# Pro-Palestine protester halts Cambridge graduations with dramatic gate blockade



A pro-Palestine protester caused significant disruption during graduation ceremonies at Cambridge University on May 23, chaining himself to the gates of the Senate House, a key venue for the event. Dressed in a boiler suit splattered with red paint, he secured himself in place with a padlock and zip-tie, chanting "Free Palestine," as echoes of his calls reverberated around the area. The scene was further enlivened by around a dozen other demonstrators, some waving Palestinian flags and donning face masks outside the ceremonies for Queen's, St Catherine's, and Jesus Colleges.

This act of protest takes place against a backdrop of increasing tensions surrounding protests at educational institutions related to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Earlier this year, in a move that has drawn considerable criticism, Cambridge University was granted a High Court injunction designed to prevent pro-Palestine protests on campus through to late July 2025. The initial attempt sought a longer, five-year restraining order but was significantly curtailed after a judge deemed it excessive, citing concerns for freedom of expression. The university justified its actions by claiming there was a "real and imminent risk" of disruptions, particularly during key events such as graduation ceremonies, which have seen increased activism in previous years.

King's College, a constituent part of Cambridge, has made headlines recently for deciding to cease investments in arms companies, a move that aligns with demands from the student group "Cambridge for Palestine." This group has called for the university to divest from firms they accuse of being complicit in the ongoing ethnic cleansing they argue is taking place in Palestine. The protests have highlighted a growing movement within academia, with students voicing a strong stance against institutional complicity in global human rights violations.

The recent protests echo sentiments expressed by students across more than 100 universities globally, as they increasingly demand urgent action regarding Palestine. In joint statements, activists from groups like Oxford Action for Palestine and Cambridge for Palestine have been vocal in rejecting their institutions' perceived complicity in what they describe as "war crimes" against the Palestinian people. Their protests aim not only to end funding links but also to push for support in reconstructing Gaza's educational systems and safeguarding students involved in these initiatives.

Despite growing calls for awareness and action, such protests have led to university administrations taking more restrictive measures, which many activists and human rights organisations, such as Liberty, have condemned as setting a dangerous precedent for free speech on campuses. Critics argue that such injunctions curtail the right to protest, an essential aspect of academic life and free expression.

As Cambridge University navigates the complexities of upholding academic values and responding to student activism, it finds itself at a crossroads. The protestor's actions during graduation serve as a stark reminder of the urgency and intensity of the sentiments surrounding this issue, as well as the challenges that lie ahead for educational institutions grappling with political activism within their hallowed walls.

## 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.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/cambridge-university-granted-extreme-protest-injunction/), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/students-stage-pro-palestine-occupations-at-five-more-uk-universities)
* 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 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 judge scheduled a follow-up hearing for March 2025 to decide whether a longer-term injunction would be imposed.
4. <https://www.newarab.com/news/uk/cambridge-slammed-chilling-ban-pro-gaza-protests> - The University of Cambridge has been condemned by activists and rights groups for obtaining a High Court injunction that effectively bans pro-Palestinian protests on its campus until July 26, 2025. The ruling, issued by Mr. Justice Soole, coincided with the final graduation ceremony of the academic year. The university had initially sought a more long-term injunction, requesting a five-year order to block protests related to the Israel-Palestine conflict on its grounds. However, last month a judge rejected this bid, citing its overreach. In a second attempt, Cambridge University returned to court in mid-March to seek a four-month order to prevent disruptions during key graduation events. The court's decision was grounded in the argument that there was a 'real and imminent risk' of recurring protests, which had already disrupted ceremonies in previous years.
5. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/cambridge-granted-gaza-protest-injunction-protect-graduations> - The University of Cambridge has been granted a court injunction preventing some protests linked to the Israel-Hamas conflict during this year’s graduation season. Three locations at the heart of the ancient university are covered by the order that restricts access for 'persons unknown' until July 26, 2025. Cambridge had initially sought a similar injunction prohibiting direct action related to the conflict without its consent for a five-year period but reduced this to four months for the latest hearing. The injunction was granted by the High Court on March 21 after the university convinced the judge that there was a 'real and imminent' risk of further protests happening on the sites. Groups including human rights organization Liberty – which had intervened in the case – said the 'overreaching' ban set a 'dangerous precedent'.
6. <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/cambridge-university-granted-extreme-protest-injunction/> - On March 21, 2025, the High Court granted a reduced version of Cambridge University’s proposed sweeping injunction against Palestine-related protests in three locations on their campus. The University’s initial attempt to secure a five-year ban on February 27, 2025, was resoundingly rejected in court, and it was forced to return this week with a significantly reduced version of its initial injunction that would apply for four months, rather than five years. The University’s second attempt to pass this injunction has resulted in an injunction restricting access to three key University sites frequently used for protests until July 26, 2025. This is far less than the five years initially sought by the university, but human rights campaigners have called the judgment excessive and said it will curb students’ right to freedom of expression.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/06/students-stage-pro-palestine-occupations-at-five-more-uk-universities> - A joint statement from the organisers Oxford Action for Palestine and Cambridge for Palestine read: 'Over 100 universities across the globe have now taken bold and urgent action for Palestine. As members of these institutions, we refuse to accept our universities’ complicity in Israel’s war crimes against the Palestinian people – and we refuse to stand by while they justify Israel’s campaign of mass slaughter, starvation, and displacement.' The protesters at Oxford and Cambridge arrived on Monday morning with supplies, sleeping bags and cardboard signs bearing hand-painted slogans that stated: 'There are no universities left in Gaza' and 'Divest from genocide'. A large banner, reading 'Welcome to the people’s university for Palestine', was put up outside the encampment in front of the Pitt Rivers museum in Oxford. They have also demanded that Oxford and Cambridge universities divest from all companies linked to Israeli genocide and occupation, help rebuild Gaza’s education system, end institutional relationships with Israeli universities and protect the safety of students and staff involved in pro-Palestinian action.