



European Association of Development Research and  
Training Institutes

Association Européenne des Instituts de Recherche et  
de Formation en Matière de Développement

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 Prof Henning Melber (PhD)  
EADI President

To  
Prof Wendy Thomson, CBE  
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3 November 2020

Prof Jo Fox  
School of Advanced Study  
University of London  
[Jo.Fox@sas.ac.uk](mailto:Jo.Fox@sas.ac.uk)

## Re: Announcement to close the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICwS)

Dear Prof Thomson,  
Dear Prof Fox,

As current President of the European Association for Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI) I take the liberty to share with you my concerns regarding the plans to close the ICwS. While the Institute is no member of EADI, we have several internationally recognised Development Studies Institutes based in the UK among our more than hundred institutional members.

Our research agenda and commitment to global governance and development is close enough to that of the ICwS to justify the articulation of such concerns. ICwS has over decades established itself as a renowned asset when it comes to matters of global governance. Its track record in a diversity of regional and area studies is a clear indication of the nature of its focus on global studies, given the Commonwealth as a historical product of the British empire. Coming to terms with this legacy in current times is an obvious challenge and task, to which ICwS has made significant contributions discussing the continued task for decolonisation of societies beyond formal state sovereignty.

In particular its recent and ongoing commitment to the promotion and protection of media freedom as a specific area has produced relevant contributions to democracy, human rights and good governance. - All strengthening the Agenda 2030 in pursuance of Sustainable Development Goals.

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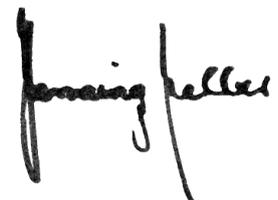
But ICwS is also a widely recognised brand name. I remember the role it played as an intellectual hub in the international support to the anti-Apartheid struggle in Southern Africa. There is social capital vested in the Institute. Its closing would not only end important academically as well as politically relevant scholarly engagements, to which a wide international network contributes. It would also damage the reputation of the School of Advanced Study and London University.

Like many others I have reacted with disbelief and shock to the announcement that the Institute will be closed. I urge you to reconsider this decision not only in the interest of the ICwS staff but of a wider community of concerned scholars and other beneficiaries of the Institute's work. And not least in the interest of London University, whose reputation would suffer damage not only for the decision but also the approach that had been chosen.

If for economic reasons a status quo is in the long term untenable, then at least you should provide ICwS and its international supporters the opportunity to adjust within a specified period of several years before creating a *fait accompli* without any prior opportunity given to a rescue mission.

I am aware that I am not alone in sharing such concerns and hope these will motivate you to consider alternatives.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Heller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

President of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institute (EADI)  
Former Director of the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU) in Windhoek  
Former Research Director and Senior Research Associate of the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala  
Director emeritus and Senior Advisor to the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in Uppsala  
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