

No identification obligation on our universities

To: Robbert Dijkgraaf, Minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap

We are very concerned about [the proposals from parliament](#) to suppress protests at universities, as well as the already approved [motion of members van der Plas en van Zanten](#) to insist on applying and enforcing an identification obligation at universities and universities of applied sciences. An enforced identification obligation on campus would hinder the university's function as a public institution, endanger academic freedom, limit the freedom of speech and the right to protest, and lastly create an unsafe environment for students and staff, not in the least precarious students and staff such as in the case of racialized groups. These concerns are exacerbated by the general tone of the parliamentary debate concerning campus protests, where the possibility of prohibiting protests at universities is openly discussed. Politicians have used escalating language with regards to the protests at Roeterseiland, and far-right agitators attacked our students there. We urge the minister to protect the academic freedom, the democratic right to protest, the right to assembly and freedom of speech, as well as the safety of our universities' staff and students.

We urge the minister:

- Not to enact an identification obligation at our universities.
- To refuse to enact any policy that strips the rights of staff and students to peaceful protest or threatens their academic freedom.
- To oppose the political rhetoric used in parliament that equates protests against the genocide in Gaza with antisemitism. There are many Jewish students and staff at the forefront of the cease fire and Palestine solidarity protests. Jewish students and staff are not protected, but harmed by this policy.
- To oppose any disciplinary actions against students and staff related to non-violent Palestine solidarity protests and speech.
- To oppose the deployment of police on campus to evict peaceful protesters.

Why is this important?

An identification obligation would cause harm to the academic community in four ways.

First, it hinders the university's function as a public institution. This motion proposes to deny access to campus to anyone who isn't a student or staff member at that university. Our universities serve a public cause. The public should be welcome. Universities should be a place where knowledge and ideas are exchanged between members of different universities, as well as with those outside of the academic community.

Second, the identification obligation endangers academic freedom. Students and staff should be able to move around and exchange knowledge and ideas without the feeling of being monitored. The obligation to identify gives rise to the idea that students and staff are surveilled because of exchanging specific political ideas and opinions. This is exacerbated by

the tone of the parliamentary debate, where the prohibition of discussions and protests on Palestine is openly discussed. The university has to remain a place where knowledge and ideas can be exchanged without political interference.

Third, the identification obligation and other proposals do not fit a liberal democratic society, where freedom of speech, the right to protest and the right to assembly should be protected. [The use of surveillance has an intimidating effect on protesters, even more so for those in more vulnerable positions in society or at university.](#) The discussion of academic freedom, free speech and hate speech are purposefully conflated in the parliamentary discussions, while [they should be kept separate](#). The right to protest is not incompatible with a rejection of any discriminatory, racist, antisemitic, islamophobic or hate speech. The claim that any of the protests have been antisemitic needs to be carefully investigated, while acknowledging that the use of Palestine flags, calls for BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions), slogans and keffiyas are not in itself hate speech or antisemitic. Let it be known that there is no place for antisemitism, islamophobia, or any other type of hate speech in our universities.

Fourth, the identification obligation is detrimental to a safe academic environment. As an academic community, we value the minister's [commitment to improving social safety at our universities](#). The identification obligation directly damages social safety at universities. Students and staff should not be considered security threats, should not be monitored, and should be supported to have difficult discussions with each other in a non-violent dialogue space. Policy that is specifically aimed to prohibit pro-Palestine protests is discriminatory and undermines the core values of our institute. Any policy that limits the right to protest for a single group of people limits freedom for all. It contributes to a feeling of unsafety for everyone.

Lastly, we want to emphasize that we see this motion as part of a trend of politicians wanting to exert influence in order to limit dialogue and protest at our universities. A trend that also includes the increasing use of police by university boards to (violently) evict students and staff from campus. We urge the minister to defend academic independence from political power and to defend students from police action.

If you are part of a collective and would like to support this call, please contact: info@zeropointseven.nl