

# Police misconduct against Dutch farmers

## Open Letter

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TO: Prof. dr. Nils Melzer, UN Special Rapporteur ✉ [sr-torture@ohchr.org](mailto:sr-torture@ohchr.org)  
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Dear professor Melzer,

Thank you for your investigation into possible police misconduct in The Netherlands. Police brutality against peaceful protestors can endanger basic democratic rights and freedom of expression. Especially protests against the political establishment received police aggression, while the rules were bend when protests were in line with the establishment. Undoubtedly you already received many stories focusing on the covid-19 related protests. In this letter, I want to address police aggression against farmers.

First I will give a general introduction; then I will give some concrete examples of police brutality. Finally I will place this in a more general context.

### **General background**

Farmers protested against new regulations that threatened their farms. A few politicians suggested to halve the number of farms. Suicide rates are still high in the agricultural sector. The regulations are based on model calculations which are proven to be very imprecise on a local level.

### **Personal introduction**

Multiple factors led to my interest in this subject. My agricultural heritage goes back to at least 1530. I still own a small bit of agricultural land. I studied both political science (MA) and medical informatics (MSc). In that capacity I was well positioned when the data on which the model calculations were based were made open source on court order. I got in touch with farmers and their organizations, including Farmers Defence Force (FDF), Agractie, and Agrifacts. I supported their cause and was surprised by a few incidents of police violence. The first two incidents are relatively mild, concerning only individuals. The third one is bewildering.

## **Hitting a farmer on the highway (2020-02-19)**

The 19-year old farmer Bram Verheul was driving to a protest in his tractor on the highway (A50), which was not permitted by the regulations. He was aggressively approached by police vehicles. His windows were smacked, pepper spray was used on him, and he was hit by batons, according to his testimony.

*Source (in Dutch):* Politie gebruikt pepperspray bij aanhouding boer op A50. *Omroep Gelderland*, 2020-02-19. <https://www.gld.nl/nieuws/2438071/politie-gebruikt-pepperspray-bij-aanhouding-boer-op-a50>

## **A pistol aimed at Thijs Wiegers (2020-07-10)**

When a group of farmers were on their way home after a protest, they wanted to get a snack at MacDonald's. A police officer prevented them driving any further. When Thijs Wiegers, one of the farmers, made an attempt to drive back, the officer pointed a gun to his head. Thijs was arrested, held in a police jail for a night, and was fined. He successfully fought his fine at the court.

*Source (in Dutch):* Vrijspraak boer Thijs Wiegers voor bedreigen motoragent die hem onder schot hield. *De Gelderlander*, 2021-02-17. <https://www.gelderlander.nl/oost-gelre/vrijspraak-boer-thijs-wiegers-voor-bedreigen-motoragent-die-hem-onder-schot-hield~af14f492/>

## **Wijster, a razzia? (2020-07-08)**

In the small village of Wijster, 63 persons, including 7 children, were arrested after joining a farmers' protest. Usage of tractors was prohibited, also under the context of measures against covid-19. According to authorities, protesting outside in tractors was contributing to transmission of the virus, but I suspect more practical motivations. A few persons were chased using dogs and drones in the fields. The arrests took place on a private property, hours *after* the protest had finished due to the farmers obeying to police instructions.

Only four protesters fought their fine in a higher court. They were acquitted because the authorities had failed to correctly publish the temporary prohibition.

*Source (in Dutch):* Vier protestboeren Wijster in hoger beroep vrijgesproken. *RTV Drenthe*, 2021-11-25.

A detailed reconstruction showed that a few majors and Gery Veldhuis, the police officer in charge, did (partly) regret the high number of arrests, the arrest of children, the use of dogs and the use of military-style equipment. However, it *did* happen and no formal letters of regret were sent nor were all fines cancelled, not even after acquittal in higher court.

*Source (in Dutch):* Klopjacht op het erf. *Dagblad van het Noorden*, 2020-12-19. <https://dvh.nl/drenthe/Klopjacht-op-het-erf-26293666.html>

## **Eye witness testimony 1 (mine)**

I was present when the arrested farmers left the police station after interrogation, and joined them when they returned to the farm to have a barbecue. I spoke with a lot of farmers. They were angry, but not that much disappointed; many of them already lost confidence in the government.

The police brutality strengthened their resolve to fight for honesty and justice. Personal stories emerged on various (social) media following these events.

### **Eye witness testimony 2 (*anonymous mother*)**

One mother with two kids (10 and 13 years old) fled into the fields. Their family were no farmers, but the ten-year-old loved tractors and farming. The mother asked if they would like to take a look at the farmers' protest. They joined the protest using their car. Note that cars were *not* prohibited from being used by protests. After the protest ended and farmers took a coffee and some bread at a farm (private property), suddenly police vehicles stormed the property, causing panic.

The mother fled, like a few others, into a nearby cornfield, losing her friend, her kids and her shoes. She continued barefoot. She was cold, and because of fear lost control over her body. Her legs felt heavy; she defecated in her pants. Police drones were flying in the air and police dogs were being used to hunt the protestors in the fields. The mother reported that she and her kids spent nearly three hours outside in fear, wetness and cold.

*Source (in Dutch):* Deze moeder met twee kinderen vluchtte het maisveld in bij Wijster. *My weblog, originally from Facebook*, <https://www.furorteutonicus.eu/2020/07/11/deze-moeder-met-twee-kinderen-vluchtte-het-maisveld-in-bij-wijster/>

### **Eye witness testimony 3 (*Melle Zwama*)**

She was not the only one. Melle Zwama reported on her Facebook timeline that police, heavily shielded and even masked, surrounded them on private property for more than one hour in the rain while they had to wait for deportation. When in the police station, they were detained in a cold, dirty room; also the children were kept there for hours.

### **Eye witness testimony 3 (*Onrecht TV*)**

Karin and Irhuia, from "Onrecht TV", were livestreaming the events. They often do civil reporting. They are officially registered (KvK). They also were arrested and their livestream was ended by the police. According to Karin, afterwards in the police station Irhuia was taken by an officer who strangled her shawl around her neck and forced her outside using that shawl. So much for free press.

*Source (in Dutch):* De razzia bij Wijster: addendum *My weblog, collected sources*, 2020-07-14. <https://www.furorteutonicus.eu/2020/07/14/de-razzia-bij-wijster-addendum/>

### **Eye witness testimony 4 (*farm family*)**

A third anonymous account is from the daughter from the inhabitants of the farm. She did *not* join the protest. The sudden intrusion of heavily equipped police, including vehicles, drones and dogs, caused a lot of stress. She was worried about the kids. Her sister named Ilse Grummel-Fikkert was also present and confirmed this story. They were lucky because they could hide in the farm. Their mother, who did have nothing to do with the protest, was less lucky. The kids saw how their grandmother was deported.

*Source (in Dutch):* Dit is de 'partyboer' die de 63 opgepakte boeren in Wijster onderdak bood na de blokkade van Attero. *Dagblad van het Noorden*, 2020-07-13. <https://dvh.nl/drenthe/Dit-is-de-partyboer-die-de-63-opgepakte-boeren-in-Wijster-onderdak-bood-na-de-blokkade-van-Attero-we-gaan-er-nog-harder-in-we-moeten-wel-25839029.html>

In face of all these stories, in face of later regrets by responsible mayors and the police officer in charge, in face of later acquittals by a higher court... Minister Grapperhaus was very quick to blame the protestors for the use of police brutality. He even stated that the police (under his responsibility) tried to make connection and de-escalate. Indeed a strange way to de-escalate by storming private property, by using dogs and drones, *after* the protest already ended. Can we trust Grapperhaus, representing our government? Can we trust those governing us?

*Source (in Dutch):* Grapperhaus over arrestaties boeren in Wijster. *RTV Drenthe*, 2020-09-20. <https://www.rtvdrenthe.nl/nieuws/162932/Grapperhaus-over-arrestaties-boeren-in-Wijster-Gekozen-voor-andere-koers>

## **Broader context**

When protesting for climate or Black Lives Matter (BLM) and related themes, some police officers join the demonstration and the mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema, forgets all covid-19 related restrictions. Protests with other political outlooks face strict regulation, often encountering police violence. Interestingly, on January 2nd, when the large protest was hit by batons, another small protest of “AFA” could *under protection of the police* paintbomb the door of the political party that was affiliated with the larger protest. This organization, AFA, is well known for using anti-democratic means and violence, according to government reports.

It is hard to imagine that our police becomes a force *against* democracy. However, the testimonies and images tell the same story over and over again. Please contact me if you have further questions.

Yours sincerely,

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*P.S.: I would like to thank Twitter user @9livewire for quickly making linguistic corrections.*