



Canadian Association of University Teachers  
Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d'université

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March 16, 2007

The Honourable Peter MacKay, PC MP  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister:

We are writing to you about a situation that has come to our attention with implications for the security of Canadian researchers abroad. It has been alleged that Canada's ambassador to Guatemala, Kenneth Cook, has been spreading misinformation about the work of a York University doctoral candidate: specifically, about that student's efforts to chronicle the evictions of indigenous Mayan Q'eqchi families near the town of El Estor, Guatemala, that took place at the behest of the Compañía Guatemalteca de Niquel, a subsidiary of the Canadian mining company, Skye Resources Inc.

In an open letter dated February 28, 2007, addressed to you, James Lambert and Kenneth Cook, Steven Schnoor (the York doctoral student) and several of his colleagues called upon "Ambassador Cook to provide an account of why he made his statements and to publicly retract them." Furthermore, their letter asked the Government of Canada to investigate this matter and "the broader implications of the ambassador's actions."

As the organization representing 55,000 Canadian university and college academic staff, CAUT does not have a position on the geopolitics of resource extraction. We do, however, have clear and legitimate expectations of the Canadian Government's commitment to free and open inquiry as well as its obligation to safeguard and protect Canadian academics, wherever their research work may take them.

As you can appreciate, the volatile mix of politics and economic interests in the developing world can place Canadian researchers at considerable risk. It is, therefore, imperative that our diplomats exercise the utmost discretion in any statements they may make about the work of Canadian academics abroad, especially when such work could be seen as posing a threat to particular projects, interests, or activities in less economically developed nations.

Consequently, we, too, desire clarification of any statements prejudicial to the work of Steven Schnoor that may have been made by Ambassador Cook or other officials connected with the Canadian embassy in Guatemala.

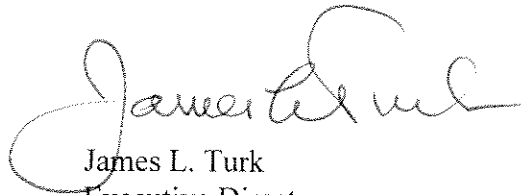
More broadly, we think that this situation points to the potential value for a larger dialogue between your Department and CAUT. International politics and sensitivities are increasingly affecting the academic community, and it could be highly productive for CAUT to work with Department staff on areas of potential concern.

We look forward to your reply both in relation to the situation of Mr. Schnoor and in relation to setting up a discussion between representatives of CAUT and your Department about the academic work outside Canada.

Sincerely,



Greg Allain  
President



James L. Turk  
Executive Director

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cc: James Lambert, Director General, Latin America and Caribbean Bureau, DFAIT  
Kenneth Cook, Canadian Ambassador to Guatemala