

Trump pledges to deport those he calls Hamas sympathisers on college campuses



Council on American-Islamic Relations accuses U.S. president of smearing students opposing genocide in Gaza.

Washington, January 30 (RHC)-- U.S. President Donald Trump has pledged to deport foreign university students involved in pro-Palestinian protests as part of a crackdown on alleged anti-Semitism, prompting

an outcry from free speech and Muslim advocacy organisations.

In an executive order signed on Wednesday, Trump said the federal government would use “all available and appropriate legal tools” to prosecute and remove perpetrators of “unlawful anti-Semitic harassment and violence.”

“Jewish students have faced an unrelenting barrage of discrimination; denial of access to campus common areas and facilities, including libraries and classrooms; and intimidation, harassment, and physical threats and assault,” Trump’s order said.

A fact sheet on the order released by the White House indicated that the crackdown would extend to “all” student visa holders who participated in “pro-jihadist protests” on university campuses.

“To all the resident aliens who joined in the pro-jihadist protests, we put you on notice: come 2025, we will find you, and we will deport you,” Trump said in the fact sheet. “I will also quickly cancel the student visas of all Hamas sympathizers on college campuses, which have been infested with radicalism like never before.”

It was not immediately clear how broadly authorities might interpret definitions such as “anti-Semitism” and “pro-jihadist”.

Trump’s comments in his fact sheet appeared to suggest more sweeping action than the text of his order, though the latter cited existing law that allows for the revocations of visas in a wide range of circumstances.

Under the order, Trump directed the secretary of state, the secretary of education and the secretary of homeland security to familiarise universities with a section of immigration law governing “inadmissible aliens” and ensure that reports of activities that run afoul of the criteria for admissibility lead “to investigations and, if warranted, actions to remove such aliens”.

Under U.S. immigration law, foreign nationals can be deemed “inadmissible aliens” under a range of scenarios apart from being convicted of a crime. Those circumstances include cases where authorities have “reason to believe” a person is engaged in various types of unlawful activity or have determined he or she is “associated with a terrorist organisation”.

“Like the college students who once protested segregation, the Vietnam war, and apartheid South Africa, the diverse collection of college students who protested against Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza deserve our country’s thanks,” the Council on American-Islamic Relations said in a statement.

“The Trump administration’s attempt to smear the many Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian and other college students who protested the Israeli government’s genocide in overwhelmingly peaceful ways represents a dishonest, overbroad and unenforceable attack on both free speech and the humanity of Palestinians, all for the sake of a foreign government. So is the administration’s apparent threat to deport any foreign student who merely participated in anti-genocide protests.”

FIRE, an advocacy group dedicated to protecting free speech, said the revocation of student visas should not be used “to punish and filter out ideas disfavored by the federal government”.

“The strength of our nation’s system of higher education derives from the exchange of the widest range of views, even unpopular or dissenting ones,” the group said in a statement.

“Students who commit crimes – including vandalism, threats, or violence – must face consequences, and those consequences may include the loss of a visa. But if today’s executive order reaches beyond illegal activity to instead punish students for protest or expression otherwise protected by the First Amendment, it must be withdrawn.”

Pro-Palestinian protests erupted at dozens of US university campuses last spring as Israel waged war on Gaza.

The demonstrations, which spread to top universities including Harvard, Yale and Columbia, prompted heated debate and recriminations over alleged anti-Semitism in higher education.

While some Jewish students reported acts of violence, intimidation and harassment at the protests, pro-Palestinian students and activists accused university authorities of wielding the charge of anti-Semitism as a tool to shut down legitimate criticism of Israel.

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