

Group urges U.S. court to drop unjust charges against pro-Gaza protesters

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Pro-Palestinian supporters confront police during demonstrations at The City College Of New

**York (CUNY) as the NYPD cracks down on protest camps on April 30, 2024 in New York City.
(Photo by AFP)**

New York, September 7 (RHC)-- A group of protesters from the City University of New York (CUNY) Gaza Solidarity Encampment is demanding that the "unjust" heavy charges against eight of their members be dropped.

The 28 protesters, known as the CUNY 28, made the call in a statement issued at their press conference outside Manhattan criminal court where eight of them pleaded not guilty to an array of charges on Thursday. The 28 activists were among those arrested during a raid by New York Police Department on the CUNY Gaza solidarity encampment on April 30.

"The CUNY 28, attempted to answer the call made by the steadfast Palestinian resistance to escalate from within the belly of the beast. We resist with Gaza," the statement said.

"The night of the CUNY raid, 'public safety' brutalized protesters. CUNY 'public safety' are the pigs! The pigs are the IOF! Anyone that chooses to play the role of a pig is the enemy," it added.

According to CUNY for Palestine, while the charges have been dropped for most of the hundreds of people arrested late in April, "Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, CUNY, and the NYPD continue to pursue the heaviest charges for 8 of the now CUNY 28."

The eight are accused of allegedly causing millions of dollars worth of damages.

"We are fighting our charges, not only because we do not recognize the state's claim to authority over our actions, but also because we believe that challenging these charges is a necessary stand against an unjust system that seeks to silence dissent and criminalize resistance. It is hypocritical of the state to criminalize property damage at a protest, while signing lucrative contracts to destroy entire communities," the CUNY 28 said.

"As the Zionist entity continues its destruction of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank—and as the United States maintains its genocidal hegemony from Palestine to Harlem—the working-class people of the world escalate. An encampment should not normalize the institution—it should disrupt it, dismantle it and abolish it."

The statement slammed CUNY administrations for remaining silent on Israel's ongoing genocidal war on Gaza and "actively repressing and condemning" any support for the Palestinians.

"The occupation of buildings by students and outside agitators symbolizes reclaiming space and disrupting normal operations to draw attention to injustices and to force institutions to address the demands of protesters."

The statement stressed "We are not just fighting for a Free Palestine but for the liberation of all. We fight for ourselves and our communities. Palestine is everywhere."

"Remember, 'we are all outside agitators.' Whether we are fighting in Atlanta, New York City, Sudan, or Palestine, the enemy remains the same. The Zionist entity escalates, so does the Palestinian Resistance. The pigs and institutions escalate, so do the agitators of the world!"

The group stressed: "We will not be intimidated into silence by the state."

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network has voiced its "full" solidarity with the CUNY 28, urging the authorities to drop the charges. "Escalating to end a genocide is not a crime — indeed, it is a duty, particularly in the heart of the imperial core, at a moment when the resistance forces of the region, from Palestine to Yemen to Lebanon to Iraq and beyond, are on the front lines sacrificing and fighting for the

protection and liberation of humanity.”

The Pro-Palestine demonstrations began at Columbia University in New York City on April 17 and spread across other campuses in the US in a student movement unlike any other this century.

The protesters, who demanded an end to the US-backed war, which has so far killed at least 40,878 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 94,454 others, were met with brutal police violence.

Israel launched the war on Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas waged the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in response to the Israeli regime's decades-long campaign of bloodletting and devastation against Palestinians.

Noting that “CUNY agitators spent more time in custody than Columbia protesters, and are still facing higher charges and continued backlash”, the CUNY 28 said, “The narrative of ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ protester is a narrative pushed by the state to divide our efforts along class and racial contentions, but in reality the fight against the same enemy unites us.”

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