

Dear Vice Chancellor Genevieve Bell,

We write with regard to reports that campus security have directed student protesters to vacate their encampment this morning, and that police are present at the camps.

Alongside eight partner organisations, we have previously written to your office regarding the responsibilities of the university administration to respond to campus protests in ways that uphold the right to public assembly and restrict police involvement to addressing criminal offences. We are concerned that the presence of police at the encampment and any use of police to disperse the encampment if it does not disband is not in accordance with these human rights standards.

The protection of the right of peaceful assembly, under international human rights law and standards, extends to assemblies even on private property and therefore applies to protests on university campuses.

If there are safety concerns in relation to the encampment, including with regard to fire evacuations, we call on you to work with protesters to resolve these safety concerns amicably, rather than seeking to disperse the protests. We understand that students have addressed safety concerns raised with them so far and indicated a willingness to continue to do so.

Police should be summoned to disperse campus demonstrations only as a last resort and only where criminal offences are involved. The involvement of police without proper recourse increases the risk of inappropriate use of force being deployed against protesters.

We urge you to facilitate the right of students to peacefully and safely protest on campus, and to not expose your students and staff to the risk of violence by inviting police to disperse the encampment.

Yours faithfully,

Anastasia Radievska

Protest Rights Campaigner

Australian Democracy Network