

30 October 2020

Dear Vice Chancellor and Professor Fox,

As one of the founding institute directors of the School of Advanced Study, I share with you the strong desire that SAS should flourish. This message explains why I believe that the survival of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies can help that to happen. In recent years, I have held the Emeka Anyaoku Professorship there. I am now ‘emeritus’, but I have remained very active promoting research and raising funds for it, so I am up to date.

You will have received a letter from four former Secretaries General of the Commonwealth, another on behalf of 25 Commonwealth organisations, and further messages including one from the Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation – all arguing for the survival of the Institute. You will also shortly see a letter in *The Times*, bearing over 180 signatures, making that case. This message sets out several reasons why the Institute’s survival is important for SAS.

***The Institute is crucial in enabling SAS to span the social sciences and humanities***

The Institute has always excelled in work on both the humanities and social sciences. That was apparent the last time SAS made submissions to a research assessment exercise in the 1990s – which I coordinated for SAS – when it received the highest scores in both history and political studies. The MA in ‘Understanding and Securing Human Rights’ attracted co-sponsorship from the Secretary General of Amnesty International because it was only the second such degree in the world to be anchored not just in the study of law but in the humanities (philosophy, history, etc.) and the social sciences (sociology, politics, etc.) That enabled us to attract exceptional students from diverse countries across and beyond the Commonwealth who were not lawyers, and to gain funding for them from the UK Foreign Office and various foundations. I founded that degree programme with encouragement from my former colleagues at Harvard Law School, who felt that their human rights MA was too narrowly based in legal studies. The proposal to move our MA to IALS raises concerns over the possible dilution of its multi-disciplinary character.

If the Institute had not bridged the humanities and social sciences, it could not have persuaded Yale University and the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (that country’s premier research institution) into a research partnership with SAS (funded by the AHRC) which spanned both sets of disciplines. (Two books emerged from that partnership.)

Over the years, the Institute’s strength in both sets of disciplines has enabled it to obtain several major grants from both the Economic and Social Research Council (see below) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The proposal to close the Institute raises concerns that SAS may increasingly appear to be overwhelmingly a centre for the humanities.

### ***It is through the Institute that SAS is linked to major international research centres***

Formidable research centres across the world see themselves linked to SAS thanks to research collaborations with the Institute. They include the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Capital Development Fund, and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (whose director was a member of our 20-member team in the recent BRICS project). They also include the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; on multiple occasions, the World Bank; Sida, Sweden's international development agency; and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (founded and housed within the Institute for many years before maturing to stand on its own in its New Delhi headquarters).

They also include the *Centre de Recherches Internationales*, and *Sciences Po* in Paris; Heidelberg and Bielefeld Universities in Germany; the Universities of Turin and Pavia in Italy; the Universities of Amsterdam and Leiden in the Netherlands, plus the International Institute for Social Studies in the Hague; Yale, Columbia and Harvard Universities in the US; the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, India's (separate) National Institute of Advanced Study, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Savitribai Phule Pune University, and the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore; the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh (where three Institute Ph.Ds, funded as a team by the Ford and Asia Foundations, teach); Simon Fraser University in Canada; the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (a partner in our recent BRICS project) and Renmin University in Beijing (which translated and disseminated our findings from that project); the Federal University of Pernambuco in Brazil; the University of Nairobi; the Centre for Democratic Development and the University of Ghana in Accra; and in South Africa, the Universities of Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town, and Rhodes University (whose name may soon change).

It is already apparent that if the Institute is closed, SAS will suffer a damaging reaction from these centres.

### ***The proposal from SAS overlooks the Institute's crucial work on South Africa and India***

During South Africa's *apartheid* era, the Institute was the secret repository for Nelson Mandela's papers – including, in his own hand, his famous speech from the dock at Rivonia. Thanks to the extraordinary work and convening power of Director Shula Marks, the Institute was also the leading centre in the global north for research on South and southern Africa – spanning the humanities and social sciences. Within the Institute, the ANC lawyer and future Constitutional Court Justice Albie Sachs drafted large sections of the new constitution of democratic South Africa. These ties have been sustained to the present day. South Africa was one of the four BRICs countries analysed in the largest research project in the ESRC/DFID-funded 'Rising Powers' initiative. South African scholars were part of the 20-member team assessing the policies of four governments to tackle poverty and inequality. I lectured on national television in South Africa on our findings, explained their implications for South Africa to officials in their president's office, and I am a Fellow of the Johannesburg Institute of Advanced Study. The Institute of Commonwealth Studies and thus SAS is now

part of a consortium including the University of Pretoria in a major research initiative to counter discrimination and economic inequality against LGBT+ people in sub-Saharan Africa, funded by a £12 million pound grant from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Since the 1960s, the Institute has had a formidable record as a centre for the study of India's democracy. This began under the Directorship of W.H. Morris-Jones, the leading authority on the subject in Europe, and a pioneer in that field. It has continued to the present day. Five successive editors from Morris-Jones onward of the main commonwealth politics journal (*Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*), which is closely associated with the Institute, have been India specialists. I am the only scholar of any nationality to be invited to spend a week following an Indian Prime Minister through his daily routines. Eight of my books have focused on Indian democracy. And today, along with the President of the French political science association, I coordinate the main analyses in the global north of the suffocation of Indian democracy by the current regime. India specialists from the Institute have spoken on multiple occasions to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, staff at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and the British High Commission in New Delhi. With support from the Ford Foundation and other agencies, Drs. William Crawley and David Page (Institute Fellows and former executives at the BBC World Service) developed a network of journalists across India and South Asia. They analysed the implications of new digital technology for the media, and sought to promote media freedom. A well-regarded website and an important book emerged. Most recently, the British Academy awarded a fellowship to a young Indian research fellow of the Institute to develop a project which combines political science with historical analysis.

***Do not overlook the Institute's strong outreach on key themes -- in and beyond Britain***

The Institute has never been just a centre for rather conventional studies of the British Empire and Commonwealth. We have worked in that sphere, and interacted constructively with Commonwealth institutions in that vein, as the letter from the Secretaries General indicates. But since the 1970s – even when it was not a matter of public concern -- ‘black history’ and issues of social justice for people of colour in Britain and the Empire/Commonwealth have been assiduously explored at the Institute under the ground breaking leadership of Marika Sherwood. That work has had an impact among scholars and activists in Britain, the US and across sub-Saharan Africa.

The Institute's engagement with Commonwealth diasporas in Britain also has a long history. The Institute was the key research centre in the global north for the anti-*apartheid* movement, and its engagement with the South African diaspora continues. It has also engaged with South Asian diasporas and issues that concern them. The Institute organised a very well attended conference to take “Bloomsbury to Brick Lane”, to commemorate the Bangladesh liberation war, at which witnesses to those dreadful events (including the BBC's Mark Tully) took part. More recently, this was followed by a well attended “Brick Lane to Bloomsbury” exercise, in partnership with SOAS and a Bangladeshi-expatriate foundation, at

which I gave the keynote lecture on the life of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I have also long interacted with the Indian diaspora – so that for example, I was the only non-Indian to be included in the official Indian delegation to a memorial meeting for Rajiv Gandhi at the House of Commons.

***The Institute can play a key role in fund raising***

The Institute's record at obtaining sizeable grants in recent years is very strong. We have a formidable capacity to obtain research funds for work in both the humanities and the social sciences – and for projects that include both sets of disciplines. Major grants from the AHRC include support for the recent oral history project which one eminent colleague has described as the most important research project in our field since the landmark 'British Documents on the End of Empire' exercise, in which Institute scholars also played a role. The ESRC awarded the largest grant in its major 'Rising Powers' initiative to our BRICS project which has led to the publication of five book-length texts. And the AHRC grant for the research partnership with Yale and the Indian Institute of Advanced Study funded work in both the social sciences and the humanities. I am told that in one recent year, the Institute raised more research money than the whole of SOAS.

We also believe, partly at Lord Desai's urging, that we can generate contributions from alumni and friends of the Institute. Lord Desai has experience of such an effort at the LSE and will assist. And since the 1970s, I have worked with Yale University (where I began my career as Secretary to the Division of the Humanities and deputy head of the Office for Foundations) in similar efforts to raise funds. Our latest such exercise at Yale, during the last one year, raised \$719 million. No British institution can reap such rich rewards, but we at the Institute believe that we can make significant headway.

I hope that this message shows that if the Institute of Commonwealth Studies were closed, SAS – to which we are all deeply committed – would lose something of great value.

Sincerely,

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