

AMERICAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY

Committee on International Freedom of Scientists (CIFS)

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J.D. Garcia, Past Chair

John Gillespie, Chair

Pavel Podvig

Ivan Schuller

Sally Seidel

Valerii Vinokour

Yue Wu

The Committee on International Freedom of Scientists, CIFS, monitors issues regarding the human rights of scientists throughout the world. It strives to support scientists who encounter problems in the pursuit of their scientific interests or in communicating with other scientists. CIFS actions include developing sources of information on human rights violations, communicating with governments, courts and prison systems to encourage respect for human rights as guaranteed in national laws and international treaties and to make clear that human rights violations have international visibility. We also communicate with individual scientists and their families to assure them that the international scientific community is aware of their situation and supports them in their efforts.

Efforts on behalf of individuals:

Russia

Several significant cases in Russia reveal systematic intimidation of scientists who, using open information sources have collaborated with foreign researchers. A number of eminent Russian academicians have protested this persecution of scientists. CIFS has been active in writing letters to Russian government officials and to The Council of the Public Chamber of the Parliament of Russia, which is currently reviewing the use and abuse of the "state secret" concept in accusing scientists of treason and espionage. We have supported individual scientists, several of whom have received severe prison sentences.

We have closely followed the cases of Valentin Danilov, Oscar Kaibyshev, and Igor Sutyagin, who have been accused of espionage. In addition to writing letters in support of each of the scientists, CIFS read a letter of support for Igor Sutyagin from the APS President at the annual AAAS Science and Human Rights Program reception. A video recording of the reading of letters of support

were transmitted to his family. Sutyagin's case is currently before the European Court of Human Rights.

Kaibyshev has received a six-year suspended sentence; it is not known if there will be an appeal.

In response to a query regarding our experience with human rights cases in Russia, we provided information to the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, which subsequently issued a report on the fairness of trials in cases of espionage.

USA

In the USA, CIFS has been following problems related to visas, asylum and immigration for scientists. There is serious concern about restrictions and delays for visas for foreign students, researchers and faculty. We are closely following cases of individual scientists currently seeking asylum in the U.S.; some are threatened with deportation.

There has been significant progress in the case of physicist Branislav Djordjevic, whose efforts to avoid deportation and to remain in the US have been supported by CIFS as well as APS itself. Several legal obstacles to his case have been resolved and it is believed that he is likely to be accorded permanent residence.

Iraq

There is evidence that Iraqi scientists, engineers health professionals, and academics have been sought out for intimidation, kidnapping and murder. We have written to both U.S. and Iraqi authorities to encourage efforts to control this serious situation.

Libya

Six medical workers--a Palestinian physician and five Bulgarian nurses--have been accused of deliberately infecting children with HIV in a Libyan hospital; they have been detained since 1999 and sentenced to death for a second time in December 2006. The case will be appealed to the Libyan Supreme Court. Two international teams of medical researchers have investigated the case and have determined that there is strong scientific evidence that the accused could not be responsible for the infections. CIFS has written to the nation's leader, M. Gaddafi, as well to the Libyan Liaison Officer in Washington, the Secretary for Legal Affairs and Human Rights, and the Secretary for Justice and General Security.

Venezuela

Physicist, Claudio Mendoza, a researcher at the Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research (IVIC), was reported to have been threatened with sanctions

and possibly loss of his position because of a published article concerning nuclear research in his country. CIFS has requested clarification of the situation from his laboratory and was informed that an investigation has been initiated. We are following the situation closely as it evolves.

China

CIFS currently monitors three cases in China. Hua Di (a researcher at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University) was detained by authorities during a trip to China in January 1998. He was arrested on charges of revealing state secrets, reportedly for articles he wrote on the Chinese ballistic missile program. Hua Di was tried and sentenced to 15 years in prison. While this sentence was subsequently thrown out, a second trial resulted in a 10-year sentence for 'illegally providing state secrets/intelligence to foreign organizations.'

Jin Haike (Geological Engineer) and Yang Zili (Computer Engineer/Software Developer) were both are detained by police in March 2001. They were later arrested and charged with subversion for having posted information in the Internet expressing their concern for social conditions in China. They were tried in September 2001, but no verdict was announced. Following a new trial, in May 2003, Jin was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment and Yang to 8 years' imprisonment for subversion.

Other

In addition to the cases above, CIFS responded to an appeal on behalf of a Ukrainian physicist who encountered difficulties with medical care and pension support. The intervention of CIFS and other similar groups resulted in an improvement in his situation.

CIFS is also examining an appeal issued by the AAAS on behalf of a Mexican scientist who allegedly was fired from his job because of his human rights activities.

Collaboration Among Scientific Human Rights Organizations

CIFS actively communicates and collaborates with other human rights groups in the international scientific community, including the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program, the Committee on Human Rights of Scientists of the New York Academy of Sciences, The Committee of Concerned Scientists (CCS), and the Scholars at Risk Program. Information exchanged among these organizations has proven to be extremely valuable for our efforts. We are collaborating with the Scholars At Risk (SAR) Program, which finds temporary academic positions for scholars whose safety and research are threatened in their home countries. SAR's director, Robert Quinn, has met with CIFS and we will exchange information on any cases involving scientists.

The Director of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Hans Hogrefe, met with CIFS to describe the Caucus' efforts and to establish communication with CIFS.

John Gillespie,
Chair