

SCHOLARS AT RISK

NETWORK  CANADA SECTION



Fall 2019 Newsletter



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1. Queen's Committee on Academic Freedom



Having recently joined Scholars at Risk, Queen's University has formed an internal committee to raise awareness around academic freedom on campus. Queen's SAR committee is composed of members from the following units: Faculty of Education, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Arts and Science, Faculty of Health Sciences, Smith School of Business, Queen's University Faculty Association, the Alma Mater Society (AMS), the Society of Graduate and Professional Students (SGPS), the Office of the Associate Vice-Principal (International) and is chaired by Fahim Quadir, Vice-Provost and Dean, School of Graduate Studies.

For this inaugural year, the committee's primary focus is to engage the internal community to raise campus-wide awareness of protecting threatened scholars around the world. In support of its mission to promote academic freedom and provide protection to threatened scholars, Queen's SAR will host a Scholars at Risk Speaker Series in 2019-20. This series will seek to engage with stakeholders on campus to bring awareness to challenges that scholars face around the world, and to share knowledge on issues of academic freedom. The series will take place throughout the 2019-20 academic year and will feature three threatened scholars currently hosted at other SAR member universities in southern Ontario. Our first speaker, on November 13, 2019, will be Dr. Mustafa Bahran, a physicist currently being hosted at Carleton University. In 2020, we will feature two additional speakers.

Please [visit our website](#) for further information.

2. The Yemeni Conundrum!



SAR-Carleton Professor of Physics, Mustafa Bahran, shares his perspective on his homeland, Yemen.

Yemen is an ancient country whose history is not well known in the West. It is also one of the most beautiful countries on this planet. It has diverse natural wonders; a rich culture; pleasant climate; unique architecture, food, music, folklore; and very hospitable people among many other qualities.

In 2015, an Iran backed local “Houthi” militia calling itself “the Supporters of God” took power in the ancient two thousand years old city of Sana’a, the capital of Yemen. The Houthis – named after their leader - overthrew the last legitimately elected president of Yemen and his government.

Consequently, Saudi Arabia (KSA) led a coalition of regional powers, particularly the United Arab Emirates (UAE), waging war against the Houthis, with an extensive air campaign, in support of the legitimate government to regain power. These government forces include army units, islamists such as the Islamic Brotherhood (IB) and the Salafies. By and large the legitimate government forces and its generals are inherently corrupt and it seems they are incapable of winning[. After thousands of sorties by coalition planes, tens of thousands dead and much more injured with a significant civilian component including children, three hundred thousand refugees and asylum seekers, 2 million internally displaced, much destruction to infrastructure, cholera and other epidemics, and famine looming, no clear winner is in sight.

Recently (August 2019) a southern movement calling itself “The Southern Transitional Council” (STC) backed by the UAE took control of the city of Aden and neighboring governorates and hence the legitimate government is neither in control of Sana’a nor Aden. It is largely becoming marginalized on the ground.

According to the UNHCR about 22 million people (75% of the population) are in need for assistance; about 8 million of them are in desperate need. Hundreds of thousands of civil servants have not been paid for more than two years. The Yemeni Rial has lost about 300% of its pre-conflict value. Billions of dollars of aid has been pouring in but unfortunately only to be consumed by warlords and corrupt dispensing local organizations apparently with the blessing and may be involvement of some elements of international organizations.

Both sides of this ugly war, have committed atrocities and the death toll among civilians including children is rising. The so-called mistakes committed by Saudi and coalition planes on civilian targets are too many; some of them can only be described as massacres. Yemeni children are being killed in the battlefield as child-soldiers for the Houthis and by coalition planes directly in addition to the regular so-called collateral damage casualties. The humanitarian crisis of this war is currently the worst in the world. This ugly war must stop.

The only way out is a political settlement. To stop this war Iran, KSA and UAE must be pressured to make that happen . Otherwise Yemen as a whole will be buried alongside its ancient history.

3. McGill Launches SAR Legal Clinic



In 2020, McGill will launch a new legal clinic in partnership with Scholars at Risk. The purpose of the clinic will be to monitor and report to SAR on attacks on higher education, legal analysis, development of advocacy in response to particular attacks.

The clinic focuses specifically on issues in Eastern Europe—including Hungary, Russia, and Poland. Poland and Hungary have witnessed rapid erosion of democratic institutions and narrowing of space for free expression and other civic

freedoms. The phenomenon of extreme ownership and concentration of ownership of media outlets has further deteriorated the climate for free expression.

4. McGill Law Hosts New Scholar



McGill

Faculty of
Law

Faculté de
Droit

Pwaangulongii Dauod is a writer. Born in northern Nigeria, he studied Literature at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and earned an MFA Creative Writing from the University of Virginia. He is a Macdowell Colony Fellow. A winner of the 2018 Gerard Kraak Prize, Dauod has also been shortlisted for the Miles Morland Writing Scholarship and Short Story Day Africa Prize. He has written for Granta Magazine, The Evergreen Review, Johannesburg Review of Books and Brittle Paper. He is currently working on a novel and a booklength essay.

5. Updated SAR Handbooks



Updated versions of the [SAR Handbooks](#) are available: Scholar Guide, with advice for scholars before, during and after placements; Host to Handbook, with information for host institution representatives and administrators as they plan for and host SAR Scholars; Speaker Series Handbook, with guidance to assist institutions interested in inviting SAR scholars to speak on campus; and the Scholar Training Online Module. Available handbook hardcopies will be at SAR events, including Congress 2020.

6a. SAR & Canadian Universities



In partnership with the Scholars at Risk Network, the SAR Canada Network, Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria and Vancouver Island University, The University of British Columbia was proud to host Scholars at Risk and Canadian Universities: Keeping Critical Enquiry Open Through Protection, Advocacy and Learning on June 4, 2019. This university-sponsored event, focused on academic freedom, featured international scholars at risk currently hosted at Canadian universities, along with students, faculty and staff working within the SAR framework. It was particularly meaningful that the event was hosted within the broader context of the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, held at UBC this year.

This event brought together scholars, students, faculty and staff to discuss the integration of SAR initiatives, scholars, and experiential learning and research seminars within the framework of higher education in Canada.

The first roundtable discussion focused on the institutional experience and rationale of SAR membership, while the second session featured the impact on student learning through SAR's Student Advocacy Seminars and Legal Clinics. Both sessions were well-attended and led to interesting and robust discussions.

6b. Carleton University SAR organizes first Canadian SAR Advocacy Summit



Carleton
UNIVERSITY

Reflection by Alec Vrech, student

On September 27-28 the Carleton SAR Initiative, with the support of the Department of Law and Legal Studies and SAR New York, brought together activists, advocates, scholars at risk and human rights defenders to discuss advocacy and academic freedom. The event was opened by Alex Neve (Secretary General of Amnesty Canada). Other speakers included Ms. Hilary Elliott (Grandmothers Advocacy Network, GRAN), Ms. Karen Secord (Executive Director, Parkdale Food Centre), Mr. Mustafa Alio (Managing Director, JumpStart – Refugee Talent), and Mr. Alan Shain (Storyteller, Comic, Disability Activist). We are hoping to expand this initiative and invite all [SAR Advocacy Seminars](#) from around the country to participate in this event. Please contact Melanie Adrian (melanie.adrian@carleton.ca) for more information.

What does it mean to be an effective advocate? For many university students such as myself, navigating this question is an important step towards transforming one's passion for a particular cause and turning this passion into actionable change. Over the course of the two-day event organized by '[University: Uncensored – The Ottawa Summit for Academic Freedom](#)' and the [Carleton University Scholars at Risk Initiative](#), participants were given the unique opportunity to explore the concept of advocacy as it relates to academic freedom. Interactive lectures and panel discussions were hosted by an impressive range of activists, leading human rights experts, world-class scholars and senior civil servants. Through these encounters, the summit created an intimate space that fostered meaningful conversations between students and advocates about the importance of using your voice to stand up for what you believe in. At the crux of this dialogue was a deliberate attempt to unpack the meaning of academic freedom and how it is conceptualized from a human rights perspective. In order to help guide participants through this discussion, the case of [Dr. Hatoon Al-Fassi](#), an Associate Professor of women's history at King Saud University and prominent women's rights activist who was detained in apparent retaliation for her advocacy work in Saudi Arabia, was positioned at the centre of a series of workshops focused on developing critical skills for maximizing one's role as an advocate in a transnational context. Reflecting on my personal experience at this summit, it is more apparent to me than ever that we as scholars-in-training have a responsibility to use the platform that we are given as students to advocate for academic freedom. By using our voices to draw attention to the injustices that are committed against scholars around the world, we have the ability to stand up for those within the academic community who no longer have a voice of their own.

6c. McMaster Magna Charta Conference



On October 16th and 17th 2019, McMaster University will host university leaders, higher education professionals, students and policy makers from around the world for a conference exploring academic freedom and the social responsibilities of universities.

The annual conference, organized by the [Magna Charta Observatory](#), explores and celebrates the principles of the [Magna Charta Universitatum](#), a document that lays out fundamental values and principles guiding the missions of universities internationally.

First signed in 1988 by 388 university leaders, the Magna Charta now has more than 800 signatories from universities across the world, with new signatories added at each annual conference.

This year's conference will examine the question of academic freedom in the context of power imbalances within universities: whether the academy is equally free for all, and the educational value of that freedom. Further, conference attendees will explore the idea of social responsibility, and how universities can best contribute meaningfully to society.

Working in partnership with [Universities Canada](#), and global associations including the [International Association of Universities](#) and [Scholars at Risk](#), the proceedings from the conference will help inform the eventual development of a new Magna Charta Universitatum.

The 2019 conference and ceremony take place on
16 and 17 October 2019 in Hamilton, Canada,
at McMaster University.

[Registration and information](#)

PARTICIPANTS

Nandini Ramanujam

Associate Professor Nandini Ramanujam is the Executive Director and Director of Programs of the [Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism](#) at McGill University's Faculty of Law. She also directs the International Human Rights Internship Program as well as Independent Human Rights Internships Program. She is the McGill representative for the Scholars at Risk Network and is a member of the Steering Committee of the Scholars at Risk Network, Canada section. [Read more](#)



Angela Campbell

As Associate Provost (Equity and Academic Policies), Professor Angela Campbell is responsible for academic policies and procedures, as well as the oversight of all equity matters, at McGill. [Read more](#)



Anneke Smit

Anneke Smit is Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies (Acting) in the Faculty of Law. Prior to joining Windsor Law she held a Lectureship at the School of Law, University of Reading (UK), where she also completed her PhD. [Read more](#)



Viviana Fernandez

Assistant Director at the Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa

Fernandez represents the University of Ottawa in the



Steering Committee of the Scholars at Risk (SAR) Network -
Canada Section since 2016 and in the SAR's International
Advisory Committee. [Read more](#)

6d. How to build a sustainable SAR program on your campus



The session will explore the characteristics of successful programs in the SAR Network. Participants will be invited to share experiences, concerns and challenges they face to set up or grow a SAR program in their home institutions.

Date: December 9 @ 1pm EST

Participants: All institutional representatives from SAR Canada members

How to participate: The meeting will take place via phone (1800 number provided closer to the date).

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