US Attorney expands frame-up of University of Michigan anti-genocide protesters

4 more defendants added to indictment

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On Friday, October 30, US Attorney Jerome F. Gorgon Jr. unsealed a superseding federal indictment that adds four defendants to the prosecution of anti-genocide protesters at the University of Michigan (U-Mich). The new defendants, Henry David MacKeen-Shapiro, 23; Aaron Hunter Vonbargen, 25; Joseph Mark Fisher, 23; and Srishti Tarana Sharma, 23, bring the total to 12.

MacKeen-Shapiro and Vonbargen were arrested before the unsealing, appeared in federal court in Detroit on October 30 and were released on $10,000 unsecured bonds. Fisher and Sharma remain at-large. Vonbargen, Sharma and MacKeen-Shapiro are all former students at U-Mich. Vonbargen was last enrolled in 2024, MacKeen-Shapiro in 2025 and Sharma in 2026. The university said it is still seeking information on Fisher.

The original eight defendants, indicted May 20, have all pleaded not guilty: Zainab Hakim, 23; her sister Amatullah Hakim, 21; Paige Feyock, 26; Ahmet Korkaya, 28; Jonathan Zou, 22; Alexander Sepulveda, 23; Mariam Odeh, 24; and Colin Weger, 24.

The expanded prosecution has a retaliatory character. Zainab Hakim and MacKeen-Shapiro are the first and second named plaintiffs in a federal civil rights lawsuit filed May 1, 2025 against the U-Mich Board of Regents, then-President Santa Ono and university human resources officials. That suit documents how the university fired Hakim, MacKeen-Shapiro and three other student workers in April 2025 and blacklisted them from employment in the university system. The firings came 11 months after the students attended a peaceful sidewalk protest outside the U-Mich Museum of Art, where they chanted for divestment while campus police attacked the crowd with pepper spray. In effect, the US Attorney's office has intervened to prosecute the lead civil rights plaintiffs, on behalf of the university officials those students are suing in federal court.

All 12 defendants are charged with conspiracy to transmit threats in interstate and foreign commerce, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in federal prison. Zainab Hakim and Feyock are additionally charged with witness intimidation, an offense that carries a potential 20-year sentence. Prosecutors allege the two confronted a classmate they suspected of cooperating with law enforcement. Sepulveda faces an additional charge of destruction of property to prevent seizure, punishable by up to five years, over allegations that he wiped the contents of his phone and computer.

The "conspiracy" is nothing more than the ordinary, constitutionally protected activity of political organization carried out by students who dared to oppose a genocide funded by their own university. Under this framework, any coordinated digital campaign against powerful institutions can be reclassified as an interstate criminal syndicate. The indictment treats political slogans like "we must escalate, mobilize, and organize to demand divestment by any means necessary" and "if you aren't losing sleep after funding mass murder and genocide, then WE WILL WAKE YOU UP" as criminal threats.

MacKeen-Shapiro is charged solely in relation to the June 30, 2024 protest and vandalism at the Rolls-Royce Solutions America building in Detroit. On June 29, 2024, the day before, he exchanged Signal messages with Feyock asking how to tune a publicly available police radio scanner app.

Vonbargen is charged in the October 7, 2024 spray-painting of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit building and the homes of the university's President Santa Ono and its investment officer. According to the indictment, on October 2, he and Zainab Hakim "discussed locations to meet with members of the

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conspiracy to plan the ‘autonomous action’,” and on October 6, he “engaged in numerous conversations across several online platforms to discuss planning and executing actions on October 7, 2024.”

Fisher allegedly “accessed and edited a CryptPad.fr document” containing a press statement about the June 3, 2024 action at Regent Jordan Acker’s law firm. He also sent an introductory Signal message stating, “this is my comrade Zainab, she said she has some content for pal action.”

Sharma allegedly accessed and edited the same June 3 press statement. She faces an additional charge of aiding and abetting original defendant Alexander Sepulveda. Prosecutors state that on April 23, 2025, when police arrived to execute a search warrant on Sepulveda, officers encountered Sharma, “who immediately warned multiple conspirators via encrypted group chats” and “instructed conspirators to remove D-6 ALEXANDER MATTHEW SEPULVEDA from the group chats.”

The expansion of the indictment was accompanied by an inflammatory ideological statement from Gorgon, who declared: “These alleged attempts to terrorize our Jewish community and government officials are nothing new. From Pharaoh to Hitler to Hamas, those who terrorize Jews have been the bad guys. As Americans, our job is to fight the bad guys.”

This is the language of a political witch-hunt. In June, Gorgon similarly declared that the protests were “anti-American,” while FBI Director Kash Patel promoted the raids on social media. The purpose of this rhetoric is to smear opposition to the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza—which has killed over 74,000 people, according to official figures, though the true toll is far higher—as “terrorism” and “antisemitism,” and thereby to justify the criminalization of political dissent.

The Democratic Party laid the groundwork for the Trump administration’s federal conspiracy frame-up. The University of Michigan Board of Regents, the university administration and Michigan’s Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel all participated in the earlier stages of this repression. Nessel brought state felony charges against campus protesters before being forced to drop them in May 2025. The university spent at least $850,000 to deploy plainclothes operatives from the private security firm City Shield to spy on pro-Palestinian protesters on and off campus, banned SAFE, issued trespass bans and brought disciplinary charges.

The release of the superseding indictment four days before the November 3 midterm elections provided the pretext for a right-wing media blitz targeting defendant Mariam Odeh over her prior work as a campaign staffer for Democratic US Senate nominee Abdul El-Sayed. On November 1, the *New York Post* published a piece headlined, “Former El-Sayed campaign worker among anti-Israel activists indicted for terrorizing Michigan’s Jewish community: feds,” which was immediately aggregated and amplified.

This attack is part of a broader assault on First Amendment-protected speech and political advocacy, rooted in Trump’s September 2025 executive order designating “Antifa” as a domestic terrorist organization and National Security Presidential Memorandum-7, which names “anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, and anti-Christianity” as “common threads animating” domestic terrorism. These methods, conspiracy charges built on association and ideology, are being refined and tested on students today so they can be deployed against striking workers tomorrow.

The prosecution of the U-Mich Twelve, the Minnesota 15, and the Prairieland defendants in Texas is an attack on the entire working class. The defense of democratic rights and the defeat of the imperialist war machine require the independent political mobilization of the international working class against the source of war and dictatorship: the capitalist profit system.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality call on all students, campus workers, professors and staff to demand the immediate dropping of all charges against the U-Mich Twelve. Drop all charges! Defend the right to protest against genocide! Mobilize the working class against dictatorship and war!

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