

Statement about Columbia University’s weaponization of an internal investigation in an attempt to silence me

My name is Shai Davidai. I am an Assistant Professor in Columbia’s Business School. I am Jewish and Israeli. Since October 7, 2023—when Hamas raped, tortured, and slaughtered more than 1,200 of my people and kidnapped an additional 250 civilians—Columbia’s campus has been a hostile environment for Jews and Israelis like me. That is why Columbia is now under investigation by both the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education, and is facing two lawsuits, brought by close to 20 Jewish students, for violations of their civil rights.

But to say that civil rights are being violated does not begin to capture what Jews and Israelis are forced to endure on campus right now, and I feel it is important to explain how intolerable the situation is. Over the past months, Jewish students at Columbia have been locking themselves in their dorm rooms to avoid being assaulted. They have been spat on, attacked, bullied, and vilified. Columbia has done nothing to stop pro-terror organizations that justify, excuse, and celebrate the massacre of my people, and chant for their eradication “by any means necessary”—as if violence against my four-year-old Israeli niece and my 93-year-old Israeli grandmother would be justified. As if Hamas terrorists raped my Israeli wife, it would be an act of resistance. As if Hamas terrorists shot my two-year-old daughter or my eight-year-old son in the head on our upcoming visit to Israel, it would be an excusable act by “freedom fighters”—an act worthy of celebration.

This is not an exaggeration. This is the reality of what it’s like being Jewish and Israeli at Columbia University since October 7.

These experiences have been the reason for my posts and statements—to finally get through to an administration that has abandoned its Jewish students, faculty, and staff. Faced with the administration’s perverse indifference to the safety of its Jewish and Israeli community, I have reluctantly become the most vocal faculty member speaking out for our Jewish students. In my wildest dreams I never imagined that this university, which I love, would have become a place that is unsafe for so many of us.

My statements and posts are purposeful. I have never—and would never—target any individual Columbia student. I have never—and would never—target any person or group on the basis of their national origin, race, religion, or any other protected characteristic. Doing so would

be morally wrong and is contrary to everything I stand for. I have made clear in and outside of my classroom that I do not—and will never—tolerate any form of bigotry. I have focused—and will always focus—my attention on Columbia’s tolerance of student *organizations* that have turned this campus into a hostile environment by openly celebrating terrorism and promoting violence against Israel and Jews.

What matters to me is that Columbia permits, and even enables, these groups to promote violence against Jews and Israelis. What matters to me is that the administration has suspended these groups but refuses to enforce the terms of their suspension. What matters to me is that the administration has explicitly stated that these groups’ rhetoric violates Columbia’s codes of conduct but refuses to enforce its own policies. What matters to me is that Columbia has created an unlawful and discriminatory two-tier system, where Jews and Israelis do not merit the same protections and considerations as everyone else on campus.

Speaking up has ruined my life. I receive death threats on a daily basis. I have been targeted on social media, including by Columbia students and faculty. To the best of my ability, I avoid spending time on campus, out of fear of being verbally or physically assaulted. And now, I am being persecuted by Columbia, which is retaliating against me based on groundless complaints.

There is no easy way to put this, so I’ll just come out and say it: I am Jewish and Israeli. I spoke up against the university. And now the university is weaponizing an internal investigation to silence me. In so doing, Columbia reveals the depths of its hostility toward its Jewish community: “How dare a Jewish professor speak up on behalf of Jewish students who are under siege!”

Every person—Jewish and non-Jewish—with whom I’ve confided about this investigation has said the same two things: that this reeks of retaliation and that this reeks of antisemitism.

I will engage in this process in good faith and plan to fully cooperate with the investigators, and I therefore cannot divulge specific details about this investigation. At the same time, I will call out Columbia’s bad faith in retaliating against me. An even cursory examination of my advocacy shows the absurdity of this investigation:

- On October 23, I explicitly stated in an interview on Haaretz.com that I support Palestinian rights
- On October 24, I wrote a blog post about my support for the Palestinian people, the distinction between supporting Palestine and supporting terror, and identified myself as someone who is both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestine but is vehemently anti-terror
- On October 30, in an interview for Hurwitz.TV, I expressed my support for a Palestinian state as part of a two-state solution.
- On November 3, I published an op-ed on CNN.com stating my support for the Palestinian people and a two-state solution
- On November 15, speaking at a vigil on Columbia's campus, I expressed my empathy for the pain and suffering of parents from both sides of the conflict – Israelis *and* Palestinians
- On November 19, I posted my support for organizations that fight for the Palestinian cause and reject terror
- On December 5, I stated my support for a two-state solution on primetime TV, on the show 60 Minutes
- On December 6, I posted on Twitter a call for creating a coalition of Jews and Palestinians for a two-state solution
- On December 12, I published an op-ed on Haaretz.com stating my support for the Palestinian people and a two-state solution
- On December 14, I expressed on a podcast my abhorrence towards violence of any kind, and the importance of distinguishing between support for Palestine and support for Hamas
- On December 20, I explicitly stated on Twitter that my concern is with Columbia's failure to address student organizations, not individual students
- On December 22, I explicitly stated on Twitter my abhorrence towards Islamophobia and xenophobia
- On January 11, in an interview for the Jewish Chronicle, I expressed my support for the Palestinian people and my support for a two-state solution
- On January 15, I explicitly stated on Twitter my abhorrence towards Islamophobia, anti-Arab prejudice, and violence of any kind

- On January 18, I explicitly stated on Twitter my objection to Islamophobia, xenophobia, and any form of prejudice
- On January 25, I explicitly stated on Twitter my objection to Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian prejudice, and violence of any kind
- On February 1, in an interview for Haaretz.com, I stated my loathing for violence and violent rhetoric regardless of the perpetrators' identity
- On February 5, I posted about the importance of humanizing both Israeli and Palestinian victims
- On February 13, my wife and I published an op-ed in Tablet Magazine in which we state our support for a two-state solution and make a clear distinction between the Palestinian people and the inhumane terror organizations the falsely purport to speak in their name

These are but a handful of the many times I have vocalized my support for the Palestinian people, my objection to Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiment, my hope for a two-state solution, and my focus on Columbia enabling pro-terror organizations, not individual students. All of these examples are public, and I find it hard to believe that the administration is not aware of my statements. The fact that the university has decided to pursue this investigation makes it clear that this is an attempt to silence me—the most vocal critic of the university's abject failure to protect its Jewish and Israeli community members from pro-terror student organizations.

I would like to make one thing clear: I view this investigation as a clear attempt to silence me. I will not stop demanding that the university enforce its own rules and policies. I will not stop fighting Columbia's attempts to sideline me, fire me, or make my life even more unbearable.

Instead of disciplining professors who have expressed support for the rape and murder of Israeli civilians, who have called for the removal of Israelis from campus, or who have participated in unauthorized pro-terror rallies where calls for violence against Jews are frequent, Columbia is seeking to discipline me for demanding those codes be enforced. I can assure you that if Columbia persists in seeking to threaten my livelihood for speaking out against hate, I, and my attorneys at Kasowitz Benson Torres, will pursue every legal remedy available in order to hold Columbia and its administrators accountable for this unlawful silencing campaign.