

*Police in riot gear enter
Columbia University in New York
City and arrest dozens of
protesters occupying Hamilton
Hall to demand end to Israeli
genocide*



New York, May 1 (RHC)-- Hundreds of New York City police officers have entered the campus of Columbia University, taking multiple people into custody, in the latest escalation in the Gaza protests that have swept college campuses, mostly in the United States.

Live television images showed police entering the university in upper Manhattan, which has been the focal point of student protests against Israel's war in Gaza, in which more than 34,535 Palestinians have been killed.

After entering the site shortly after 9 p.m. on Tuesday (01:00 GMT on Wednesday), some officers approached Hamilton Hall, the administration building that students began occupying early on Tuesday morning after the management said it had begun suspending students who had refused to meet a previous deadline to disperse.

They had renamed the building "Hind's Hall," in memory of six-year-old Palestinian girl Hind Rajab who was killed in Gaza in February.

"We're clearing it out," police in a riot unit yelled as they marched up to the barricaded entrance to the building, while dozens more officers moved on the main protest camp.

Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine said in a post on X that the police officers were "wearing riot gear" and that "multiple blocks have been barricaded off."

A long line of police officers were seen climbing into the building via a ladder extended from the top of a truck into a second-storey window.

Shortly afterwards, officers were seen leading multiple protesters, their hands tied behind their backs with plastic zip ties, to police vehicles outside the campus gates. Between 30 and 40 people were taken from Hamilton Hall, the Associated Press reported.

"Free, free, free Palestine!" chanted protesters outside the building. Others yelled, "Let the students go!"

The move to clear the protest came exactly 56 years since police swept into Hamilton Hall to end a 1968 protest by students against racism and the Vietnam War.

Dozens of protesters barricaded the entrances of Hamilton Hall after occupying the building on Tuesday. A student organizer who spoke to Al Jazeera said that the occupation group was separate from the group that had established a camp on the campus lawn.

At an evening news briefing held a few hours before police entered the campus, New York Mayor Eric Adams and city police officials alleged the Hamilton Hall takeover had been instigated by "outside agitators" who lacked any affiliation with Columbia and were known to law enforcement for provoking lawlessness.

Adams suggested some of the student protesters were not fully aware of "external actors" in their midst. A spokesperson for Columbia University said police had been asked onto the campus as a last resort.

"After the university learned overnight that Hamilton Hall had been occupied, vandalised, and blockaded, we were left with no choice," the spokesperson said in a statement, adding that its public safety personnel had been forced out of the building and one facilities worker "threatened."

"The decision to reach out to the NYPD was in response to the actions of the protesters, not the cause they are championing," the statement said. "We have made it clear that the life of campus cannot be endlessly interrupted by protesters who violate the rules and the law."

One of the student leaders of the protest, Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian student at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs, disputed the claims.

"They're students," he told the Reuters news agency.

The protesters are calling for the university to sell off any investments linked to Israel, be transparent about its financial ties to the country, and provide amnesty from any disciplinary measures to all students participating in the rallies.

Columbia's protests began on April 17th, inspiring demonstrations that now stretch from California in the west to Massachusetts in the east, and come as universities prepare for end-of-year graduation ceremonies.

More than 1,000 protesters have been arrested over the last two weeks on campuses in states including Texas, Utah, Virginia, North Carolina, New Mexico, Connecticut, Louisiana, California and New Jersey, some after confrontations with police in riot gear.

At the University of Southern Florida in Tampa on Tuesday, police fired tear gas at students who set up a Gaza solidarity camp and arrested two people, according to videos from journalists and witnesses verified by Al Jazeera.

Sixteen people were arrested at the University of New Mexico as police forcefully removed pro-Palestine protesters occupying the college's Student Union building. A university spokesman said five of those arrested were students at the University of New Mexico, while the 11 others had no connection with the institution.

Meanwhile, students arrested on Monday during pro-Palestinian protests at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) were greeted by supporters on their release from the Travis County Jail.

Travis County Attorney General Delia Garza said 65 people arrested at UT Austin had been charged with criminal trespass.

New York police are expected to remain on Columbia's campus until its graduation events come to an end on May 17th.

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