

Open Letter in Support of Campus Safety and Academic Freedom

Note: to sign this letter [click here](#)

Dear President Shafik, Board of Trustees, and Deans of all Columbia Schools:

We, the undersigned Columbia faculty and affiliates, write to you to offer our support and partnership to secure safety, speech and civility on campus. We write to relay urgent concerns for our students and our community.

We imagine that the decision to [request help](#) from the NYPD to address the unauthorized student encampment on our campus must have been difficult, especially in light of Columbia's campus history.

We highlight your duty to enforce the rules of the University. We deeply value free speech and academic freedom. We recognize that rights to speech are accompanied by [responsibilities](#) to ensure safety and to uphold the University's core missions of teaching, research, patient care, and service.

We acknowledge the [Charters and Statutes of Columbia University](#) which, among other things, specify:

*"If the President, upon consultation with a majority of a panel established by the University Senate's Executive Committee, decides that a demonstration poses a clear and present danger to persons, property, or the substantial functioning of any division of the University, he or she shall take all necessary steps to secure the cooperation of external authorities to bring about the end of the disruption. The President shall make public his or her decision to the fullest extent possible as soon as it is feasible. *Nothing in the above shall be construed to limit the President's emergency authority to protect persons or property.*"*

The AAUP and Columbia Chairs of the Student Affairs Committee do not represent many faculty and students at Columbia University. Presumably the majority of students, faculty, and staff simply wish to peacefully study, teach, research, and live and work on campus; their rights to do so must also be upheld. These activities are impeded given the repeated and flagrant violations of University rules. This is especially concerning as students enter the final exam period and upcoming commencements. We also explicitly recognize the rights of our neighbors and the surrounding community.

We recognize that the University exists within the rule of law. On November 7, 2023, the US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) issued a ["Dear Colleague" letter on "Shared Ancestry"](#) reminding "colleges, universities, and schools that receive federal financial assistance of their legal responsibility under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations (Title VI) to provide all students a school environment free from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin, including shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics."

In the letter, OCR notes "Harassing conduct can be verbal or physical and need not be directed at a particular individual. Schools must take immediate and effective action to respond to harassment that creates a hostile environment." In addition, [New](#)

[York State Human Rights Law](#) protects individuals in educational institutions from unlawful discrimination on the basis of multiple factors including national origin and military status.

The situation on campus continues to escalate. There are reports of death threats, calls for violence, physical assault of students and stealing of their property, explicit support of terrorist organizations, and calls for ethnic cleansing. These invocations have occurred with frequency both within and beyond the campus walls. Moreover, there is video evidence of people who are presumably unaffiliated and/or disinclined individuals sneaking into (or being snuck onto) campus. There are eyewitness accounts of students and faculty promoting some of these activities on social media. Students relay being afraid to report individuals and conduct for fear of retaliation from the individuals engaged in these violence-promoting activities.

One non-exhaustive snapshot of recent campus and campus-adjacent activity can be found at this link (link removed).

Activities on and off campus are becoming increasingly blurred. In addition:

- A student [held up a sign](#) reading “Al Qassam Brigade’s next target” pointing to Jewish students peacefully singing the Israeli National anthem;
- An Israeli Arab journalist, Yoseph Haddad, was [physically assaulted](#) just outside the Columbia gates;
- A Jewish student was hit, shoved, and had his [Israeli flag burned](#);
- [Nerdeen Kiswani](#) was [able to enter](#) campus despite the requirement for Columbia ID.

There have been multiple reports of visibly Jewish individuals simply walking past 116th Street, as well as Jewish students attempting to flee campus, who have been [followed](#), stalked, and told ethnic slurs and hateful statements like “go back to Poland.”

There are also multiple Jewish students who have left campus housing and some who are even seeking to transfer out of Columbia University due to antisemitism on campus.

Among the chants and posters observed over the past several days on and adjacent to campus:

- [“We don’t want no Zionists here,”](#)
- [“There is only one solution, Intifada revolution.”](#)
- ["From the water to the water, Palestine is Arab" \[translated\]](#)
- ["Al Qasam you make us proud, kill another soldier now"](#)
- ["Yes Hamas, we love you! We support your rockets too"](#)
- ["Resistance is justified when people are occupied"](#)
- ["By any means necessary"](#)
- [“We say justice, you say how. Burn Tel Aviv to the ground!”](#)
- [“Red, black, green and white, we support Hamas’ fight!”](#)
- [“It is right to rebel, Al-Qassam give them hell! It is right to rebel, Hamas give them hell!”](#)
- ["We don't want no two states, we want all of it"](#)
- ["All you do is colonize"](#)
- [""Never forget the 7th of October. That will happen not 1 more time, not 5 more times, not 10, not 100, not 1,000, but 10,000 times! The 7th of October is going to be every day for you"](#)

- "[We are all Hamas, b*tch](#)"
- "[Globalize the Intifada](#)"
- "[Yahoodi, Yahoodi, f*ck you](#)"
- "Stop killing children"
- "Zionists are against g-d" [translated]
- "[Go back to Poland](#)," "Go back to Europe," "Go back to Germany"
- "[Al-Qasam's next victims](#)"

In addition, on Friday April 19, 2024 FSJP@Columbia Barnard Teachers (whose Instagram account "[fsjp_cbt](#)" describes itself as "a collective of Columbia University, Barnard College & Teachers College faculty, staff, and graduate workers dedicated to Palestinian freedom") issued a message: "Calling all faculty. Come hold classes, office hours, meetings from the lawns today." This seems to suggest that students must engage in disobedience and ideological endorsement to access educational opportunities.

We respectfully request, under the increasingly dangerous circumstances, for you to take the following actions:

1. Enhanced Personal Security Measures:
 - a. Personal Security: Provide security staff escorts upon request for students traveling to and from classes until normalcy is restored.
 - b. Campus Housing: Enhance security measures within all campus housing to ensure a safe living environment for everyone.
 - c. Virtual Learning Options: Offer remote learning alternatives for those who face challenges attending in-person classes due to safety concerns.
2. Upholding Campus Rules and Regulations:
 - a. We urge you to continue to notify students, as well as faculty and staff of all applicable University rules;
 - b. Enforcement of Policies: Strengthen enforcement of existing policies that prohibit disruption of educational activities;
 - c. Disciplinary Actions: Implement fair and consistent disciplinary procedures.
3. Campus Access Control:
 - a. ID-Only Access: Strictly enforce Columbia University ID-only access to better control campus entry points, ensuring a safe environment for all. All unsecure access points to campus should be checked. Students who have been suspended should be prevented from accessing campus.
4. Community Relations and Communications:
 - a. Neighborhood Harmony: Work closely with our neighbors to ensure their voices are represented in discussions to minimize disturbances in surrounding areas, maintaining Columbia's role as a responsible neighbor.
 - b. Offer dialogue, ensure transparency and increase communication—with students, faculty and staff.
5. Protection of Academic Activities:
 - a. Hold faculty members accountable for their teaching responsibilities as outlined in the [Columbia University Faculty Handbook](#). The "Obligations and Responsibilities" section states: "Faculty should confine their classes to the subject matter covered by their courses and not use them to advocate any political or social cause."

- b. Protection of Free Speech: Protect free speech rights while maintaining viewpoint neutrality. Identify unprotected speech or speech that violates community values.

We know this has been an incredibly difficult time for so many in our community, especially Jewish/Israeli and Muslim/Palestinian students, faculty, and staff. There is much work that needs to be done to bring us together and to restore Columbia's reputation as an exemplar of reason, inclusion, learning, and discovery.

We stand ready to work with you to help make Columbia the inclusive and safe campus it strives to be, and a place where all students, faculty and staff can flourish.