

Dutch universities order staff to reveal their ties to Jewish and Israeli groups

Cnaan Liphshiz February 11, 2022



Former Dutch Prime Minister Dries van Agt welcomes a journalist into his home in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, April 6, 2008. (Cnaan Liphshiz)

([JTA](#)) — At the behest of a pro-Palestinian organization whose critics say is antisemitic, administrators at more than a dozen Dutch universities are instructing their staff to list their interactions with Israeli and Jewish organizations.

The order followed a request sent last month by The Rights Forum, a pro-Palestinian advocacy group, to the offices of multiple universities. The universities are gathering the information because the group's request was certified as what is known in the Netherlands as a WOB request, meaning a query certified by the country's prosecution service under a 1991

freedom of information law and binding on public or state-funded organizations.

It is unclear whether the universities will complete the full request by passing on the information to The Rights Forum.

[In the request, Gerard Jonkman, director of The Rights Forum, wrote that under the WOB request, he is seeking documents or information on “Institutional ties with Israel universities, institutions and businesses and with organizations that propagate support for the State of Israel.”](#)

Among the dozens of entities Jonkman listed are Elbit, the Israeli weapons and defense systems producer, Christians for Israel, and a right-wing, pro-Israel Dutch-Jewish association.

But the list also includes mainstream Jewish entities from the Netherlands and beyond that do not define themselves as Israeli or solely focused on Israel.

Those groups include the Anti-Defamation League, the Central Jewish Board of the Netherlands, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, B’nai B’rith and even the office of the Dutch government’s own National Coordinator for Fighting Antisemitism, which is headed by Edo Verdonner, who is Jewish.

Reports about the list in [NIW, the Dutch-Jewish weekly, and other publications prompted strongly-worded condemnations by Jewish groups and community leaders against The Rights Forum.](#) The group was co-founded by Dries van Agt, a former prime minister of the Netherlands who has often been accused of spreading antisemitic ideas (including, in 2017, by [The Central Jewish Board of the Netherlands](#)), though he says this allegation is meant to silence his criticism of Israel.

“The clear inference is that some shadowy Zionist/Jewish cabal is operating in the Dutch university system. This reeks of antisemitism, but it comes as no surprise to me given this group’s reputation,” Dutch Chief Rabbi Binyomin Jacobs said in a statement Wednesday.

“What really concerns me is the number of universities that were so compliant with such a transparently antisemitic request. It reminds us that most mayors cooperated during the occupation to pass on the names of their Jewish citizens to the Germans,” added Jacobs.

The Rights Forum has not immediately replied to a request by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency to respond to the criticism.

[Van Agt recently accused Israeli settlers of routinely poisoning their Palestinian neighbors, prompting critics to say he was reviving Medieval antisemitic blood libels.](#)

In 2008, [he compared Israel to Nazi Germany](#) and [spoke at a rally in Rotterdam that featured a televised address by a leader of Hamas](#), the Palestinian militant group considered a terrorist organization by the United States, Israel and others.

Van Agt has also said [that the Jews “should have been given a piece of land” in Germany](#) instead of Israel. In 2017, he praised the Dutch Labour party for being “good for the Palestinians despite the strong Jewish lobby” in its ranks, according to the [Central Jewish Board of the Netherlands](#). And as the country’s justice minister in the 1970s, [he cited his “Aryan” roots in explaining his plan to pardon four Nazi war criminals due to health reasons.](#)