

Paris's Sciences Po rejects protesters' demand to review Israel ties



Paris, May 3 (RHC)-- The Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po) has rejected demands by protesters to review its relations with Israeli universities, its interim director Jean Basseres says, prompting some students to say they would start a hunger strike in protest.

The decision on Thursday was made after students at several French universities, including Sciences Po and Sorbonne University, blocked or occupied their institutions to protest against Israel's war on Gaza following similar protests in the United States.

"I clearly refused to set up a working group on our relations with Israeli universities and partner companies," Basseres told reporters after a town hall meeting with students and staff.

Dozens of students promptly started a sit-in inside the university to protest Basseres's decision. "A first student has started a hunger strike in solidarity with Palestinian victims but even more so to protest against the way Sciences Po is repressing students who want to show their support for Palestine," said Hicham, a Sciences Po student protester. More students would join the hunger strike, he told reporters, demanding that the university administration agrees for its board to hold a public vote on reviewing partnerships with Israeli universities.

The town hall was one of the conditions set last week for Sciences Po students to call off their protests over the war in Gaza. Many had also asked the university to cut all ties with Israel.

Basseres said he was aware that refusing to put together a working group to review relations with Israel could anger some protesters. "I'm calling on all to show a sense of responsibility," he said, urging protesters not to disrupt exams, which are set to start next week.

The elite political sciences university in Paris would work on how best to organise internal debate on contentious topics, Basseres said, adding that the university already had rules to review its partnerships. "The last ties that should be severed are the ones between universities," said Arancha Gonzalez, who heads Sciences Po's School of International Affairs.

The 150-old university has been the site of pro-Palestinian protests for several days. Some demonstrators blocked entrances to the university, and tents were set up on the central courtyard for a protest camp.

Last week, scuffles broke out after hundreds of students turned out and police moved in when about 50 pro-Israeli demonstrators arrived.

University authorities agreed to drop all disciplinary proceedings against demonstrators, said a note sent to students and faculty by Basseres.

France is home to the world's largest Jewish population after Israel and the U.S. and Europe's biggest Muslim community.

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