# Cambridge protester disrupts graduation amid court ban on Palestine demonstrations



A pro-Palestine demonstration at Cambridge University on 23 May caused significant interruption during graduation ceremonies when a protester padlocked himself to the gates of the Senate House. Dressed in a boiler suit coated in red paint, the individual made his stance clear with shouts of “Free Palestine,” his voice reverberating around the university grounds. This act drew attention amidst a gathering of around a dozen supporters, who were waving Palestinian flags and wearing face masks in solidarity.

The protest came on the heels of a controversial High Court injunction obtained by Cambridge University in March, which is set to prevent pro-Palestine demonstrations on several parts of campus until late July 2025. Critics of the injunction have decried it as a severe infringement on free speech and student activism. They argue that the ruling represents a troubling trend of suppressing political dissent, particularly concerning the sensitive topic of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Opponents have labelled the injunction a "chilling attack" on students' rights to protest, suggesting that it sets a precarious precedent for future activism across UK universities.

This backdrop of heightened tensions is underscored by a recent statement from King’s College, a constituent college of Cambridge, which announced in May its decision to divest from arms companies following sustained public outcry about ethical investment practices. Such moves indicate a growing awareness and willingness among university institutions to align their financial choices with their political values, particularly in relation to the ongoing humanitarian situation in Palestine.

Legal authorities have also expressed concern regarding the implications of the injunction. The European Legal Support Centre and human rights organisations like Liberty have contended that it unlawfully restricts freedom of expression and assembly as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. Libery stated firmly that such measures "severely restrict protest rights" and highlighted the need for universities to uphold student voices rather than silence them, particularly on issues of global significance.

The tensions at Cambridge University resonate with a broader pattern of protests occurring at universities across the UK. In May 2024, for instance, students at multiple institutions staged occupations demanding greater institutional accountability and divestment from companies that support actions in Gaza. This movement reflects a rising momentum among student groups advocating for Palestinian rights, echoing sentiments found in numerous protests around the globe.

These ongoing demonstrations underscore not just local but also international calls for justice regarding the Palestinian cause, with numerous organisations and movements actively challenging institutional policies perceived to support human rights abuses. Amid this backdrop, the university’s position and actions will likely continue to invite scrutiny and spark further debate over the sensitive intersection of education, activism, and free speech.

As these developments unfold, the University of Cambridge faces the task of balancing its commitments to academic freedom, student rights, and institutional policies, all while navigating the complexities of a highly politicised global landscape.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/gallery/pro-palestine-protester-padlocks-himself-31710724), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/students-stage-pro-palestine-occupations-at-five-more-uk-universities)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.newarab.com/news/uk/cambridge-slammed-chilling-ban-pro-gaza-protests), [[4]](https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/cambridge-university-granted-extreme-protest-injunction/), [[7]](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/cambridge-granted-gaza-protest-injunction-protect-graduations)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.cam.ac.uk/notices/news/information-about-the-precautionary-injunction-order-granted-following-hearing-on-21-march-2025)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://elsc.support/news/cambridge-universitys-attempt-to-restrict-palestine-solidarity-protests-faces-legal-challenge-in-high-court/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/students-stage-pro-palestine-occupations-at-five-more-uk-universities)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.newarab.com/news/uk/cambridge-slammed-chilling-ban-pro-gaza-protests), [[4]](https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/cambridge-university-granted-extreme-protest-injunction/)

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.newarab.com/news/uk/cambridge-slammed-chilling-ban-pro-gaza-protests> - In March 2025, Cambridge University was condemned for 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,' arguing it infringed on students' rights to protest and set a dangerous precedent for suppressing activism related to the Israel-Palestine conflict. The injunction aimed to prevent disruptions during graduation ceremonies and other key events, citing a 'real and imminent risk' of recurring protests.
3. <https://elsc.support/news/cambridge-universitys-attempt-to-restrict-palestine-solidarity-protests-faces-legal-challenge-in-high-court/> - In March 2025, the University of Cambridge sought a High Court injunction to prevent pro-Palestinian protests on its campus until July 2025. The European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) and Liberty intervened, arguing that the injunction was an unlawful restriction on freedom of expression and assembly under the European Convention on Human Rights. The case highlighted concerns about universities suppressing political expression and the right to protest, with potential implications for student activism across the UK.
4. <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/cambridge-university-granted-extreme-protest-injunction/> - In March 2025, the High Court granted Cambridge University an injunction against protests related to Palestine and Israel until July 2025. Liberty, a human rights organization, criticized the injunction as excessive, stating it would severely restrict protest rights on campus. The university had initially sought a five-year injunction but reduced the request to five months following interventions from the European Legal Support Centre (ELSC) and Liberty. The injunction aimed to prevent disruptions during graduation ceremonies and other key events.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/students-stage-pro-palestine-occupations-at-five-more-uk-universities> - In May 2024, students at five UK universities, including Cambridge, staged pro-Palestinian occupations, demanding their institutions divest from companies linked to Israeli actions in Gaza. The protests involved setting up encampments with supplies and banners, calling for universities to end research collaborations with Israeli institutions and to protect the safety of students and staff involved in pro-Palestinian action. The demonstrations were part of a broader movement across over 100 universities globally advocating for Palestinian rights.
6. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/notices/news/information-about-the-precautionary-injunction-order-granted-following-hearing-on-21-march-2025> - In March 2025, the University of Cambridge was granted a precautionary injunction to prevent trespassing and related actions at key sites, including Senate House, Greenwich House, and The Old Schools. The injunction aimed to protect graduation ceremonies and prevent unauthorized access to buildings containing sensitive information. The university emphasized its commitment to freedom of speech and the right to protest within the law, stating that the injunction was limited to specific sites and did not prevent lawful protest elsewhere on campus.
7. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/cambridge-granted-gaza-protest-injunction-protect-graduations> - In March 2025, the High Court granted Cambridge University an injunction preventing protests related to the Israel-Hamas conflict during the graduation season. The injunction covered three central university locations and restricted access for 'persons unknown' until July 26, 2025. The university had initially sought a five-year injunction but reduced the request to four months. Critics, including human rights groups, argued that the injunction set a 'dangerous precedent' for suppressing student activism and freedom of expression on campus.