# Pro-Palestine protester disrupts Cambridge graduations amid legal ban on demonstrations



On 23 May, a pro-Palestine demonstrator caused significant disruption at the University of Cambridge by chaining himself to the gates of the Senate House, which was hosting graduation ceremonies. Dressed in a boiler suit marked with red paint, the protestor secured himself using a padlock and zip-tie, shouting “Free Palestine” as his voice rang out across the crowd. This action was part of a larger movement advocating for the rights of Palestinians and coincided with ongoing tensions regarding the university's stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Around a dozen supporters joined him outside the ceremonies for prominent colleges including Queen's, St Catherine's, and Jesus Colleges, holding Palestine flags and wearing face masks. This incident highlights the growing activism among students and the broader community regarding political issues, especially those linked to international human rights.

The university recently faced legal challenges regarding its approach to such demonstrations. In March, a High Court injunction was granted, effectively banning pro-Palestine protests on key areas of the campus until the end of July. Critics of this ruling described it as a “chilling attack on free speech,” arguing that such measures undermine the right to protest and express dissent in academic environments. Advocates for the injunction, however, claimed it was necessary for maintaining order during graduation ceremonies, a point that has sparked considerable debate among students and observers alike.

In a related development, King's College—part of Cambridge University—announced in May that it would cease investing in arms companies, a decision prompted by public pressure and calls for ethical accountability from student groups. The student-led organisation 'Cambridge for Palestine' has been active in urging the university to divest from companies viewed as contributing to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Their protests have formed part of a larger pattern across various universities in the UK, where students have demanded an end to institutional affiliations with entities believed to be complicit in violations against Palestinians.

The landscape of student activism around Palestine is expanding, with demonstrations and occupations reported at more than one hundred universities globally. This particular movement intertwines local actions with international advocacy, aiming not only to shine a light on the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza but also to challenge the investments and financial ties of educational institutions to the situation.

As the University of Cambridge strives to balance the rights to protest with concerns about maintaining a respectful academic environment, the events of May 23 serve as a reminder of the complexities and heightened emotions surrounding the Israel-Palestine issue. With continuing pressure from student activists and community groups, the university's policies may further evolve as they navigate the demands for both free expression and academic integrity.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/gallery/pro-palestine-protester-padlocks-himself-31710724), [[2]](https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/gallery/pro-palestine-protester-padlocks-himself-31710724)
* Paragraph 2 – [[4]](https://www.newarab.com/news/uk/cambridge-slammed-chilling-ban-pro-gaza-protests), [[5]](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/cambridge-granted-gaza-protest-injunction-protect-graduations)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/students-stage-pro-palestine-occupations-at-five-more-uk-universities), [[7]](https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/cambridge-university-granted-extreme-protest-injunction/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.icjpalestine.com/2025/03/03/high-court-rejects-bid-by-the-university-of-cambridge-for-a-long-term-injunction-on-palestine-protests/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/gallery/pro-palestine-protester-padlocks-himself-31710724> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/gallery/pro-palestine-protester-padlocks-himself-31710724> - A pro-Palestine demonstrator disrupted graduation ceremonies at Cambridge University on May 23 by chaining himself to the gates of the Senate House. Wearing a boiler suit smeared with red paint, he secured himself using a padlock and zip-tie, chanting 'Free Palestine.' Approximately a dozen other demonstrators waved Palestine flags and wore face masks outside the ceremonies for Queen's, St Catherine's, and Jesus Colleges. In March, the university had been granted a High Court injunction to prevent pro-Palestine protests on parts of the campus until the end of July. King's College, part of Cambridge University, declared in May that it would cease investing in arms companies following public outcry. The student-led group 'Cambridge for Palestine' had urged the university to divest from companies 'complicit in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.' The University of Cambridge has been approached for comment.
3. <https://www.icjpalestine.com/2025/03/03/high-court-rejects-bid-by-the-university-of-cambridge-for-a-long-term-injunction-on-palestine-protests/> - On February 27, 2025, the High Court of Justice rejected the University of Cambridge's bid for a long-term injunction aimed at banning Palestine-related protests at four university sites until 2030. The university's application followed a series of high-profile encampments and demonstrations led by Cambridge for Palestine (C4P) at Senate House Yard in May and November 2024. These actions were part of a broader movement demanding that Cambridge divest from companies and institutions linked to Israel’s alleged violations in Gaza. The court issued a narrow, two-day injunction restricting entry to Senate House and Senate House Yard but explicitly removed any references to Palestine or C4P, preserving the right to protest in surrounding areas. The ruling was hailed as a victory for student activists, affirming their right to protest and challenging the university’s attempts to suppress political expression on campus.
4. <https://www.newarab.com/news/uk/cambridge-slammed-chilling-ban-pro-gaza-protests> - The University of Cambridge faced criticism after obtaining a High Court injunction that effectively banned pro-Palestinian protests on its campus until July 26, 2025. Critics described the ruling as a 'chilling attack on free speech.' The university had initially sought a five-year injunction but reduced the request to four months. The injunction covered three key university sites frequently used for protests, including Senate House Yard, the Old Schools building, and Greenwich House. The university argued that the measure was necessary to protect graduation ceremonies and prevent disruptions. However, human rights groups and activists condemned the decision, viewing it as an escalation in efforts to silence voices speaking out against Israel's actions in Gaza.
5. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/cambridge-granted-gaza-protest-injunction-protect-graduations> - The University of Cambridge was granted a High Court injunction preventing certain protests related to the Israel-Hamas conflict during the graduation season. The injunction restricted access to three university sites until July 26, 2025. Cambridge had initially sought a five-year injunction but reduced the request to four months. The university argued that the measure was necessary to protect graduation ceremonies and prevent disruptions. Human rights groups, including Liberty, criticized the injunction as excessive, stating it would severely restrict protest rights on campus and set a dangerous precedent for limiting freedom of expression.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/students-stage-pro-palestine-occupations-at-five-more-uk-universities> - Students from various UK universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, staged pro-Palestinian occupations to protest their institutions' financial ties to Israel. The protesters demanded that universities divest from companies linked to Israeli actions in Gaza and the West Bank. At Cambridge, students set up an encampment on King's Parade, calling for the university to end institutional relationships with Israeli universities and protect the safety of students and staff involved in pro-Palestinian action. The protests were part of a broader student-led movement across over 100 universities globally, challenging their institutions' complicity in Israel's alleged war crimes against Palestinians.
7. <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/cambridge-university-granted-extreme-protest-injunction/> - On March 21, 2025, the High Court granted the University of Cambridge an injunction against protests related to Palestine and Israel until the end of July 2025. The university had initially sought a five-year injunction but reduced the request to five months following interventions from the European Legal Support Center (ELSC), supported by Liberty and the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to protest. Liberty criticized the injunction as excessive, stating it would severely restrict protest rights on campus and set a dangerous precedent for limiting freedom of expression.