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## Press Release

### Harvard Researcher Seeks Refuge at the University of Mannheim

**Researcher Eirliani Abdul Rahman, who holds a doctorate from Harvard University, transferred to the University of Mannheim in early March thanks to funding from the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung. The program for international academic freedom is supporting her with around EUR 1.8 million, enabling a six-year stay at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES).**

Dr. Eirliani Abdul Rahman is a researcher from Singapore who gained global recognition when she resigned from Twitter's Trust and Safety Council in 2022 in protest against the sharp rise in hate speech following the platform's acquisition by Elon Musk. At the time, she was at Harvard University, completing a doctoral program in Public Health. In view of the new US administration taking office in January 2025 and increasing threats to academic freedom, the social scientist—with the support of the University of Mannheim—successfully applied for funding from the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung in July 2025 to relocate to Germany. Since early March, she has been able to continue her research here.

Abdul Rahman has been granted a three-year stay with the option of renewal for another three years at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES). Until the end of 2027, she will be developing a prototype for an AI-based tool to combat child trafficking in India as part of her new research project. Previously, she worked with Nobel Peace Prize laureate Kailash Satyarthi in India for more than a decade to combat child trafficking and child sexual abuse.

"I have only been in Mannheim for a few days, but I already feel completely different. Not having to constantly be vigilant and worry whether a new executive order affects me and restricts my freedom is simply reassuring," says the Singaporean and former diplomat.

She is conducting her research project together with Professor Marc Ratkovic, Ph.D., holder of the Chair of Social Data Science. Ratkovic, who himself transferred from Princeton University to Mannheim in 2023, nominated her for the foundation's program for international academic freedom, thereby facilitating her transfer.

According to Marc Ratkovic, "Dr. Abdul Rahman's commitment to academic freedom, collaborative research, and protecting children is as inspirational as it is impressive." He goes on to say: "The University of Mannheim and the Land of Baden-Württemberg have shown leadership, innovative power, and flexibility by creating an environment that attracts world-

class researchers and activists like Dr. Abdul Rahman. In an evolving world, the quality and rigor of research at the University of Mannheim have, thankfully, remained constant.”

#### **About Dr. Eirliani Abdul Rahman**

Dr. Abdul Rahman is an expert in online safety and online forms of harassment. She began her international career working in Singapore’s diplomatic service for around a decade, including positions at embassies in Berlin and Delhi.

She gained international recognition as a founding member of Twitter’s Trust and Safety Council, from which she publicly resigned in 2022. She later transitioned to research and earned her doctorate in Public Health at Harvard University. During her time at Harvard, she changed the focus of her doctoral dissertation to develop a taxonomy of a form of online harassment she refers to as “indirect swarming,” i.e. indirectly triggered collective online attacks. Her starting point was her observation that this phenomenon had not yet been quantified and that research had mainly focused on qualitative approaches and network analyses.

After graduating from Harvard University, Abdul Rahman became a research affiliate at the Minderoo Centre for Technology and Democracy at the University of Cambridge. In addition, she was a senior fellow at Georgetown University.

#### **About the project [Trafficking Risks: AI for Proactive Protection \(TRAPP\)](#)**

As part of her project at the MZES, Abdul Rahman uses artificial intelligence to identify patterns in child trafficking. According to the Indian government’s crime report, 82,000 children were abducted in India in 2023. A scalable platform leveraging predictive analytics that, among other things, creates heat maps is intended to help consolidate fragmented datasets, assist law enforcement agencies in planning operations, and strengthen the infrastructure for combatting human trafficking. A pilot project is currently being conducted in the state of Odisha in India.

#### **Further information on the [program for international academic freedom of the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung](#) (in German only)**

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