

SUHF expresses a grave concern over the development of academic freedom and calls for its protection and promotion

Academic freedom is widely recognized as a fundamental value for higher education and research, as well as a prerequisite for well-functioning democracies and sustainable social development. This freedom includes the right to independently develop, acquire and apply knowledge and ideas through research, teaching, learning and open discussion, without the influence of scientifically irrelevant ideological, political or commercial interests. It is protected by international law and international principles for education and seen as a fundamental part of our democratic society where it provides citizens the access to independent and reliable knowledge.

SUHF expresses a grave concern over the increasing pressure on academic freedom currently taking place in Europe and globally, not least in areas such as health, equality and climate research. This pressure is manifested through political interference through policy changes and direct violations, censorship and problematic human resources policies at higher education institutions, intolerance and attempts to silence dissenting voices within academia, attacks on academics especially via social media, improper funding relationships with the private sector and security-related restrictions due to geopolitical tensions. Together, these violations pose serious challenges to maintaining academic freedom, conducting essential research and education, governance of higher education institutions, research funding and international academic collaborations. They also erode democracy itself.

Academic freedom needs to be continuously discussed, explained and defended. Everyone entitled to academic freedom should be able to enjoy it, and higher education institutions must take responsibility for fostering a working and learning environment that is inclusive, welcoming, developmental, safe, and secure for all staff and students. Higher education institutions and other actors have a shared responsibility to promote and protect, but also respect, academic freedom. The Swedish Higher Education Ordinance assigns this task to higher education institutions, providing a clear mandate for this statement. The entire sector must strengthen its efforts to protect and promote academic freedom.