



On Free Speech and a Free Palestine A Statement from the LSE Liberated Zone 3 October 2024

For almost 3 months, LSE has subjected 7 students to an egregiously unfair disciplinary process for their alleged participation in a legitimate protest on campus based on shocking claims. The university has punitively targeted this group of students with an appalling Islamophobic narrative comparing the student protest – where students called on LSE to divest from its ‘Assets in Apartheid’ – to the London 7/7 bombings in 2005. Students have since been suspended from campus and kept in the dark about the investigation, allegations, and evidence held against them. We have been left with no choice but to share this experience publicly to bring attention to yet another troubling example of the repression of pro-Palestine activism on campus and rally support.

On July 7th, LSE held its second round of summer school registrations, bringing in ambitious students from across the globe to study at a renowned institution which proclaims “to know the causes of things”. The protest was held during this event to raise awareness among incoming students about LSE’s financial complicity in genocide, arms proliferation and the climate breakdown. Students held banners and chanted “Disclose, Divest! We Will Not Stop, We Will Not Rest!” in the Student Service Center. Many summer school students expressed support and engaged positively, asking questions about LSE’s complicity. Days later, the LSE administration sent a number of students intimidating letters which grossly misrepresented the protest, accusing students of “marching down [a staircase] in military style” with their faces covered with “Palestinian bandanas”. The letters compared the student protest to the 7/7 London bombings of almost 20 years ago, claiming that individuals at the summer school registration “feared there was a further attack taking place”. This disturbing accusation does not match the video evidence of the protest which [we posted](#) on our Instagram account on 10 July 2024. LSE’s heinous misrepresentation of legitimate, pro-Palestinian protest is steeped in Islamophobia. We condemn the university’s instrumentalisation of the 7/7 London bombings to demonise student protestors and criminalise dissent on campus.

LSE adds disciplinary action to its repertoire of repressive tactics to suppress a unified and democratic voice in support of Palestinian liberation on our campus. Earlier this year, we occupied the Marshall Bloom Building for five weeks from May-June, demanding that LSE divest from the egregious activities outlined in [LSESU Palestine Society’s ‘Assets in Apartheid’](#) report. While LSE has consistently tried to paint our demands as divorced from the wider community, the encampment represented a unity of voices across campus calling for an end to LSE’s financial complicity in genocide. This was evidenced in a historic student referendum in which [89% of LSE students voted in favour of divestment](#), and multiple petitions representing over 3,000 voices including [students](#), [staff and faculty](#), [Jewish staff and students](#), and LSE [alumni](#). Despite this extraordinarily popular and democratic mobilisation, [LSE became the first university to evict its students](#) from an encampment by [controversially](#) taking us to court. Less than 24 hours after our eviction, LSE’s leadership unilaterally ended ongoing negotiations with our student representatives – violating previous assurances that negotiations would continue

regardless of the physical presence of the camp. LSE's Council went on to vote against a divestment [proposal](#) on 25 June against clear, widespread support across the LSE community.

Our university's punitive and disturbing approach to silencing protest has had devastating consequences on the wellbeing of targeted students. LSE's suspension of 7 students has denied them access to campus and all university events. Students have had to submit painfully detailed appeals and reveal sensitive personal information to the university in order to gain exceptional access to the library, the GP and counselors, and prayer areas. The incredible burden and constant stress of navigating these measures has even led students to defer the end of their degrees. LSE's consistent failure to abide by its policies, such as completing the investigation within 60 days, has ensured students suffer the consequences of guilt, even with no ruling on their culpability. LSE is yet to meet with the students and has withheld evidence of the alleged misconduct for almost 80 days, while obstructing data requests for personal information. This follows a worrying trend of institutional neglect as it was revealed earlier this year that [LSE mishandled a sexual harassment investigation](#) and silenced victim-survivors and their advocates, forcing an International History professor to resign from her department while a sexual predator remains in his post. To address this scandal, LSE decided to revise its internal procedures and President and Vice Chancellor Larry Kramer specifically proposed [a new in-house General Counsel](#) to independently oversee disciplinary processes. While this was intended to rebuild trust in LSE's processes, the experience of the 7 LSE students does little to suggest that anything has changed.

Last month, as LSE was named "[University of the Year 2025](#)" by [The Sunday Times](#) for the first time, Larry Kramer asserted his commitment to "championing free speech". Yet, LSE has excluded students from campus for engaging in pro-Palestine protest, in contempt of their right to free speech. [In July](#), more than 100 staff members wrote to the LSE administration expressing concern over the potential misuse of disciplinary action to censor speech and intimidate students. With the curtailing of civil liberties across society, especially in the context of Palestine protest, LSE's actions set a draconian precedent for freedoms of expression and assembly, not only at LSE, but in higher education in the UK. The court order LSE previously acquired to evict the encampment in June means that anyone who protests in the ground floor and atrium of the (Marshall) Bloom Building is [at risk](#) of a criminal prosecution. We condemn LSE's attempts to intimidate and dissuade its own students from exercising their fundamental rights. With these suspensions, LSE makes a mockery of "free speech" and the values and freedoms that are central, defining principles of the university. Protest can be noisy, disruptive, and even uncomfortable. That is the point of protest when conventional avenues for achieving change have been exhausted.

This isn't the first time that LSE has tried to silence its students, but we'd like it to be the last. In 1967, LSE punished anti-apartheid students for their activism on campus. LSE suspended student organisers David Adelstein and Marshall Bloom – after whom we renamed the (Marshall) Bloom Building – for mobilising students against LSE's appointment of Director Walter Adams because of his ties to the apartheid regime in Rhodesia. LSE also called police on protesting students, took legal action against 13, dismissed faculty members who supported them, and even painted students as "agitators" in the national press. What were the students'

alleged crimes? Demanding transparency on LSE's holdings in apartheid and an end to all ties to apartheid rule. Today, LSE [celebrates](#) how its students were among the first in the UK to protest South African apartheid. After apartheid, in 2000 [Nelson Mandela visited and praised LSE](#) for responding "to the call to isolate the apartheid regime". But history shows us that LSE brutally repressed and criminalised its students at the time - only claiming the cause of anti-apartheid when it became easy and convenient to do so.

We are compelled to write this statement in the interest of transparency to show what pro-Palestinian students endure behind closed doors, for simply trying to make their university divest from apartheid, occupation, and genocide in 2024. There are no universities left in Gaza. Israel's genocidal war, with the unrestrained support of Western governments, has taken the lives of over 42,000 Palestinians (with the Lancet figure estimating upwards of 180,000 deaths). Over 20,000 children are "trapped beneath rubble, detained, buried in unmarked graves, or lost from their families". We have seen videos of burnt, maimed and disfigured babies, children, women, and men on our screens every single day for the past 12 months. Israel has expanded its deadly violence to Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. There is no end in sight. Instead of condemning and divesting from the worst atrocity of our times, LSE has chosen to punish the students who have brought this to its attention.

The LSE Liberated Zone urges the LSE administration to drop the disciplinary investigations against the 7 LSE students and to protect freedoms of assembly and expression on campus.