

## **Administrative partnerships with institutions in conflict areas scrutinised; international exchange and cooperation individual academics guaranteed**

Maastricht University (UM) is working on a tool to help make an informed assessment of whether, and if so to what extent, partners with whom we have an administrative cooperation in areas with large-scale conflict are involved in violations of fundamental human rights standards. The exchange of knowledge and collaboration between individual academics at the university and their international colleagues in those areas is not affected.

UM is committed to promoting academic cooperation between our academics and their colleagues around the world. Science is pre-eminently international and free, and universities worldwide acknowledge and defend this fundamental value. UM also works with partners in unsafe or troubled areas where governments or other non-state actors violate fundamental human rights standards. Our aim here is to continue to share knowledge as academic institutions and stand for the protection of fundamental human rights. At the same time, we also feel a responsibility to evaluate our administrative partnerships on aspects relating to security and the possible role of partners in contributing to fundamental human rights violations. Finding the right balance can at times be a struggle for universities. We stand for academic freedom, but violent conflicts around the world constantly make us think about the responsibility we can and want to take as knowledge institutions.

The university has for some time now been working on developing its own guideline to evaluate administrative partnerships in light of potential contributions to violations of fundamental human rights by our partners, a so-called *human rights due diligence assessment tool*. In addition to existing national guidelines around knowledge security, which we of course also know and follow, we are more keenly aware than ever of our moral compass. We do not want to be administratively linked in any way to institutions that are later found to have fuelled potentially life-threatening and degrading conflict situations. Further development of the human rights due diligence assessment tool required for this purpose will be completed in the coming months.

The Executive Board and the deans have already taken a decision that will become part of the further development of this tool in areas with large-scale conflict. In such areas - starting with an initial focus on the Middle East conflict - in which it is currently impossible to determine how academic institutions might be contributing to fundamental human rights violations, Maastricht University is freezing administrative cooperation for the time being. Specifically, this freeze means that UM 'locks in' the status quo with an institution and no new cooperation initiatives are started.

During the administrative cooperation freeze, however, dialogue with the board of the institution in question remains ongoing. Again, cooperation between individual academics remains unaffected. In this way, the mutual relationship between the institutions can be assessed with great care and after the application of the soon to be adopted tool, it can be determined whether the freeze can be lifted.

UM is a university with a distinctly international and inclusive nature. Promoting human rights worldwide and countering hatred in any form are necessarily linked to our social responsibility. A lively culture of debate, with plenty of room for safe dialogue, respect for everyone's point of view and the ability to listen to each other, is characteristic of our academic community. In the coming

period, we will intensify that dialogue across our entire institution. Everyone has a voice in this. It is of the utmost importance that we hear it.

Read [here](#) the detailed memo for more information.