



An Open Letter to Presidents of Learned Societies, University Leaders and Academics

On Oct. 28, 2020, The Iraqi National Parliament passed the “Foundations of University Degree Equivalency Act”, which represents a substantial rewriting and expansion of the previous instructions for degree equivalence of Arab and Foreign Certificates and Degrees No. 5 of 1976. The Act has provoked crises within the higher education institutions in Iraq by allowing the recognition of foreign higher degrees in ways far from meeting the high standards of previously used to establish Iraqi educational equivalency of university-level degrees. It has made conditions for granting academic titles to members of Parliament, ministers and high-ranking government officials, thus in effect creating a two-tier system for dealing with degree equivalency. It has also allowed several governmental bodies to award academic titles to their employees without giving due importance to the academic qualifications. The Act has also abolished the research thesis as a requirement for the PhD degree and drastically reduced the period of residency at the host country with respect to meeting the requirement for obtaining a degree. Moreover, the Act has ignored the evaluation process which reflects how international qualifications compare to national qualification standards through consideration of the qualification components.

Violating existing regulations and laws and interfering with the academic processes have led to the erosion of academic standards and threaten basic academic freedoms, democratic governance and participation, and, last but not least, the independence of the universities.

We are writing this appeal for solidarity in utmost shock and despair regarding this attack on our higher education system. The Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the university councils and the majority of professors have vehemently opposed this Act but to no avail.

We appeal to you as academics, researchers and concerned individuals to strongly condemn the attack by the Iraqi parliament on higher education and to express support for Iraqi academics endeavouring to protect higher education from further damage to the integrity and values of the education system. We ask you to stand in solidarity with our attempts to defend the independence of the education system that should be free of any interference from political parties in scientific activities and academic decisions.

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