



Joint Statement

21 May 2026

On the Arrest of Two Dutch Lawyers During a Peaceful Protest near the Dutch Parliament

The European Democratic Lawyers (AED -EDL), The European Association of Lawyers for Democracy & Human Rights (ELDHD) and the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL) express their deep concern regarding the arrest of two Dutch lawyers during a peaceful protest near the Dutch Parliament (Tweede Kamer) in The Hague. According to reports, the lawyers were participating as legal observers in a non-violent demonstration linked to solidarity with Palestine when they were detained by police authorities.

The demonstration was organized to call the urgent attention of Dutch politicians, the government and parliament to the military intervention carried out by the Israeli army against a large group of activists who were attempting to reach Gaza by sea. After the activists were taken from international waters, including several Dutch nationals reportedly held incommunicado at an unknown location, the demonstrators sought to demand immediate political action and protection for those unlawfully detained.

The protest took place at a location of obvious political relevance: the House of Representatives. Participants, ranging from young people to elderly demonstrators, had gathered peacefully to express their concern and to call on the Dutch authorities to respond to Israel's ongoing violations of international law, including the blockade of Gaza, the denial of basic necessities, the killing of civilians, and the continued disregard for decisions and principles of international courts.

We are alarmed by reports that, instead of facilitating the exercise of the right to demonstrate, the police surrounded the group, failed to give clear and effective instructions, refused meaningful communication, and suddenly announced the arrest of everyone present. Demonstrators were reportedly pushed together into a confined space, held for a long period in cold, rain and wind, and then transported by bus to the ADO stadium at the edge of the city, where they were later released.

We are especially disturbed by the treatment of two observing lawyers, Hans Gaasbeek and Anne van Schaik, who were present on behalf of the Vereniging Sociale Advocatuur Nederland to monitor respect for fundamental rights. Despite clearly identifying themselves as legal observers, they were also detained, arrested and removed together with the demonstrators. The refusal of the police, the command structure and the Mayor's representatives to engage with observing lawyers is unacceptable in a democratic society governed by the rule of law.

The presence of lawyers at demonstrations is not an obstacle to public order. On the contrary, it is an important safeguard for fundamental rights. Treating legal observers as if their role were irrelevant sends a dangerous message, both to demonstrators and to those who monitor state conduct.

We are further concerned by reports of masked police officers, aggressive pushing, the absence of clear warnings or lawful instructions, and the apparent refusal to explain the legal basis for the mass arrest and removal of demonstrators. Such conduct has an intimidating effect and risks discouraging people from exercising their right to protest.

The signatories of this statement recall that the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression are fundamental democratic rights protected under the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Lawyers, like all citizens, have the right to participate in peaceful public demonstrations without fear of intimidation, arbitrary arrest, or reprisals.

The arrest of legal professionals engaged in peaceful protest raises serious concerns regarding the shrinking space for democratic expression in Europe, particularly in relation to solidarity with the Palestinian people and opposition to the ongoing atrocities in Gaza. Across Europe, we are witnessing an increasing pattern of restrictions, surveillance, and criminalization targeting activists, students, journalists, and lawyers who express support for Palestinian rights.

The signatories further recall the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, in particular Article 23, which affirms that lawyers are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association, and assembly, and have the right to take part in public discussion concerning the law, the administration of justice, and the promotion and protection of human rights.

These principles is also enshrined in article 7 of Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer signed on the 13 May 2025 by Netherlands which clearly state the right of lawyers to individually and collectively, and of professional associations to promote the rule of law and adherence to it, to take part in public discussion on the substance, interpretation and application of existing and proposed legal provisions, judicial decisions, the administration of and access to justice and the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as to make proposals for reforms concerning these matters

The use of police powers against peaceful demonstrators — especially against members of the legal profession — risks creating a chilling effect on democratic participation and undermines the rule of law. Measures restricting demonstrations must remain strictly necessary and proportionate. Peaceful protest cannot be treated as a threat to public order merely because it expresses political dissent.

The signatories therefore call on the Dutch authorities to:

- Respect and protect the right to peaceful protest and freedom of expression ;
- Ensure that lawyers are able to exercise their civic and professional rights without intimidation or arrest;
- Drop any charges or proceedings which could arise solely from participation in peaceful protest;
- Refrain from the growing criminalization of solidarity movements connected to Palestine.
- To launch an investigation to identify the law enforcement officers and politicians responsible for the violation of the rights of the demonstrators and the participating lawyers, and to hold them criminally accountable.

At a moment when the credibility of international justice is under profound attack, protecting the right to dissent is more essential than ever, AED stands in solidarity with the arrested lawyers and with all those defending democratic freedoms, human rights, and international law