

U.S. police break up Gaza protest encampment at George Washington University

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Washington, May 8 (RHC)-- Police in Washington, DC have broken up a student protest encampment at George Washington University, one of dozens of tent camps set up on campuses across the country in support of Palestinians in Gaza.

The Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, DC, said in a statement that it “moved to disperse” demonstrators on Wednesday morning after “a gradual escalation in the volatility of the protest.” It did not elaborate on what exactly that means.

“During the course of the operation, arrests were made for Assault on a Police Officer and Unlawful Entry,” the department said, without specifying how many arrests were made. Citing an unnamed police source, CNN reported that 30 to 40 people were arrested.

The Gaza encampment at George Washington University is one of dozens that have sprung up around the world since late April in protest of Israel’s war on the besieged Palestinian enclave.

Students across the U.S. as well as in Canada, the United Kingdom, France and elsewhere are demanding an end to Israel’s military offensive, which has killed nearly 35,000 Palestinians since early October.

They are also calling on their universities to divest from any companies that are complicit in Israeli human rights abuses, among other demands.

The arrests at George Washington University are part of a wave of similar police crackdowns on US college campuses, including New York’s Columbia University, the University of Chicago and the University of California at Los Angeles.

University administrators have accused pro-Palestinian demonstrators of using anti-Semitic language and creating an unsafe environment on campus. The students have rejected those claims, which they say aim to distract people from what is happening in the Gaza Strip.

“It’s meant to take the focus away from the genocide in Gaza, and it is meant to take the focus away from our demands,” Mariam, a Jewish student demonstrator at George Washington University, told Al Jazeera late last week.

U.S. politicians – including President Joe Biden, a Democrat and staunch backer of Israel – have criticised the Gaza encampments.

Republican James Comer, chairman of the Committee on Oversight and Accountability in the House of Representatives, will hold a hearing on the response to the George Washington University encampment on Wednesday.

The mayor of Washington, DC, Muriel Bowser, and Police Chief Pamela Smith are to testify.

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