

?Dozens arrested on U.S. campuses during another weekend of protests against Israeli genocidal war on Gaza



Protests at University of Virginia in Charlottesville

Chicago, May 6 (RHC)-- U.S. police agents have arrested at least 25 pro-Palestinian protesters and cleared an encampment at the University of Virginia (UVA) as campuses across the United States brace for more turmoil during graduation ceremonies.

Tensions flared at UVA's campus in Charlottesville, where protests had been largely peaceful until Saturday morning, when police officers in riot gear were seen in a video moving on an encampment on the campus's lawn, cuffing some demonstrators with zip ties and using what appeared to be chemical spray.

Students across the U.S. have rallied or set up tents at dozens of universities to protest the months-long war in Gaza and call on President Joe Biden, who has supported Israel, to do more to stop the bloodshed in Gaza. They also demand their schools divest from companies that support Israel's government, such as the arms suppliers.

The UVA said in a statement that protesters had violated several university policies, including setting up tents on Friday night and using amplified sound. UVA President Jim Ryan wrote in a message that officials had learned that "individuals unaffiliated with the university" who presented "some safety concerns" had joined the protesters on the campus. In a post on Instagram, a group called UVA Encampment for Gaza, which said earlier this week it had set up the encampment, condemned the university's decision to call in the police.

Meanwhile, dozens of people were arrested for "criminal trespass" outside the Art Institute of Chicago at a demonstration on Saturday after the institute called in the police to remove protesters it said were illegally occupying its property, the Chicago Police Department said on X.

Elsewhere, confrontations did not escalate into arrests. In Ann Arbor, pro-Palestinian protesters briefly disrupted a commencement ceremony at the University of Michigan, one of the many universities which altered their security protocols for graduation ceremonies.

Videos shared on social media showed dozens of students wearing the traditional keffiyeh headdress and graduation caps, and waving Palestinian flags as they walked down the centre aisle of Michigan Stadium amid cheers and boos from a crowd of thousands.

The ceremony continued and campus police escorted the protesters towards the back of the stadium, but no arrests were made, according to Colleen Mastony, a spokeswoman for the university.

"Peaceful protests like this have taken place at U-M [University of Michigan] commencement ceremonies for decades," Mastony said in a statement. "The university supports free speech and expression, and university leaders are pleased that today's commencement was such a proud and triumphant moment."

One of the common chants by protesters heard at the University of Michigan was: "Divulge, divest. We will not stop, we will not rest," Al Jazeera's John Hendren reporting from Ann Arbor said.

"According to the faculty and the students that we've talked to, they say they've gotten no satisfactory response on engaging students on their demands. The university hasn't agreed to disclose its investments in Israel," he said.

Contrasting views over Israel's war in Gaza have erupted, sometimes violently, across U.S. campuses over the last couple of weeks. Many of the schools, including Columbia University in New York City, have called in police to quell the protests.

Police have so far arrested more than 2,000 protesters at colleges around the country.

The antiwar protests in the U.S. are being staged in response to Israel's offensive in Gaza, where more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces since October and the Palestinian enclave

flattened in what rights experts have called a genocide.

Campus protests have emerged as a new political flashpoint during a hotly contested and deeply divisive US election year. On Thursday, a pro-Palestinian protest at the University of Mississippi, also known as Ole Miss, was met by a larger crowd of counter-protesters singing the national anthem and carrying US flags.

The events at Ole Miss, the state's flagship university, drew widespread outrage and condemnation after a viral video showed a group of mostly white students taunting a Black female protester.

Some shouted racist remarks and one individual can be heard making what sounded like monkey noises at the Black student.

While the university's chancellor condemned the "racist overtones" of the incident and said an investigation was under way, Republican Representative Mike Collins of Georgia shared the video on his X account on Friday, writing: "Ole Miss taking care of business."

A spokesperson for Collins said he was pointing to examples of "regular everyday students... pushing back against the very small group of leftist agitators who care only to disrupt and destroy".

But the taunting brought sharp criticism on and off campus. "Students were calling for an end to genocide. They were met with racism," James M Thomas, a sociology professor at the University of Mississippi, wrote on X.

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