

U.S. Capitol police use pepper spray on protesters calling for Gaza war ceasefire

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Washington, November 16 (RHC)-- Police in riot gear have clashed with demonstrators calling for a ceasefire in the Israel-Gaza war outside the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee in Washington, DC.

Protesters, many wearing shirts that read “Cease Fire Now”, linked arms in front of the DNC building’s entrance near the Capitol on Wednesday night, where some sang: “Which side are you on?”

Officers pushed and pulled the protesters to try to remove them from the area, at one point shoving one protester down a staircase leading to the entrance. Police also used pepper spray and fired projectiles containing chemical irritants.

Demonstrator Dani Noble said people came to the DNC to peacefully call on Democratic Party leadership to support a ceasefire in Gaza. Instead, “we were met by police pulling on folks that are disabled or have chronic illnesses, pulling people to the ground in riot gear”, Noble said.

“It is shameful the way that nonviolent protesters and members of our community were met with violence tonight. It is absolutely shameful,” he added.

Capitol Police said approximately 150 people were “illegally and violently protesting.” It said six officers were treated for injuries, ranging from cuts to being pepper sprayed and punched. “One person has been arrested for assault on an officer,” Capitol Police said on social media. The protest organisers rejected allegations that the demonstrators were violent.

Police escorted legislators who were at the DNC offices at the time out of the building to safety.

Congressman Sean Casten said: “We were rescued by armed officers who did not know the protesters’ intent; they knew only that members of Congress were inside, could not leave and that protesters would not let police through.”

The demonstration was organised by three advocacy groups, and included members of IfNotNow, a group that urges US Jewish groups to end their support of Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians; Jewish Voice for Peace, a group that advocates for Palestinian independence; and the Democratic Socialists of America.

Jewish Voice for Peace wrote on social media that the protesters had gathered to lay out candles for Palestinians killed during Israel’s bombardment and to call for a ceasefire.

Last week, a large number of House Democrats joined nearly all Republicans in voting to censure Representative Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian American in Congress, over her criticism of the Israeli government’s treatment of Palestinians.

Public demonstrations – both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel – have rippled around the world since October 7, when Hamas launched an attack in Israel that killed 1,200 people, and Israel began a non-stop bombardment of Gaza that has killed more than 11,300 Palestinians, about 40 percent of them children.

Wednesday’s pro-ceasefire demonstration came a day after many thousands of pro-Israeli protesters gathered on the National Mall, holding placards with words like: “Let Israel finish the job,” “From the river to the sea, Israel is all you’ll see”, and calling for “no ceasefire” to take place.

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