

Our Rector is proudly allowing space for genocide. We refuse.

Late last night, the Rectors of the Dutch universities made a public statement committing to not cutting ties with Israeli institutions. We, the students and staff of Tilburg University in solidarity with Palestine, condemn this cowardly statement. Wim van de Donk no longer speaks for his own academic community at Tilburg University.

After 17 days of encamping on campus, months of negotiations with the university and over a year of advocating for Palestine at Tilburg University, we are outraged by the Dutch Rectors' unilateral decision to not cut ties with Israel. The students, after facing censorship and repression for months, have had their demands publicly muzzled. The staff, who despite facing pressure not to speak up have publicly stood for Palestine, are now being told by their own university that their voices do not matter. The expert advisory committee, formed by our Rector Wim van de Donk himself, is sidelined and not even allowed enough time to issue their advice. **In the name of academic freedom, the entire academic community is ignored and subdued by incompetent university administrators.**

Here at Tilburg University, and as quoted in the letter, we supposedly pride ourselves on core values that are so fundamental to our society: freedom, justice and respect for human rights. In its insistence on maintaining its bloodsoaked ties with Israeli institutions complicit in genocide, Tilburg University has betrayed these values and shown itself to be a supporter of human rights violations, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing.

#### **Advisory committee? Sidelined and used as a diversion.**

After insistent action and pressure from its own students and staff, Tilburg University decided to form an [Advisory Committee on Collaborations](#) in order to critically assess its ties to Israeli institutions, which we have proven time and time again, are complicit in genocide. While this was not enough for us, we viewed this as a step in the right direction. Wim van de Donk expressed to us that as he and his Board were not experts, they could not logically make such a decision to cut ties with Israel. We ask if Wim van de Donk has now come across newfound expertise allowing him to confidently and expertly hold on to ties with genocide, or if the students, staff, and experts of this university are all being lied to by its authoritative head. We fail to see the logic or rationality of forming an independent committee to critically analyze our complicity in genocide only to then publicly express no interest in this committee's investigation or findings. We cannot see the academic freedom professed by our university's administrators in action. We condemn the use of this committee as a distraction while the Rector made plans to announce a public rejection of our rightful demands.

#### **Academic freedom? Misleadingly weaponised.**

It was expressed in the letter that the "freedom to research, think and debate, even if that rubs with our and other people's deepest beliefs" is a core value that Wim van de Donk stands for as the first signatory of the open letter. We presented him and our entire academic community with

[extensive and highly detailed research about the atrocities the state of Israel is committing and how Israeli institutions with which Tilburg University has partnerships with assist and partake in these crimes](#). The facts are clear and there is no need for further research to conclude that we are not only normalizing genocide but supporting it by preserving these ties. Academic freedom would mean critically assessing these ties and cutting them. Academic freedom would mean listening to students, staff, and the University's own expert committee before making a decision that affects the entire academic community. What academic freedom is not is the Rectors' expression that no decision would be taken to cut ties with Israel unless dictated as such by the government. This is a clear display that the Dutch Rectors have no backbone and believe not in academic freedom but rather in undemocratic "genocide management".

### **Individual scientists? Lies from the Rectors.**

The Rectors proclaim that "we do not want to isolate Israeli scientists". We have made it explicitly clear time and time again that our [PACBI](#)-adherent boycott demands do NOT target individual scientists and academics. Our boycott targets collaborations with institutions that we have proven to be complicit in genocide, war crimes, and human rights violations in Gaza and all across Palestine. In fact, it is the same [Israeli institutions we call to boycott that target and suppress critical voices](#) against the genocide in Gaza. It is us, the student movement for Palestine, that [invites and platforms critical Israeli scholars like Maya Wind](#), who stands with the academic boycott of Israel. We firmly reject this purposefully misleading reframing of our calls for boycott. Our negotiators and even professors have expressed personally to Wim van de Donk multiple times that our boycott does not target individuals - to frame our boycott calls in this way is not only cowardly but also dishonest and lacks integrity.

### **Values? Thrown in the trash.**

Tilburg University prides itself on its [four core values](#), its four C's: Caring, Curious, Connected, and Courageous. Tilburg University cannot claim to uphold any of its values with its decision not to cut ties with Israel. How can we consider ourselves Curious when we ignore overwhelmingly evident research showing the complicity of our Israeli partners in genocide? How can we consider ourselves Connected when we are partnered with institutions that actively suppress their critical anti-genocide voices? How can we call ourselves Courageous when we fear the powers that be so much that we refuse to take any critical action without a directive from the government? How can we call ourselves Caring when we as a university clearly do not care in the slightest about the televised murder of tens of thousands of Palestinian men, women, and children, at the hands of Israel?

We also cannot consider our university a democratic space any longer. We now have an advisory committee charged with rigorously investigating our ties with Israel, a [university council that wishes to critically discuss](#) our ties with Israel, over [75 professors and academics of our own university](#) publicly expressing support for our demands (and dozens more doing so

privately), and a [student encampment that has been strongly standing for 17 days](#) in defiance of our ties to Israel and in solidarity with our Palestinian people in Gaza and Palestine. Our Rector has taken the unilateral decision that all of these invested parties and stakeholders, including his own students, are not worth consideration.

### **Tilburg University, it's time for a reckoning.**

As a university and an academic community, we genuinely need to consider our actions and next steps in this fiasco. We find it unacceptable that our own university's Rector is comfortable publicly rejecting our demands, preemptively overruling his own expert committee, ignoring the rightful calls of his own students and staff, and making such key decisions wholly undemocratically. Deans, professors, student parties, study associations, university councilors, faculty leaders, students ... are you truly fine with this status quo? We are not.

Our liberated zone has not only physically liberated a section of our university, but has also exposed the deep moral failure that has taken root at Tilburg University. It has provoked questions and discussions that begin the struggle of liberating our university from complicity in genocide. We call on you all to join us in this struggle.

In solidarity,  
Palestine Solidarity Tilburg