

Microsoft employees occupy headquarters in protest of Israel contracts

On Tuesday, a group of current and former Microsoft employees, as well as community members, took over a plaza at Microsoft's headquarters in Redmond, Washington, as part of a No Azure for Apartheid protest. They declared the area a "Liberated Zone" encampment and said they had changed its name from East Campus Plaza to "The Martyred Palestinian Children's Plaza." The organization, which announced and distributed pictures of the takeover in a press release, said around 50 people were in attendance at the start of the event.

The protesters set up tents and artistic homages to the losses in Gaza, including shrouds and a large plate that reads "Stop Starving Gaza." They also set up a negotiating table with a sign inviting Microsoft executives to "come to the table" and end the company's partnership with the Israeli military.

The group says it plans to occupy the plaza until they are forcibly removed. Microsoft did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

It's a continuation of a string of high-profile protests targeting Microsoft and its executives over their work with Israel. At Microsoft's 50th anniversary celebration in April, a software engineer in the company's AI division interrupted Microsoft AI CEO Mustafa Suleyman's speech with a call to stop allowing the Israeli military to use the company's AI products. At another Microsoft event the same day, another software engineer interrupted a speech from Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella with a similar protest. The company swiftly

terminated the roles of both employees. A month later, Microsoft employees said that the company had begun blocking Microsoft Outlook emails containing the words "Palestine," "Gaza," "genocide," "apartheid" and "IOF off Azure."

A press release by No Azure for Apartheid, the Microsoft division of the No Tech for Apartheid organization, called the action the "biggest escalation targeting Microsoft" yet. It referenced an investigation earlier this month by The Guardian in partnership with +972 Magazine and Local Call, which revealed that the Israeli government sought to store recordings and data of up to "a million calls an hour" made by Palestinians. The reports said those calls had directly shaped Israel's military operations in Gaza and the West Bank.

The activists also circulated a document called "We will not be cogs in the Israeli genocidal machine: a call for a Worker Intifada." The document, written by "Microsoft workers, former workers, and community members of conscience," calls for Microsoft to cut ties with Israel. It also calls "for an End to the Genocide and Forced Starvation," as well as for reparations to Palestinians and to end Microsoft's "discrimination against Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and pro-Palestine workers" and "protect all workers involved in Palestinian advocacy from harm, and harassment in the workplace."

The document calls for Microsoft workers to "speak up, walk out, protest, [and] strike." It also calls for workers at any company to demand their workplaces "cut ties and divest from all genocidal partnerships, including any relationship your company has with Israel or Microsoft." For Microsoft executives, the document offers an email address to contact for negotiations, as well as a place at the negotiating table in the plaza.

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