

Dear Sir or Madam,

With this letter, we would like to grant our support to the association Free Palestine Maastricht (FPM) against the accusations made in the newspaper The Observant. Indeed, an article on Antisemitism at Maastricht University accuses FPM of hate speech against Israel. We would like to take a stand in this debate as Jewish students, but also as enthusiastic participants in the events of FPM. The organization's events bring a crucial input in order to have a discussion about Israel among students of Maastricht University, by bringing new perspective onto one's perception of the conflict. First of all, we have never felt unwelcomed or stigmatized by the members of the association, it is quite the opposite. FPM has welcomed Jewish/ Israeli students to make speeches at protests and has valued the contribution of Jewish students in discussions on the situation in Palestine.

All in all, being an organization that defends the rights of Palestinians, it seems logical that FPM presents critical views on Zionism and the consequences of Zionism on the lives of Palestinians. Nevertheless, FPM makes a clear distinction between Zionism and Judaism on their social media pages. The discussions are never about Judaism but about Zionism and Israel as a country. Zionism as a political movement needs to be criticized on the same level as any other political movements. Like stated in the article, accusing Free Palestine Maastricht of Antisemitism can be considered as misinformation that obscures the reality in Palestine with accusations of Antisemitism. In fact, the debates happening during FPM's events are crucial in order to discuss the conflict in depth. Critical analysis, which is valued within Maastricht University, pushes students to engage in discussions with all the cards in hand. The events proposed by FPM hold information that is not necessarily covered by mainstream media, like the situation of Palestinian women, the treatment of Palestinians after the second Intifadah, ect. Free Palestine Maastricht gives a proportional answer to the political international

stance, that largely supports the State of Israel through programmes of exchange or economic treaties.

Moreover, on a more personal note, the discussions and events organized by FPM enabled us to engage more critically with our own environment and perceive the reality taking place in Palestine. By this we mean the apartheid, the war crimes, the executions, the torture and oppressions of Palestinians. This needs to be discussed not only among non-Jews/Israelis, but especially among Jews/Israelis in order to lead to new perspectives on an issue that might affect them.

Growing up as Jewish persons or having family in Israel, the perspective on the conflict can be quite limited and one sided. FPM has proposed screenings of documentaries that are censored by the State of Israel such as *Jenin Jenin*, which enabled interesting conversations not only on the content of the movie but also why it has been censored. The organization brings the possibility to discuss topics that wouldn't have been possible to discuss otherwise in such an open way, like in the case of *Jenin Jenin*. This documentary specifically shows the suffering of Palestinians, and how rough the living situation has been and still is in Palestine, a situation that should be known by everyone.

We are extremely angry and sad about the attacks that Ethan received in the past months and find him courageous to speak up against these intimidations. While Antisemitism is an important issue to raise whenever it is relevant like in the direct attacks that Ethan received, discussing the legitimacy of the state of Israel to perpetuate crimes against the Palestinian population does not imply a criticism of Judaism or Jews. One might indeed feel unwelcomed or unseen in a discussion where the State of Israel as it is nowadays is criticized only if they are not willing to accept the reality of the situation and recognize the atrocities committed by the Israeli army and politicians. Nevertheless, it is not FPM's role to restrain from

criticizing Israel in a context where they aim to raise awareness on the situation of Palestinians.

Free Palestine Maastricht is one of the many organizations around the globe that organizes events around Palestine and contributes to a global discussion about the issue. The organization "Ifnotnoworg" is also part of this movement, and while they openly criticize Zionism and the Israeli actions in Palestine, they affirm their Jewish Identity and their positions in the conflict. Here the narrative is quite clear: one can criticize Zionism and be Jewish at the same time and admit that the Israeli State commits immoral and destructive actions against Palestinians. One should be able to admit that the consequences of Zionism alongside with other factors resulted in oppression of Palestinians, and that this should be criticized, especially in the current context.

Jewish students can feel confident in raising their voice and having discussions about Palestine in the context of Free Palestine Maastricht with respect and calm, and one should discuss with members of the organization before accusing them of being Anti-Semitic, since this might potentially affect their relation with Maastricht University.

Thank you.