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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 May 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Suppression of Pro-Palestinian Students in the United States of America Violates Academic Freedom

We note the report submitted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Ms. Farida Shaheed, submitted to the 56 session of the UN human right Council on academic freedom and freedom of expression in educational institutions.

We also note the Special Rapporteur's statement, released following her visit to the United States of America and the expression of worries over the increase in attacks against the protesting student across campuses in the United States of America which she considered as an "erosion of intellectual freedom and democratic principles within educational settings," in addition to her condemnation of "violent crackdown on peaceful demonstrators, arrests, detentions, police violence, surveillance and disciplinary measures and sanctions against members of the educational community" for exercising their right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

In addition, we welcome the Special Rapporteur's emphasis that "the right to express views peacefully on a campus inside or outside of class is at the heart of academic freedom, which is a key part of the right to education"(1) as well as her recommendation on the necessity of removing police from the schools in the United States of America and making investments in experts such as counsellors and social workers to create a safe and learning environment in the academic institutions in the United States of America.

The Students

The scope and extent of the students' protests have been alarming. Thousands of students have been camping and demonstrating in at more than 130 colleges and universities across the United States of America and more than 3,000 demonstrators were arrested between April and May 2024. The Students have been expressing political disagreements, condemning the Israel military operations in the occupied Palestinian territories, and specifically in Gaza, which have created the colossal death toll of 30000, and the injury of over 100,000 civilians, predominantly women and children. The students have witnessed the humanitarian disaster in Gaza to be growing more horrifying each day and more lives being lost, so they have been calling upon their country to stop supporting the massacres and the on-going genocide (2,3), while at the same time calling upon their universities to divest from Israel. The students have been requesting a permanent ceasefire to protect civilians and ensure unimpeded humanitarian aid access.

The United States of America response to the students' peaceful exercise of their fundamental human rights has involved heavy-handed suppressions, the Police has been raiding the students' campings, assemblies and demonstrations, arresting thousands of protesters. The university officials have been forced to impose academic sanctions for many students including suspensions, expulsions and visa revocations (4) .

The Academia and the Staff

Concerns have been voiced by the media over the discriminatory treatment and extensive suspension of the United States of America university professors and presidents for expressing political views opposing to those of the government. The university staff who have voiced concerns over the situation of the occupied Palestinian territories have been charged with anti-Semitism and have faced various forms of punishment. Critiques believe that the discriminatory treatment of these members of academia is setting a "dangerous precedence for academic freedom".

In late May 2024, at the time of the preparation of this statement, the United States of America still continue to criticize the United States of America who “provides weapons for Israel to carry out a massacre of a magnitude that history has never witnessed” (6), And the Country continues to use all capacities at hand to suppress and suffocate the protesting voices. on May 26th, the heads of Ivy universities of the country are under immense pressure by the congress to punish the students and stuff protesters, stigmatizing them with anti-Semitism.

The heads of the United States of America prominent universities are under intense pressure (7) and questioned on the intensity of punishments decided for protesting students and at the same time they are criticized by some members of the Congress for following the international law, getting involved in negotiations with the students, in an attempt to peacefully manage the situation, avoiding Police involvement and convincing the students to discontinue camping and protesting.

Recommendations*

As a NGO concerned with violations of human rights, we would like to call on the Special Rapporteur on the right to Education to:

- continue raising concerns on the situation of the United States of America student protestors and urge the country to take effective steps to prevent violations and guarantee the enjoyment of the right to education, the right to freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly for the students, without discrimination on the grounds of political viewpoints.
- Join the other UN Special Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights defenders, in an official statement, to condemn the continuous, wide- spread violations of the human rights of the students of the United States of America, professors, university staff and university presidents who voice concerns on the situation of the State of Palestine or abide by the international law and try to protect human rights of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and academic freedom in the academic settings.

1- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/05/1149616>

2- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147976>

3- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145937>

4- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/05/03/international-students-campus-protest-visas/>

5- <https://progressive.org/latest/the-new-assault-on-academic-freedom-zunes-20240515/>

6- <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240429-gaza-revives-student-movement-in-the-us/>

7- <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/us-college-leaders-grilled-congress-165755288.htm>