

New McCarthyism: Pro-Palestine group denounces U.S. Senate crackdown on Gaza protests



Pro-Palestinian protesters hang a banner in a protest rally at Columbia University over the hosting of former Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett, on March 4, 2025. (Photo by AFP)

Chicago, March 6 (RHC)-- A pro-Palestinian advocacy group has condemned recent U.S. Senate hearings on Gaza protests as a "McCarthyite witch-hunt" aimed at silencing students and professors in the U.S. who advocate for Palestinian rights.

Palestine Legal, a Chicago-based advocacy organization, issued a strong statement on the platform X on Wednesday, criticizing the hearings as part of a troubling trend to suppress dissent and criminalize those who support Palestinian causes.

"These Senate hearings represent a McCarthyite witch hunt targeting students and professors who speak out for Palestinian rights," the group stated.

It said the hearings followed an executive order from US President Donald Trump targeting college advocates for Palestinian rights, adding that it is part of a larger strategy detailed in the Heritage Foundation's "Project Esther," which was designed to dismantle the Palestinian rights.

Project Esther, created by the conservative think tank aligned with Trump, aims to eliminate dissent against Zionist policies, restrict educational access on related issues, and mobilize support for a crackdown on individuals and organizations opposing systemic racism and colonialism, starting with the Palestinian rights movement.

"It is imperative that universities refuse to collaborate with Trump's efforts to silence and criminalize dissent, and to put an end to the McCarthyite crackdowns on students advocating for Palestinian rights," the organization emphasized.

These Senate hearings represent a McCarthyite witch-hunt targeting students and professors who speak out for Palestinian rights. So far, many universities have surrendered to the right-wing attack on higher ed and accepted their role as censors and snitches of their own students.

— Palestine Legal (@pal_legal) March 5, 2025

The hearings, organized by the Senate Committee on the Judiciary under the title "Stemming the Tide of Anti-Semitism in America," have faced criticism for targeting advocates of Palestinian rights within academic settings.

The term "McCarthyism" refers to the campaign led by U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s, which sought to expose alleged Communist sympathizers, often resulting in widespread fear and the persecution of individuals based on flimsy evidence.

In the latest act, Trump has threatened to halt federal funding for any college or university that allows "illegal protests" to take place, saying he would punish students who participate in the demonstrations.

He did not specifically mention pro-Palestine protests in his post, but in late January, Trump signed an executive order, pledging to deport foreign students who have participated in pro-Palestinian protests

Meanwhile, Leo Terrell, head of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) task force on anti-Semitism, said last week student protesters who took part in pro-Palestine protests could face years in prison.

Terrell also vowed to "financially attack" the universities where such demonstrations took place. This came as students at Columbia University began fresh pro-Palestinian protests after two students were expelled for their anti-genocide activism.

In the last academic year, colleges and US universities became central to a surge of student-led pro-Palestinian protests, sparking a global movement where hundreds of students urged their institutions to withdraw investments from companies linked to Israel.

U.S. police arrested more than 3,000 students, professors, and faculty members after accusing the involved activists of “anti-Semitism” and “terrorism”, and school administrators threatened some protest leaders with suspension and academic probation.

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