

## Online Article

# Safeguarding Academic Freedom in Africa: The 2025 Dar es Salaam Annex to the 1990 Kampala Declaration

The article was originally published as an opinion piece for *African Arguments*.

<https://africanarguments.org/2025/06/safeguarding-academic-freedom-the-dar-es-salaam-annex-to-the-kampala-declaration/>

Around the world, academic freedom in universities is increasingly under threat from the rise of populist regimes, repressive governments and heightened polarisation based on race, religion and other political divides. In China, for example, Pringle and Woodman (2022) have described the state of academic freedom in universities as being caught between a rock and a hard place, owing to increasingly repressive policies and the constant involvement of the government in the internal affairs of universities. In India, there has been a decline in freedom of academic and cultural expression in public universities, which has been exacerbated by the Hindu nationalist, Narendra Modi's election as prime minister since 2014 (Kinzelbach et al. 2023). This has mainly been the case with universities located in minority Muslim states. Recently, the conflict in Gaza has underscored the fragile state of academic freedom in universities in the global North. In the United Kingdom (UK), Germany and the United States (US), some universities, academics and students have faced punitive repercussions for voicing their opposition to the on-

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going atrocities in the world but especially in the so-called middle East. In Germany, such threats have led to a significant decline in the country's position on the 2025 Academic Freedom Index, causing it to fall outside the top 10 per cent. Similarly, recent protests at numerous campuses in the US, along with the subsequent revocation of visas and related rights, based on allegations of antisemitic behaviour, have led to the withdrawal of state funding from major universities, including Harvard. These developments indicate a higher education environment that is increasingly characterised by threats of federal research grants being frozen, loss of tax-exempt status, control over curriculum, and self-censorship, in a nation once regarded as a shining example of democracy.

As in many parts of the world, the transition to democracy in Africa has, unfortunately, not succeeded in safeguarding academic freedom

and institutional autonomy for numerous universities. This issue was underscored during the recent [international conference on academic freedom in Africa](#), held at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania from 29 April to 2 May 2025. The conference was organised by the Senegal-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA).

Under the theme 'Academic Freedom in Africa: Revisiting the Kampala Declaration', participants gathered at this historic university, which had previously been the site of initial debates on academic freedom three decades ago. This was highlighted in the [welcome speech](#) by CODESRIA's Executive Secretary, Godwin Murunga, when he noted:

[the] University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) ignited the pan-African agenda on intellectual freedom. It was through the leadership of its staff union, the University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly (UDASA), that the first conference on advancing intellectual freedom was held here at Dar es Salaam on 19 April 1990.

The 2025 conference attracted more than 169 delegates from various regions of the continent and beyond. The call for papers generated a total of 220 submissions from thirty-six countries. Among these submissions, 23.6 per cent were from female applicants and 76.4 per cent were from male applicants. This gender disparity indicates that the academic freedom research terrain in Africa is still very much male-dominated. Additionally, 76 per cent of the papers were submitted in English, with 38 per cent in French and 2 per cent in Portuguese. The top six countries with the highest number of submissions were Cameroon, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe. After four days of critical discussions, the conference concluded with the review and adoption of the [Dar es Salaam Annex \(2025\) to the Kampala Declaration \(1990\) on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility](#). The final version of the Annex will be presented to the 17<sup>th</sup> CODESRIA General Assembly for final review and adoption in December 2026.

## Key Debates and Critical Engagement

Academic freedom is a vital cornerstone of scholarly pursuit, allowing academics and students to engage in open and rigorous deliberations on any idea or concept without the looming threat of repercussions, censorship or interference from authoritative bodies, whether within the academic institution or outside it. Ali Mazrui posited three fundamental elements that shape the understanding of academic freedom from an African perspective:

[It] involves autonomy to shape the curriculum and syllabus, relative freedom to recruit teachers, and some freedom to

admit students by criteria chosen by universities. Then there is freedom for scholars to decide research priorities and research methods, to publish their research findings, and to publicise their intellectual positions. Finally, there is general freedom of expression for teachers and students as a necessary intellectual infrastructure for mental development and intellectual creativity. (Mazrui 1975: 393)

Mazrui's definition of academic freedom highlights the importance of independent thought, intellectual exploration and the need for meaningful dialogue that reflects the contextual relevance of academic freedom. The advancement of academic freedom plays a pivotal role in realising the economic and social missions of universities and their contributions to communities. It is with this hindsight that Judith Butler states:

Higher education is not only a public good that every state should provide, but higher education based on principles of academic freedom is necessary for an informed public, a public that can understand and evaluate issues of common concern and form judgements on the basis of a knowledgeable understanding of the world. (Butler 2017: 854)

In university spaces, where epistemic debates, democratic principles and social cohesion are constantly threatened by increased polarisation and state influence, safeguarding academic freedom is not merely an institutional necessity but a societal imperative. This freedom enables universities to engage meaningfully with pressing issues, such as governance, human rights and economic inequality, thereby positioning them as vi-

tal contributors to development in their respective societies. In Africa, numerous examples have shown how academic thought intersects with sociopolitical progress, particularly during the third wave of democracy that began in the early 1990s. This period marked the re-introduction of multiparty politics in many countries. For instance, in Zambia, academics and university students played a pivotal role in opposing Kenneth Kaunda's one-party state. Their efforts were essential in pushing for the return of plural politics, ultimately leading to the election of Frederick Chiluba as president in 1991. Similarly, when Chiluba attempted to amend the Constitution to permit a third presidential term, academics and university students again took a stand. Their voices were critical in challenging and resisting this manipulation of the Constitution, illustrating how the voices of academics and students, when aligned with popular struggles, help to safeguard democracy.

The need to protect academic freedom and align it with common good values was a recurring theme at the CODESRIA-organised conference on academic freedom. In his [opening remarks](#), CODESRIA's Executive Secretary, Godwin Murunga, reinforced the need for scholars to organise themselves not just in defence of intellectual freedom but also in exercising responsibility to link their struggles with the popular struggles of the people for freedom, social justice, human dignity and human emancipation. The conference's key themes centred on education management and governance, gender diversity, university associational life for staff and students, knowledge production and the impact of neoliberal forces on academic freedom in African universities.

The conference highlighted that external and internal threats continue to pose significant obstacles to academic freedom in public universities across the continent. Papers focusing on Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda, Eswatini, Zambia and Zimbabwe depicted how political capture of university management weakens academic freedom and university autonomy in African public universities. Despite the existence of 'autonomous structures', such as university councils or senates, governments have often exerted unlimited power over the affairs of universities on the premise that public institutions are dependent on public funding. In Zambia, for instance, the Minister of Education still retains the power to appoint members of university councils in public universities. As a result of such unlimited powers, there have been concerns that the appointment of top university officials is usually characterised by political patronage, where positions like vice chancellors, deputy vice chancellors, registrars and membership to university councils are awarded on account of loyalty to the ruling party. This practice has contributed to suppress academic freedom and institutional autonomy in many universities across the continent, as universities operate under a panoptic gaze, whereby academicians are constantly under surveillance by university management and state security forces.

When academicians are perceived as overly critical of the ruling government, they are often labelled as supporters of opposition parties. This designation carries significant negative repercussions, especially for those who work in public universities in countries with high levels of political intolerance. In such environments, it can lead to diminished opportunities for pro-

motion and funding, as well as social isolation, particularly from management. For academics, this atmosphere can generate insecurity regarding their tenure. As a result, the fear of being branded as opposition party members has compelled some scholars and researchers to self-censor their teaching and research practices, undermining their epistemic capabilities. Consequently, they may refrain from engaging in or commenting on sensitive topics such as human rights violations, tribalism, corruption in public offices, police brutality and other forms of institutional abuse, which could be viewed as politically charged.

The conference also emphasised how the rise of extreme groups has affected academic freedom in certain countries. In the context of South Africa, Pedro Mzileni, from the University of Zululand, highlighted the challenges of coloniality in academic freedom and teaching at a white far-right university, the University of the Free State. Reflecting on his personal experiences at that university, Mzileni expressed concern that academic freedom is increasingly under threat from recent international trends in far-right politics. These movements, rooted in colonial denialism and a phenomenon often referred to as white amnesia, seek to sustain global white supremacy while distorting historical narratives. This distortion aims to preserve colonial legacies and suppress progressive ideas that challenge the atrocities committed against humanity by those in positions of global white power.

In a presentation titled '[Enacting Academic Freedom in the Neoliberal University](#)', Sioux McKenna from Rhodes University emphasised that, at the time of political

independence, African higher education had the potential to serve as a common good for society and the environment. In recent years, universities have missed an opportunity to redefine their role by instead prioritising a neoliberal approach that emphasises skills training and credentialling for industry. McKenna contends that for higher education to reclaim its status as a common good, it must actively safeguard its academic freedoms. This entails critically addressing the influences of state and market imperatives as the academic community seeks to fulfil its responsibilities towards society and the environment.

Additionally, delegates observed that the erosion of academic freedom on the continent has been exacerbated by insufficient funding for research in universities. Because of these funding challenges, African universities have sought partnerships with donors, often from countries in the global North. [Johnson Inshengoma](#) (Catholic University of Mbeya) highlighted that while such donor-funded collaborations have indeed contributed to the enhancement of research capacities in African universities, they have also posed challenges to academic freedom, because donor agencies frequently dictate the research agenda within these institutions.

[Hajer Kratou](#) (Ajman University) emphasised the crucial role of academic freedom in promoting peace across Africa. She urged governments to prioritise the protection of academic freedom, ensuring that universities serve as venues for critical dialogue and as nurturing environments that empower scholars to engage in conflict resolution and foster social cohesion.

## **The Way Forward: From the Kampala Declaration (1990) to the Dar es Salaam Annex (2025)**

The conference culminated with the adoption of the Dar es Salaam Annex (2025) to the 1990 Kampala Declaration. It is hoped that the Annex will reinvigorate the need to safeguard academic freedom on the continent. As highlighted in its preamble, the Dar es Salaam Annex 2025 is:

A clarion call to the intellectuals of Africa to hear the cries of the peoples of the continent—for united action to liberate Africans completely from the clutches of imperialism and to emancipate them as the rightful makers of their own history, sovereign, independent and dignified. This demands nothing less than an All-Africa Intellectual Movement to articulate systematically the struggles of the people and thread together pockets of struggle unfolding in different corners of the continent into a pan-African mass movement.

The Annex comprises nine thematic chapters, interconnected by the imperative to reposition academic freedom as a collective good. The first chapter emphasises the engagement of African intellectuals in popular struggles within their communities. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 underscore the relationship between academic freedom and knowledge production. In particular, Chapter 2 urges African intellectuals to dissociate themselves from the political right and far-right ideologies propagated by certain Western academics, social media platforms and civil society organisations, which primarily serve the interests of the financial oligarchy (Article A11). Moreover, the Annex cau-

tions against the commercialisation of knowledge, advocating for university knowledge to be regarded as a common good. Given the epistemic injustices in knowledge production, Chapter 4 of the Annex underscores the need for promoting African knowledge values. As part of the decolonisation agenda, safeguarding academic freedom recognises the critical need for the African voice in the realm of global knowledge production and politics. Thus, African intellectuals are called to research, study, reclaim and critically develop Afro-centric knowledge, epistemologies and languages.

Furthermore, the Dar es Salaam Annex acknowledges the funding challenges that confront the African higher education system and its impact on academic freedom. In response, Chapter 5 addresses this dilemma by encouraging African academics to resist the interference of donors and other funders in dictating research agendas and the production of knowledge. Additionally, it highlights the urgent need for locally sourced solutions to the funding issues that face universities across the continent.

Chapter 6 emphasises the significance of financial independence while also recognising the value of international collaborations that uphold the rights of individuals engaged in their struggles for freedom, social justice, self-determination and national liberation. Thus, most delegates stressed the importance of decreasing reliance on donor funding by increasing local financial resources. Moreover, the reduction in international aid from major donors, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, should serve as a wake-up call for African states to explore alternative sources of funding.

The final three chapters adopt a broader perspective, concentrating on the fight against discrimination and various forms of prejudice, the application of principles to private institutions, and the responsibilities of higher education institutions. Notably, Chapter 9 seeks to address the internal threats to academic freedom that characterise universities across the continent. It also mandates that public and private higher education institutions, as well as similar entities, adhere to the provisions outlined in the Kampala Declaration of 1990 and the Dar es Salaam Annex of 2025.

During the debate leading up to the adoption of the Annex, several participants raised concerns regarding the modalities for its monitoring and evaluation. They emphasised the necessity of developing indicators and highlighted the importance of universities providing information that could aid in assessing progress on academic freedom across the continent. Some delegates noted that the Annex should broaden its approach to engagement, involving not only non-state institutions but also governments, which are vital stakeholders in promoting academic freedom. Kwadwo Appiagyei-atua from the Africa Coalition for Academic Freedom stressed that while the Annex places a significant emphasis on the responsibilities of academics, it does not clearly define the rights holders and duty bearers. The absence of the state as a duty bearer in the Annex document could complicate the monitoring process. Notwithstanding these concerns, the Dar es Salaam (2025) Annex offers hope for collective efforts and emphasises the urgent need to protect academic freedom across the continent. It is essential to ensure that this agenda transcends CODESRIA and serves as a rallying call for all who



believe in the vital role of higher education for the common good. The success of this initiative relies on the commitment of a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, owners of private higher education institutions, university leaders, research institutes, academics and students. *A luta continua for academic freedom in Africa and beyond!*

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