

A number of CUPE 2950 members expressed their support for the encampment at MacInnes Field at UBC Vancouver and this letter was shared with CUPE 2950 members in advance of the June 27 General Membership Meeting. Since the letter was written, the protestors have decamped; however, their demands to UBC remain the same. These demands are reiterated in and supported by the letter below. A statement was issued about their decision to decamp and the next steps for this movement, which can be read [here](#).

At the June 27 CUPE 2950 General Membership Meeting, the majority of members present at the meeting voted in favour of the motion to pass this letter.

June 18, 2024

**Letter in Solidarity with Students' Right to Protest
from Clerical, Library, and Chan Centre Employees at U.B.C.**

We at CUPE 2950 express our support for the student encampment for Palestine at “MacInnes Field” on the UBC Vancouver Campus, located on the unceded territory of the Musqueam Nation. This encampment was set up on April 29 as an act of protest against UBC’s complicity in the ongoing genocide of Palestinians through its unethical financial investments in Israel’s war machine. Students have kept this encampment going for 50 days and counting while enduring bouts of windstorms, heavy rain and cold weather. Their demands to the university have been clearly expressed multiple times, however the leadership and administration has refused to respond meaningfully. Instead UBC has deployed armed police officers and paramilitary units onto our campus to intimidate and surveil its own students. These acts have been justified by the administration by painting students as a threat to workers and other groups on campus. As workers we deny and wholeheartedly oppose the administration's mischaracterization of students as a threat. We reiterate that the workers of this campus do not view the students as any source of threat. However, we *are* highly alarmed by the administration's decision to call armed police forces to our workspace and the growing levels of surveillance at UBC.

We are also appalled that the university has failed to clearly condemn the indiscriminate violence being carried out against Palestinians by the Israeli armed forces. Since October 7th 2023, Israel has escalated its attacks on Occupied Palestine with horrific, indiscriminate bombing, killing at least 45,000 Palestinian civilians,¹ including more than 15,000 children. Over these 255 days we have witnessed Israel’s bombing of homes, schools, hospitals, universities and displaced people in tents. On January 26, the UN International Court of Justice announced their decision to investigate Israel for the crime against humanity of genocide, given ‘plausible’ violations of the Genocide Convention. Despite the scale and horrific nature of these war crimes, and despite the complicity of Canada vis-à-vis its arms trade with Israel, UBC Vancouver has failed to issue an overarching statement decrying this situation and supporting the right of Palestinians to life, land

¹ This number includes the more than 10,000 people who are missing and presumed to be buried under destroyed buildings. The latest casualty figures can be found on Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker>

and freedom. As an influential institution it is UBC's responsibility to acknowledge the ongoing Nakba/genocide against Palestinians, and to call on the Canadian government to instate a two-way arms embargo on Israel. We are disappointed by the administration's refusal to do so and call on UBC to rectify this error.

We are deeply impressed by the students' dedication in calling for just demands. Students have legitimately protested our complicity as UBC continues to support the Israeli war machine through investment in companies that fund weaponry and war technologies and partnerships with Israeli universities that are complicit in Israel's colonial and military projects.² These students have shown true leadership, inclusivity, and care as they exercise their right to civil disobedience in protest of the ongoing illegal occupation and genocide in Gaza. Their community guidelines also showcase a true commitment to safety and well-being via community care. UBC claims to cultivate these very values in our students (in our various strategic plans, such as the Inclusion Action Plan and Indigenous Strategic Plan), yet the students' show of character has been met with increased police surveillance on campus, dismissal of the atrocities that are being actively carried out against the Palestinian people, and fearmongering.

On Wednesday May 15, peaceful student protestors marked the 76th anniversary of the Nakba by hosting a sit-in at the executive offices in Koerner Library. The following morning, an email was sent to all Arts Administrators from the Arts Human Resources Manager with the subject line "Time-Sensitive: Safety Protocol - Protests at Buildings," suggesting that the "personal safety and wellbeing" of the staff was under threat. This message made a choice to frame the peaceful direct action as aggressive. Videos from the protest show students occupying the office in an organized manner, with coordinated attempts to peacefully assemble. The university's framing of these protests as threatening is not only inaccurate; it implies that the students organizing the encampment and protests are inherently violent, setting them up to be targeted for police brutality and harassment, and justifying other potential escalations directly enabled by the university administration. It also obscures the fact that students, staff, and faculty have exhausted several avenues of dialogue with the university administration, which has not been meaningfully engaged thus far. We are disappointed that the university instead directed 15 armed RCMP officers and campus security to surround the student protestors. Far from protecting the safety or wellbeing of staff, students, or faculty, this directly exposed them to the possibility of police brutality, arrest, and unjust suspension. This is unacceptable when many of the students are Black, Indigenous, and people of colour, and are disproportionately made vulnerable to state carcerality.

The administrations' email also suggests that "these incidents may be upsetting" in reference to the student protest. This language further perpetuates tension on campus by implying that the protestors are discriminatory or antisemitic. In actuality, many Jewish students and community members are actively involved in the encampment. Organizers at the encampment have made it clear that discriminatory behavior is unwelcome, that protests may be disruptive but that violence is unacceptable, and that the encampment does not stand against Jewishness but rather for an end to the genocide being carried out against Palestinian people in the name of Zionist

² More about the history of this complicity in Maya Wind's recent book *Towers of Ivory and Steel*: <https://www.mayawind.com/book> and https://www.democracynow.org/2024/3/15/maya_wind_part_2

imperialism and settler colonial violence. Let us be clear: we as workers are not "upset" about students organizing to exercise their academic freedom and right to protest such atrocities. However, we are upset that UBC, as an institution built upon our collective labour, continues to invest in companies that fund the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people, and that the administration continually refuses to meaningfully engage with the students' demands.

UBC exists because of our students, who are leaders of the future and who act on principles of justice, global citizenship, and integrity. It is irresponsible of the university to endanger these very students. As workers, we stand in solidarity with them and urge the university to not put them in harms way. We workers reaffirm our right to shape the direction of this university as the hands and minds that build and sustain its daily functioning. We add our voice to the students; and urge UBC to follow through on the following demands³:

1. UBC must divest from companies that are complicit in Israeli atrocities
2. UBC must cut ties with Israeli institutions
3. UBC must condemn Israel's genocide and scholasticide in Gaza
4. UBC must keep marginalized students on campus safe from police
5. UBC must respect Palestinian right to return as enshrined under UNGA Resolution 194 and the right to resist as outlined under UNGA Resolution 2625

In solidarity,

CUPE 2950 members

M/S/C at CUPE 2950 June General Membership Meeting

June 27th, 2024

³ Detailed explanations of these demands can be read in the open letter to President Bacon authored by the People's University of Gaza [here](#)