and, in the end, preserving those records and encouraging scholars and the public to make use of them. The historical record is a valuable and under-utilized tool for advocacy and action.

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PLAN OF ACTION

Protecting Scholars, Expanding Prevention, Advancing University Values

1. COORDINATING SCHOLAR PROTECTION
One enduring lesson of the past century is that threats to individual scholars recur, although political circumstances and the nature of threats differ. Too often, we have been ill-prepared to help and thus have responded to crises in an ad hoc manner. A deeper institutionalization of our efforts must begin with greater collaboration among prominent rescue organizations such as the Institute of International Education’s Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF), the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA), and the Scholars at Risk Network (SAR). The participants in the Bellagio meeting will take steps to create a coordinating committee or to convene more regular meetings with the leaders of these and other rescue organizations. We will also find mechanisms for more systematized relationships with relevant governmental departments and agencies; facilitate the creation of wider networks for the exchange of information and for public advocacy; and encourage the participation of more diverse and more non-US and non-UK organizations.

2. PREPARING FOR LARGE-SCALE CRISES
As we have seen with the rise of fascism in the 1930s or the wars in Iraq and Syria today, some crises affect entire countries, regions or even continents. The scope of these crises demands the mobilization of greater financial resources, more thoughtful planning and more skillful coordination of the responses. Greater local and regional expertise, whether it is knowledge of systems of higher education or insight into political, social and economic conditions must be brought to the table. We must also prepare for large-scale crises so that systems, networks, and funding are in place and ready when needed.

3. BUILDING A PROTECTIVE WEB
The protection of scholars is an issue in which a far wider range of organizations can and should become involved: professional associations, disciplined-based academic societies, networks of academic administrators, and a diverse array of civil society organizations from many different countries. The personal and informal connections of scholars are often transnational as well. All of these formal and informal means for connecting scholars can serve as early warning systems and mechanisms for aiding scholars under threat. We must make more concerted efforts to inform these organizations about the issues and enlist their support in both the cause and the actual work of scholar protection.

4. USING TECHNOLOGY
Scholars under threat are often unaware of organizations that might be able to come to their aid. We must improve
and increase the use of well-targeted technologies to open communications and increase knowledge and information flows to threatened groups and individuals. While we do not want to create a magnet that draws scholars out of their countries unnecessarily, we must be more conscientious about informing threatened scholars about the availability of assistance. Technologies such as distance learning and real time communications platforms can be deployed to enable threatened scholars to continue to contribute to their home academic communities even when they cannot be physically present.

5. UTILIZING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE
Our conversations at Bellagio have confirmed how much valuable knowledge exists within the group of scholars who have experienced threats, exile and return. We should be more inclusive in drawing upon the knowledge of these individuals as we deliberate about and conduct our rescue initiatives. Their expertise and insights can be better utilized in everything from the language we use to describe our efforts to practical measures in shaping rescue initiatives and plans for return.

6. EXPANDING PREVENTION ACTIVITIES
Without diminishing support for protection efforts (which are sometimes preventive in and of themselves) we must think more systematically about prevention. Prevention strategies can be pursued along three tracks:

- We should begin to strengthen early-warning systems and to develop indicators that can predict future attacks. When threats arise, we should encourage measures within countries to mitigate threats, to reduce the need to flee, and to maximize the prospects for continued scholarly work and professional development in the home country.

- We must devise strategies to increase governmental commitments to protecting systems of higher education. States must acknowledge their responsibilities to the educational sector and their obligation to ensure that higher education values such as academic freedom and institutional autonomy are secure.

- We must help the higher educational sector in every country develop the capacity to mount its own defense of higher education values. University administrators and faculty members can be the first line of defense when scholars are under threat.

7. EXPANDING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY
Protection and advocacy organizations should expand their efforts to reach out to diverse stakeholders as well as to the general public and the media to explain their goals and the nature of their activities. Awareness and advocacy requires more widespread reporting on threats to both individuals and higher education systems. It requires expanded monitoring, an increased capacity for investigating incidents, and more extensive communication about the urgency of rescue efforts. Human rights tools might also be considered as a way to pursue the accountability of perpetrators.

8. DOCUMENTING RESCUE EFFORTS AND EXPANDING RESEARCH
The Bellagio discussions drew on the work of historians who have studied episodes of rescue, from the experiences in
9. ADVANCING UNIVERSITY VALUES

While individual human lives and professional careers are always at stake in any rescue effort, it is important to emphasize that rescuing scholars also means protecting and preserving the creation of knowledge. The Bellagio participants affirmed their commitment to core values advanced by higher education: academic freedom, meaning both the freedom to undertake research and to teach; institutional autonomy and sound university governance; the free exchange of ideas; and the creation and dissemination of knowledge. These values are central to the public good, healthy civil societies, social and economic progress, and transnational understanding.

In a practical sense, assisted scholars who are able to return home have a critical role to play in strengthening higher education values in their home countries.

The historians brought fresh, cross-disciplinary perspectives to our understanding of rescue, seeing it in a broader historical framework and raising new questions. With a long view of knowledge creation and perspectives on the careers of individual scholars, their research underscored the value of intellectual freedom, the free exchange of ideas, and the value of thriving systems of higher education.

Ultimately, protecting scholars helps to protect the spaces in which knowledge is created and transmitted. With this wider perspective on the societal value of higher education, the Bellagio Conference hopes to mobilize a larger constituency to protect scholars under threat, to anticipate and prevent the disruption of higher education in times of crisis, and to expand public understanding of values that reach beyond higher education to benefit everyone.
August 14, 1942.

Dear Mr. Applegat,

It appears the only possibility of getting Dr. Nodelo and Mr. Rgenq delivered one of these days would be to have them seen to in U.S. visas. Then visas would permit them to get to London where it is unlikely possible that they might get regular American visas. If this were not possible, they could get the American visas after they landed in Spain.

We have also talked this question over with Mr. Makower, who believes that this plan would work. It involves additional expense, probably $1000 each. What do you feel about this? Could we do it if we were to bring these scholars to safety?

Sincerely,
Alvin Johnson

Mr. Thomas A. Applegat
The Rockefeller Foundation
60 East 53rd Street
New York City

RCA Radiogram
RCA Communications Inc.
Rec'd: 9/19/42

[Additional content]