

Statement from the LSE Encampment, 27 May 2024

Due to the lack of good faith negotiations on the part of SMC, the perimeter of the camp has been expanded. This decision was specifically made following the failure of the SMC to respond to our email, sent on 23 May.

On the night of the expansion, we have been horrified as a camp to witness in real time the violence committed against innocent displaced men, women and children in Rafah. Witnessing the bodies burned beyond recognition, the mutilated and decapitated bodies of children, and hearing the pained screams of Palestinians who cannot turn away from these sights makes the decisions of the SMC, and language of LSE procedure, even harder to swallow. Despite the ICJ ruling issued on 24 May ordering Israel to halt military operations in Rafah, and an interim judgement on 26 January which labelled the violence a plausible genocide, Israeli violence continues to not only take Palestinian lives, but to brutally disfigure and mutilate Palestinian bodies. This is the context within which students are organising. This is the context within which the university refuses to meaningfully engage with students on the issue of our demands—in particular, the issue of divestment.

It is truly shocking that a university which takes great pride in its international scope and reach would feel no urgency to divest from such an international atrocity. The complicity of the LSE in this violence is not only morally reprehensible, but poor practice for the university—all UK institutions with investments in genocide open themselves up to serious legal vulnerability.

The LSE Liberated Zone is disheartened by the SMC's refusal to negotiate with us in earnest. Until now, the encampment has been fair in negotiating; beyond the existence of the camp as a direct action intended to disrupt business as usual, efforts have been made to act in good faith. We are aware that the SMC had concerns over obstruction of teaching, disruption of examinations, and interfering with the day-to-day activities of the university. Up to this point, our encampment has not sought disruption to students as the university claims; this is clearly exhibited by the inter-university rally on 23 May, where we were explicit in our intent to hold a silent protest for the LSE action. In addition to this, the camp has not prevented general access to the Marshall Bloom (formerly Marshall) Building for LSE faculty and students. Therefore, whilst the SMC has halted negotiations as they request assurances about camp behaviour, materially the camp has not yet behaved in any of these ways. Seeking assurances about behaviours which have not manifested, has delayed the negotiation process.

To date, the SMC has ordered the removal of posters, and has set the bounds of the camp with security tape. The SMC has requested that the Muslim prayer be kept within the bounds of the encampment, assumedly a direct response to the public prayer which took place on 17 May - an event at which Muslims were invited to peacefully pray together in the CBG Plaza. Since the beginning of the encampment, the SMC has also increased securitisation and general surveillance around the encampment. Despite this, the camp has allowed LSE staff to enter the space in order to carry out operational tasks, and we have even allowed security access to maintain guard over the Bloom Building basement.

All of these terms have been tolerated by the encampment, which has instead focused its efforts towards providing a space for community, for mourning, and for educating. The encampment has also provided space for students to practise the values we see LSE to lack. Principally, we practise compassion, liberation, and education. Organisationally, we practise democracy and transparency. As much as we have been able to, we have extended this compassion and transparency to the SMC.

On the negotiation front, the camp has accepted SMC terms; we have compromised on open negotiations, accepting the SMC request that we have a limited number of witnesses instead. We have accepted such a compromise because we are not willing to further waste time debating the terms of the process; we wish to move on to negotiation. Unfortunately, despite our willingness to compromise, the SMC refuses to reciprocate in good faith. The SMC has not agreed to a mutually pre-set agenda for forthcoming meetings, which would ensure effective discussions. Generally, the camp shares the feeling that the SMC wishes to engage in undemocratic negotiations only - meetings are halted until we accept their strategically inefficient and generally questionable terms of engagement.

Unfortunately, the SMC response, or lack thereof, has proven once again that playing by the rules set by the SMC yields no material outcome. The good faith extended to the SMC and broader student body by the camp has resulted in no movement towards our demands. Divestment still remains undiscussed. The camp has adhered to the red lines set by the SMC. Without further negotiation, this cannot be expected to remain the case.

We propose that a further meeting time and date is set for this week. As our negotiators have made clear, we have an expectation that time in these meetings is not wasted seeking such assurances and discussing details about the day-to-day operational matters of the camp. As ever, we assert that concerns regarding the camp could be resolved if demands are fulfilled and the camp is able to disband.

Yours,
The LSE Liberated Zone