



From denouncing genocide to challenging the system: a call for global action by the youth

Two weeks into the encampment at the University of Barcelona, the scale of the students objectives brings to light the issue of international institutions at a time of wavering faith in the current global system.

Since the 6th of May, the historic building of the University of Barcelona (UB) has been occupied by an encampment in solidarity with Palestine, following the international surge of social mobilisation at universities. In an extraordinary session of the university senate on the 8th of May, a motion was presented by the organisations Universitats amb Palestina and the Grup Palestina UB. The motion called for a ceasefire, as well as demanding that the UB recognise and condemn the genocide, colonial occupation, and apartheid against the Palestinian population. It also called for the university to cut ties with Israeli academic institutions companies and demand the Catalan and Spanish governments to do the same.

The motion was passed with 59 votes in favour, 23 against and 37 abstentions, a significant advancement. But the battle with the university does not end there. The motion now faces further approval by the government of the UB, which is

currently being met with resistance. The all-too-familiar sense of empty promises hangs in the air. And until the UB government takes concrete action, the encampment will remain in place and continue to intensify pressure.

The potential risk of eviction on Sunday 12th due to the Catalan regional elections dissipated as negotiations ensured that the campers and voters could continue as usual on their respective sides of the rectorate, with boards installed in the voting hall to obscure the tents behind. Compared to the disturbing repression by police and often military troops against peaceful student protesters at other encampments, particularly in the USA and Amsterdam, the atmosphere at the UB camp remains calm. Within this context, the question “what next?” arises.



The encampment's objectives are ambitious and there is still much to achieve. Participants have described this movement as a catalyst for addressing many other human rights issues around the world. The encampments create an opportunity to denounce other genocides which are not receiving the mediatic response they ought to, such as in Sudan, Ethiopia or Congo. In fact, one member of the camp is responsible for organizing talks and has been trying to get in touch with the Saharawi community. As he noted, "they are analogous cases as they are two of the only stateless populations which are suffering a genocide" and importantly, "the international community has abandoned these people". He also recognised the increasingly strengthening links

between the Moroccan and Israeli states who are complicit in methods of ethnic cleansing, territorial occupation and thus violation of international law.

The movement also goes further than denouncing the atrocities of wars to also defend our societies' democratic rights and "rise up against all of the injustices in the world and especially against our governments." The deterioration of the supposedly strong moral values across Europe and the United States is pushing students across the world to advocate for better living conditions for all people, particularly marginalised groups such as the LGBTQ+ community, migrants, economically disadvantaged individuals, and women.



Source: Hanin Fraser



The protestors call for workers unions to join their fight, clarifying that massifying as many people as possible is necessary to ensure that this movement continues. One participant highlighted the importance within Spain, saying “we don’t want our government to finance a genocide in Palestine, but we also don’t want them to increase military spending, militarizing our borders, as the Spanish government has done: ceding a port to NATO and declaring immigration a hybrid threat”. Whilst the Spanish government has taken a progressive stance compared to other European countries, recently declaring its plans to officially recognise the state of Palestine, Spain continues to send arms to Israel. The sentiment that the statements of academic institutions, politicians, and world leaders are mere “empty words” rings clear once again amongst this youth.

These movements also bear the question of system change. And for the vast majority of those camping, a greater, universal transformation is needed. The atrocities we are witnessing in Palestine do not exist in a vacuum. They are a result of the existing framework, in a world that is currently shaped by the few elite actors with access to power and capital. In this sense, the repression of all types of human rights through gender, race or class ideologies is sustained by the system in place. In one protestors words, “if we don’t put an end to the capitalist system, all of the barbarities we are

experiencing will continue to be repeated.” Yet, whilst our contemporary competitive system clearly increases inequality and fragmentation - which in turn impedes global peace and stability - potential alternatives are hard to imagine, let alone turn into reality.

Within this context, the role of international institutions becomes ambiguous. Does the frustration towards people’s leaders and governments also extend to our transnational organisations? The answer is a clear, yes. Some participants of the camp feel such a lack of trust and hope in these organisations, that they discard their utility completely. Again, the argument returns to a critique of the system, whereby entities like the UN, the ICJ or the WTO are established upon Western imperialist ideologies which further entrench worldwide inequalities.

The UN Security Council’s 5 permanent members; France, England, USA, Russia and China, are the only states with the power of the veto. Under this system, it is extremely difficult for real changes to take place in states whose interests do not align with those of the permanent members. The Security Council’s inability to effectively respond to global shocks has become increasingly evident following the escalations in Gaza, as well as considering the ongoing war in Ukraine or the internal conflicts in Sudan and Myanmar.

This does not take away from the fact that the UN itself is the principal organization for the defence of peace, security and human rights, and the most valuable institution in providing a global moral compass. One camp participant echoed this sentiment, clarifying that “the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has taken actions in favour of the Palestinian people and indicates that what is happening there is a genocide.” Another added that whilst some are hasty to criticise international institutions, “people have no problem referring to them when they serve the movement, for example commending the ICJ ruling.” Yet it is clear that such statements and positionings from reputable institutions are unfortunately unable to effect meaningful change on the ground.

The need for a democratic reform of the UN’s structure is evident, and indeed will be discussed as a priority at the World Summit for the Future in September 2024. The promising initiative proposed by the Secretary General in the New Agenda for Peace calls for increased membership of permanent and non-permanent members to create a Security Council which is more representative of the geopolitical realities of today. In addition, it seeks to modify the use of the veto with the hope of limiting mass atrocities.

Such a reformation is no small feat and requires genuine commitment from all member States. Those who have already abandoned their faith in such institutions argue that real and effective



Source: El Punt Avui



action can only come from the bottom: actors in civil society such as the working-class and students. Yet, denying the influence of other actors, such as elites within institutions and governments, also restricts the potential for change. The frustration towards the system of those who outright reject the potential of such institutions can lead to more polarisation and fragmentation. The vast array of personal preferences, identities and ideologies ought not to weaken the common goals of such movements. With a consensus of one common goal, whether it be an urgent call to end the genocide and free Palestine, or a transformation of our global governance system for effective action, the more people involved, the better.

With all of this in mind, there is a strong consensus that whenever the encampment at the UB comes to an end, this movement must not die with it, but solidarity and organisation should continue afterwards. The initial effort taken by these students and collaborating organisations ought to be utilized for it not to go in vain. This way, pressure can be maintained against states and companies which are complicit with the Israeli state and those whose policies continue to endanger human rights due to their capitalist, imperialist, and extractivist practices. There is no doubt that a powerful global social movement driven by the younger generations is necessary to achieve this. It will require a great amount of work and effort, but it is vital nonetheless, and has been pending for too long. Such a change provides an opportunity to restore faith in a democracy that truly delivers on its commitments.

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