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wcaa
World Council
of Anthropological
Associations

**To The Honorable
Annemie Turtelboom, Ministre de l'Intérieur**

Cellule stratégique et Secrétariat de la Ministre de l'Intérieur
Rue de la Loi 2
1000 Bruxelles
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E-mail min.annemie.turtelboom@ibz.fgov.be

CC:

**The Honorable
Yves Leterme, Premier Ministre, chargé de la Coordination de la Politique de
migration et d'asile**

Organes stratégiques et Secrétariat du Premier ministre
Rue de la loi 16
1000 Bruxelles
Téléphone : 02/501.02.11
E-mail info@premier.fed.be

**RE: Arrest and Maltreatment of a Researcher by Belgium Police in conjunction
with the No Borders camp**

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am writing to you on behalf of the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA). The WCAA is a network of more than thirty national and international professional associations in anthropology from around the world, with a joint membership of tens of thousands of individuals. I am writing to protest the maltreatment by Belgium police officers of anthropologist Dr Marianne Maeckelbergh, a case of which the entire international community of scholars has now been made aware.

We are concerned and disappointed that a democratic country like Belgium could have allowed the public humiliation and maltreatment of a woman scholar. Marianne Maeckelbergh, a University of Sussex graduate and highly respected Lecturer in Anthropology at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands, was arrested for attempting to take photographs of public acts of brutality carried out by Belgian police on protesters during a demonstration. Dr Maeckelbergh was observing this demonstration as part of her legitimate and important research on new social movements such as “No Borders”. Her arrest raises questions as to whether the government of Belgium understands and defends the value of academic freedom. Other than being an interference with her research on new social movements, Dr Maeckelbergh’s arrest is of concern because she had not committed an offense, and was arrested without charge or valid pretext.

Given that it may have been difficult to distinguish her from protestors, a mistaken arrest is not entirely surprising. Nevertheless, there are also questions as to the lawfulness of pre-emptive arrests of non-violent protestors in general. One would not expect to see these kinds of methods used against citizens in a democratic nation in the heart of Europe, a continent where the evil memory of fascist and communist totalitarian police states and their heinous crimes against humanity is still recent and not to be revisited.

What we primarily disapprove of is what happened to Dr Maeckelbergh subsequent to her arrest on 1 October 2010 and during the 14 hours while she was held in police custody. These events we consider a gross violation of her human rights.

Following her arrest, members of the Brussels Police subjected Dr Maeckelbergh to physical and psychological intimidation and brutality. She was taken into custody where she was violently dragged by her hair, chained to a radiator, hit, kicked, spat upon, called 'a whore', and threatened with sexual assault by the police. She also witnessed the mistreatment of another prisoner also chained to a radiator.

This did not take place in a dark corner of the police station but in the open, directly witnessed by police station authorities and staff, who gave the impression that this kind of violence was standard practice in Brussels. Police removed her ID card, USB stick, the camera with the photos on it, as well as 25 euros in cash. To date they have refused to return her property other than her ID card.

We have verified this information directly with the victim.

This case is a threat to the ability of academics to pursue ethnographic research by 'participant observation' in safety and in freedom -- within a supposedly democratic society whose security is clearly in no way threatened by actions such as the No Borders camp, which was merely aimed at combating xenophobia.

We would like to request the release of the remaining prisoners and to demand that the police are held accountable. The government must publicly condemn and take steps to discontinue such practices, or else it is passively endorsing them through its inaction. A public enquiry to investigate the whole issue of the policing of this protest would seem entirely appropriate.

We are looking forward to receive your reply, and will not rule out other representational action until we do. Such action is likely to be directed at the world press, the EU, the UN and other international political and academic bodies.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Reuter', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Prof Thomas Reuter
Chair: World Council Of Anthropological Association