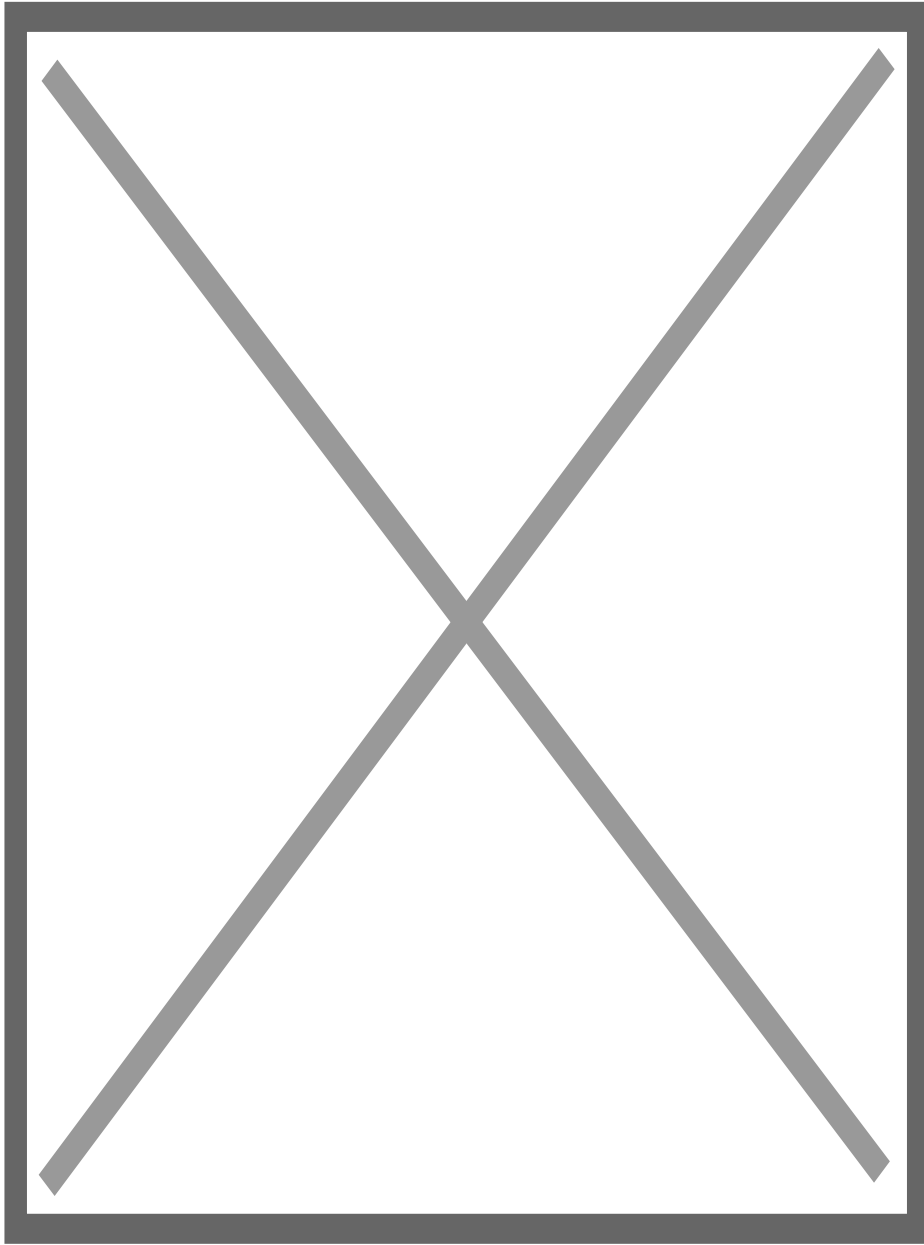


With antisemitism claims settled, Columbia now faces lawsuit from Palestinian students

by [Simone Saidmehr](#)

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Protestors mark the the second anniversary the pro-Palestinian takeover of Hamilton Hall at Columbia University on April 30 by holding photos of Gazan scholars killed in the war with Israel (Sunrise Columbia via Instagram)

A group of current and former Palestinian students and faculty at Columbia University filed a lawsuit this week, alleging that the university discriminated against them because of their Palestinian identity and treated them less favorably than other students engaged in political advocacy.

Filed in New York State Supreme Court, the complaint accuses the university of encouraging the mistreatment of Palestinian students by holding “unfair and biased disciplinary hearings” and creating a “hostile and unsafe environment” following Hamas’s 2023 attack on Israel that sparked university-wide protests and tensions on campus. The lawsuit alleges that the university “actively participated in and amplified the racially, ethnically, and politically motivated targeting of Palestinian students, staff, and faculty.”

The case is the latest in a string of legal battles born out of Columbia’s handling of campus protests. In July 2025, the university [agreed to pay \\$21 million to settle charges](#) by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that alleged a hostile work environment for Jewish employees as a part of its federal resolution agreement with the Trump administration.

In February 2026, the university also settled [with a group of Jewish plaintiffs](#) that had alleged the university failed to protect them from antisemitism. As a part of that settlement, Columbia agreed to implement additional programming to address antisemitism.

The new lawsuit alleges that Columbia discriminated against Palestinian students by, among other things, retaining private investigators to surveil students involved in a March 2024 “Resistance 101” teach-in. [The event featured Khaled Barakat](#), whom the US State Department has identified as a leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which the US has designated a foreign terrorist organization. Following the event, the lawsuit states that six students were suspended from the university and evicted from Columbia housing.

The suit also accuses the university of failing to treat physical assaults of Palestinian students seriously, citing alleged incidents where keffiyehs were forcibly removed from Palestinian students, and an [incident where a student sprayed a foul-smelling](#) substance at pro-Palestinian demonstrators in January 2024. It also challenges Columbia’s decision to call in New York police to clear protest encampments and arrest demonstrators in the spring of 2024.

Plaintiffs include lecturer and former anthropology student Hadeel Assali, who allegedly canceled her classes so that students could attend pro-Palestinian protests; Bahia Munem, a former lecturer at Columbia’s Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race; Mahdi Sabbagh, a Ph.D. student; Maryam Alwan, who graduated from Columbia in 2025 and was a student leader in the pro-Palestinian movement who was arrested during the encampment protests; and Layla Saliba, who earned a master’s degree in social work from Columbia in 2025.

In April 2025, the Columbia office of Institutional Equity [investigated](#) Saliba and Alwan for their role in writing an [op-ed](#) in the campus newspaper *Columbia Spectator* that called on the university to stop admitting Israeli students who had served in the Israel Defense Forces. The university later [dropped](#) its investigations into the two activists.

The lawsuit seeks monetary damages under New York City Human Rights Law, which prohibits discrimination or harassment based on race, creed, national origin, immigration status, or citizenship.

Columbia University did not immediately respond to request for comment. —Forward

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