

From: HRC-SR FreeAssembly-ROMERO <hrc-sr-freeassembly-romero@un.org>
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To: ROLE Vice-Chancellor <Vice-Chancellor@admin.cam.ac.uk>
Cc: VCO Enquiries <VCO.Enquiries@admin.cam.ac.uk>, Emma Rampton <Emma.Rampton@admin.cam.ac.uk>, Gloria De Marino <gloria.demarino@un.org>, Vanessa Asensio Perez <vanessa.asensioperez@un.org>, "Gina Romero [GMAIL]" <grsrfoaa@gmail.com>
Subject: Message from the United Nations Special Rapporteur of Freedom of Assembly and of Association

Mr. Vice Chancellor University of Cambridge
Ms. Emma Rampton

Good morning. I am Gina Romero, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly.

I would like to express my concern about some allegations I have received regarding University's claim for a precautionary injunction to restrain trespass in University's premises and in relation with the university based pro-Palestine movement.

I feel obliged to remind the University of Cambridge that the international standards of protection of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly (mainly [General Comment 37](#)) indicates that "Any restrictions on participation in peaceful assemblies should be based on a differentiated or individualized assessment of the conduct of the participants and the assembly concerned. Blanket restrictions on peaceful assemblies are presumptively disproportionate".

As the claim filled by the University to the High Court of Justice are solely focus on 'Cambridge for Palestine' or 'purpose connected with Palestine-Israel conflict', it violates the principle of non-discrimination and content neutrality that are part of the international standards for the protection of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

Besides, the claim includes: i) blanket bans of actions and equipment: entering, occupying or remain upon, block, prevent, slow down, obstruct or interfere with access; erect any structure (including tents and sleeping equipment), ii) blanket bans on specific places: Greenwich House, Senate House and Senate House Yard, The Old schools.

As mentioned before, blanket prohibitions go against the standards, that clearly indicates that: Peaceful campus assemblies should be guaranteed and protected wherever they take place (outdoors, indoors, online; in public and private spaces; or a combination thereof), and regardless of their forms (demonstrations, protests, meetings, processions, rallies, sit-ins, candlelit vigils and flash mobs, civil disobedience campaigns, camps, etc.), whether they are stationary or mobile.

Besides, restrictions, unless justified as necessary on a case-by-cases basis, should not be imposed on elements of:

- i. The time of assemblies, as “participants must have sufficient opportunity to manifest their views or to pursue their other purposes effectively”,
- ii. Their frequency, as “the timing, duration or frequency of a demonstration may, play a central role in achieving its objective. However, the cumulative impact of sustained gatherings may be weighed in a proportionality assessment of a restriction”,
- iii. The number of participants and their place, as “peaceful assemblies may in principle be conducted in all spaces to which the public has access or should have access (...) they should not be relegated to remote areas where they cannot effectively capture the attention of those who are being addressed or the general public”.
- iv. The equipment used, as “participants should be left to determine whether they want to use posters, megaphones, musical instruments or other technical means, such as projection equipment, to convey their message. Assemblies may entail the temporary erection of structures, including sound systems, to reach their audience and achieve their purpose”.

Besides, requesting 'consent' for the assemblies, as it is included in the claim, is also against the standards that recommends notification systems, but with the understanding that the notification "must not be misused to stifle peaceful assemblies (...) The enforcement of notification requirements must not become an end in itself, (and...) the notification procedures should be transparent, not unduly bureaucratic, proportionate to the potential public impact of the assembly concerned".

Also the standards are very clear when they indicate that "a failure to notify the authorities of an upcoming assembly, where required, does not render the act of participation in the assembly unlawful, and must not in itself be used as a basis for dispersing the assembly or arresting the participants or organizers, or for imposing undue sanctions (...) Lack of notification does not absolve the authorities from the obligation, within their abilities, to facilitate the assembly and to protect the participants".

Last year I issued a series of recommendations for universities so that they can align their actions and regulations with international standards for the protection of human rights. You can find the document here:

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/association/statements/20241004-stm-sr-association.pdf> I invite you to read it and check how align are the University's policies and practices with the international human rights standards.

I respectfully but strongly call on you to ensure that blanket bans are not imposed.

As the recommendations document includes, in universities located on private property, gatherings and peaceful protests are still protected under the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. While certain restrictions may be applied to safeguard the rights and interests of others property stakeholders, these must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. This underscores the importance of refraining from imposing blanket restrictions. The use of “trespassing” offences for peaceful assemblies carried out on the private property of academic institutions should be assessed strictly against the necessity and proportionality principles. Criminal charges for non-violent protest activity are disproportionate.

Besides, I want to call to your attention the more recent report presented to the UN General Assembly by the Special Rapporteur for the right to freedom of expression, Irene Khan, that is also very relevant for the update of your own policies and standards:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a79319-global-threats-freedom-expression-arising-conflict-gaza-report>

I am more than willing to work with you all on the review of internal policy and practice, and to discuss this further if you wish. Please, do not hesitate in sending me any information you consider is relevant for informing my action and work pertaining to the information included in this email.

Respectfully,



GINA ROMERO

UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association
Relatora Especial de Naciones Unidas para los derechos de libertad de asamblea pacífica y de asociación.

Link tree: <https://linktr.ee/GinaRomero>

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