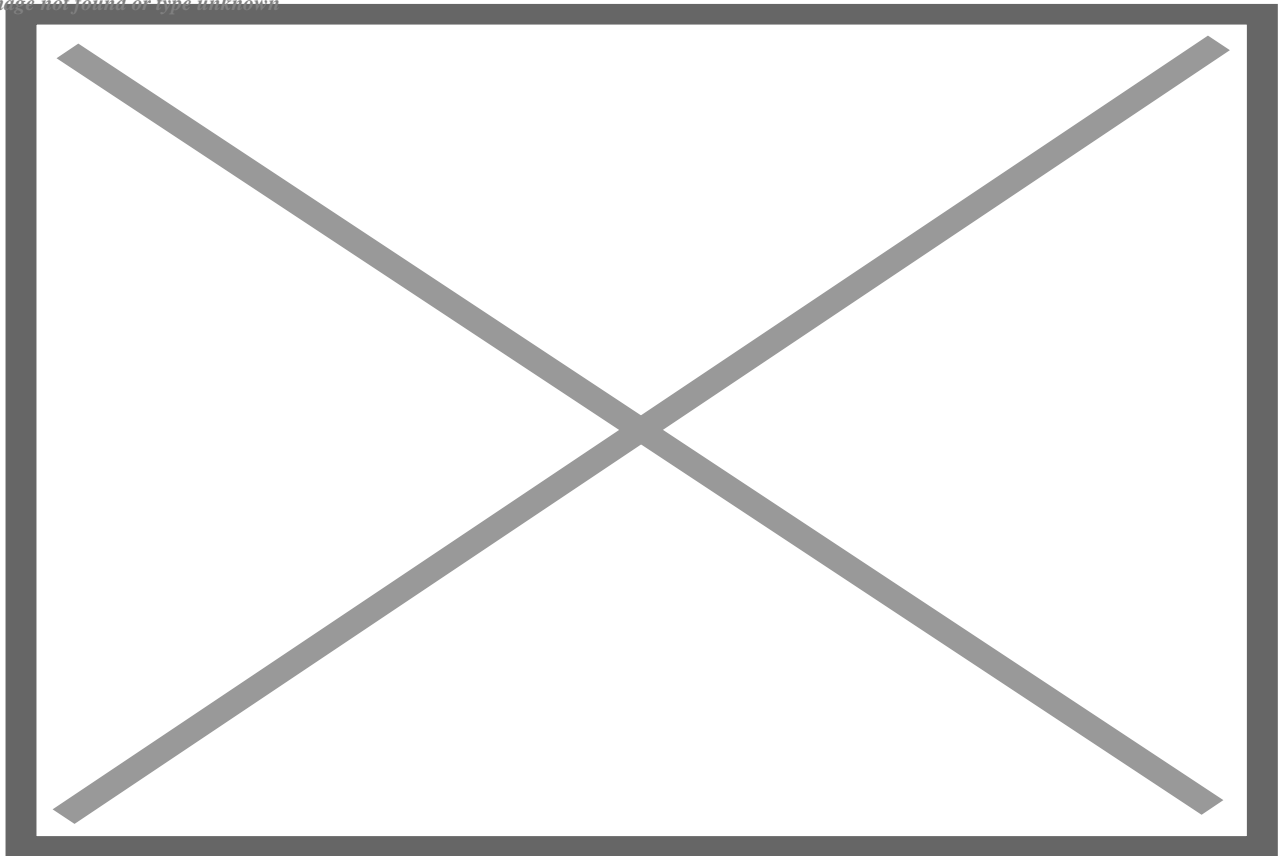


Students protesting Israel's genocidal war machine are arrested at University of Texas / Austin

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Austin, April 29 (RHC)-- Hundreds of Texas state troopers have descended on a pro-Palestinian student protest at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin), arresting several demonstrators.

The raid by the security forces on the protest site came on Monday afternoon, as university administrations and local government officials across the country grow increasingly intolerant of the

nationwide campus protest movement.

The mood at UT Austin was noticeably tense as armed state police in riot gear returned to the campus, having already been sent in by Texas Governor Greg Abbott last Wednesday, resulting in the arrest of approximately 50 students.

All of them were charged with misdemeanour trespassing, though the charges were later dropped as a result of insufficient evidence.

Broadcasting live from the Texas campus on Monday, Al Jazeera correspondent Heidi Zhou-Castro said she observed police removing items surrounding a newly established encampment and arresting a handful of protesters.

Faculty and community members were heard chanting: "Hands off our students! Hands off our students!" Others shouted at the police to ask why they were wearing riot gear.

"What I'm seeing is what appears to be an impending clash between Texas state police, who as you see are now arriving more and more. Now they're surrounding this small encampment that is being guarded by student protesters, alumni and community members who have linked their arms," said Zhou-Castro.

She emphasised that the protests have not been violent. "There has been very little conflict between the two sides." The protesters were "very fearful" after last week's spate of arrests, Zhou-Castro added, resulting in more muted protests until the arrival of police on Monday.

"They were fearful of being expelled, they were fearful of being arrested or physically harmed, so they have really been taking it easy in these tightly controlled, smaller protests."

Protesters told Zhou-Castro that they were determined to continue the protests in the face of attempts to silence them. "What trumps our fear, is our love for Palestine, and our love for liberation, and our refusal to accept subjugation and censorship from an oppressive institution," said one student protester, Hadi.

The threat of police violence also hangs over Columbia University, a prestigious Ivy League school in the United States, where the administration announced that its negotiations with student protesters has fallen through, opening up the potential for severe consequences for those involved in a pro-Palestinian encampment on campus.

"Since Wednesday, a small group of academic leaders has been in constructive dialogue with student organizers to find a path that would result in the dismantling of the encampment," Columbia president Nemat Minouche Shafik wrote in a statement on Monday. "Regretfully, we were not able to come to an agreement."

The statement came on the same day that the New York City-based university issued a new deadline for the encampment to disperse: 2pm local time (18:00 GMT). But the latest deadline came and went, with protesters bracing themselves for the possibility of consequences as their push for a ceasefire in Gaza stretched into its second week.

"The current unauthorized encampment and disruption on Columbia University's campus is creating an unwelcoming environment for members of our community," university administrators wrote in Monday's notice for the encampment to disperse.

Citing violations of multiple university policies — including vandalism and harassment — the university threatened to suspend the students involved in the protest, which involves dozens of tents pitched on the university lawn.

"If you do not leave by 2 p.m., you will be suspended pending further investigation," the notice explained, adding that campus identification cards would be deactivated and students would be barred from attending classes or completing the spring semester.

The deadline, however, is the latest in a string over the past week, with Columbia University largely failing to follow through with its threatened punishments.

Student groups greeted the expired deadline with defiance, pledging to continue their activism on behalf of the Palestinian civilians harmed by Israel's war in Gaza. "WE WILL NOT STOP, WE WILL NOT REST!!" one group, Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine, wrote on social media. "We will continue until our demands are met. We will not be intimidated."

Al Jazeera correspondent Teresa Bo likewise reported that the students on Columbia's encampment intended to stay put, as she entered the gated campus.

Located in the Upper West Side neighbourhood of Manhattan, the campus has been largely blocked off to outsiders throughout the day.

"We've been seeing lots of police coming towards the university. We do not know whether there's going to be an attempt to remove the students here by force. That's what many of the students are fearing," Bo said. "We are just hearing also from them [the students] that Columbia is fabricating a state of emergency to suspend, expel and evict hundreds of students."

The Columbia protest is one of several high-profile university protests unfolding across the country, including at Yale, George Washington University and the University of California, Los Angeles, prompting questions about academic freedom and free speech.

On April 18, New York police arrested an estimated 108 students protesting on Columbia's campus, including Isra Hirsi, the daughter of US Representative Ilhan Omar, at the request of school administrators.

An estimated 500 students have been arrested across the country for their shows of solidarity with the people of Gaza.

School administrators have been under pressure to crack down on alleged incidents of anti-Semitism on their campuses, though the student organisers behind the protests have denounced those allegations as false and misleading.

"Our values — as well as our duties under civil rights laws — compel us to condemn hate and to protect every member of our community from harassment and discrimination," Shafik said in her statement on Monday. "Antisemitic language and actions are unacceptable and calls for violence are simply abhorrent."

But Al Jazeera correspondent Kristen Saloomey, reporting from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, said that the encampment there had been largely peaceful, with no indication of violent rhetoric or actions. "The university is saying that the students are violating policies as to who can set up on campus, and what can be done on campus," Saloomey said, "although what we've seen here today has been pretty quiet and pretty calm, and they aren't blocking any of the buildings or any of the entrances."

Observing the George Washington University campus in Washington, DC, Al Jazeera correspondent Shihab Rattansi said that administrators appear to be behind much of the calls for police intervention in the protests. "It's the university administrators — who are supposed to be wanting freedom of speech and thought and critical engagement with the issues of the day — who are begging the police to come in

here to arrest and drag away these students,” Rattansi said.

“The police are saying: ‘No, we don’t want to,’ because they don’t want the optics of, frankly, assaulting peaceful protesters.”

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/353457-students-protesting-israels-genocidal-war-machine-are-arrested-at-university-of-texas-austin>



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