

# Japanese university encampments established against Gaza genocide

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University students in Japan have created encampments and held protests on at least seven different campuses over the past two weeks in opposition to Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza. The camps are the expression of significant anti-war sentiment in Japan.

The encampments were set up alongside those by protesting students in the United States and around the world to oppose the genocide that has killed more than 40,000 people, a large number of whom are women and children. Japanese students have also expressed solidarity with protesters on campuses in the US who have faced a wave of vicious police crackdowns.

The first encampment appeared on April 27 at the University of Tokyo (UTokyo), the country's most prestigious university. This was quickly followed by four others in Tokyo: Waseda University, Sophia University, Tama Art University, and the International Christian University. Outside the capital, students have erected protest camps at Kyoto University and Hiroshima University.

At the UTokyo camp, students placed placards and banners around their tents reading "Ceasefire now!", "Don't turn your back on Gaza!" and "Disclose! Divest! We will not stop. We will not rest!" The demands have been limited to calling on the university administration to end its partnerships with Israel and support the BDS movement, which promotes the boycott of Israeli products. Students are also calling on the university to allow refugee students and academics from Gaza.

Yuka Okamura, one of the student leaders at the encampment, spoke with Al Jazeera regarding their demands. She explained: "We are demanding of the University of Tokyo, like other university students in the US, an academic boycott to begin with, and to

disclose, divest, declare, and also to defend the students and faculty."

Shiki Yasojima, the founder of the UTokyo encampment, said: "I knew I had to do something with all the things going on in Gaza, and also the situation in the United States. I think we have responsibilities as we have the privilege as students, especially of the University of Tokyo."

At Waseda University, a demonstration was held last weekend of around 100 students. One of the speakers at the rally, student leader Sho Toda, raised the support given for the Israeli genocide by the government of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

According to *Arab News*, he asked: "Do you know about Israel's selling of high-tech weapons? They say those weapons have been tested in actual battles. This means that those were developed in Palestine and used in Gaza to kill Palestinians. Without a doubt, the Japanese government is participating in genocide.

"We are fighting for Palestinian students," Toda continued, "who have lost their schools, their futures, and even their lives. If many people participate in demonstrations and express their opposition, the political powers will have no choice but to listen to us. If we do nothing, violence for vested interests will not stop."

In fact, the governments of Japan, the US and other imperialist powers have all lined up with Israel behind its barbaric war despite occasional expressions of concern about the humanitarian disaster facing Palestinians. Increasingly they have resorted to police repression in answer to the anti-genocide protests.

Protests have taken place in Japan since Israel's genocide began last October. These protests have grown in recent weeks alongside the student encampments. A May Day rally, organised by labour

unions, involved an estimated 12,000 people marching under the banner, “Labor Day Against War.” The protesters gathered in front of the Israeli Embassy. Other demonstrations have taken place in high-profile locations like Tokyo’s busy shopping district of Shibuya.

In addition to the US and Japan, the student encampments and demonstrations have also spread to several other major world centres of imperialism: Germany, France, Canada, and Australia, despite the repressive measures that have been used by the bourgeoisie to silence protesters.

In the US, the Biden administration has attempted to falsely brand the protests as “antisemitic,” paving the way for a full mobilisation of the state to suppress them. Over 2,000 students and staff have been arrested in violent scenes at universities from New York to Los Angeles.

The Japanese encampments are also not only an expression of the ongoing outrage felt among young people over the imperialist-sanctioned mass murder in Gaza. The current outpouring of anti-war and anti-militarist sentiment occurs as the Kishida government is rapidly expanding Japan’s armed forces in preparation for a US-led war with China.

This includes a de facto doubling of Tokyo’s military spending and the expansion of military alliances. Kishida’s visit to Washington last month marked a further turning point in the development of these imperialist war plans, which includes the most significant update to the US-Japan military treaty since 1960 as well as Tokyo’s push to join the anti-China AUKUS military pact.

This US-led war drive, of which the genocide in Gaza is only one component, is taking place with the support of both the right-wing ruling Liberal Democratic Party as well as the opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), regardless of the latter’s phony anti-war pretensions.

An April 9, the CDP released a statement attempting to exploit the anti-genocide movement, by supposedly calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. It began by saying, “On October 7, 2023, armed groups such as Hamas in Palestine’s Gaza Strip carried out attacks and kidnappings targeting Israeli civilians, and in response, Israel launched airstrikes, ground invasions, electricity, fuel, supplies, etc. in the Gaza Strip.”

The statement continues: “The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan once again strongly urges all parties to the conflict to strictly abide by international law, including international humanitarian law, and to act toward an immediate ceasefire.”

The CDP, in other words, is equating the victims of longstanding oppression and now mass murder with the perpetrators of this horrific crime. It was the Zionist regime’s brutal decades-long treatment of the Palestinian people that caused the October 7 uprising, and was seized on as the pretext for a war of annihilation.

The war in the Middle East as well as the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine and the intensifying military build-up against China are the emerging fronts in a global war that stems from the profound crisis of world capitalism.

Youth and students in Japan and internationally need to turn to workers on the basis of a socialist perspective to build a unified anti-war movement of the working class to abolish the profit system—the root cause of war.



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