

Columbia University protests continue after police arrest more than 100 and tear down solidarity encampment

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New York, April 19 (RHC)-- In New York City, riot police moved in on a peaceful student protest encampment, arresting at least 108 people on Thursday -- but the protests continue.

Columbia University President Minouche Shafik called the New York Police Department, NYPD, to clear the Gaza Solidarity Encampment on the campus's South Lawn, where Columbia and Barnard students had set up one day earlier to demand university leadership divest from Israel.

NYPD Chief John Chell said Shafik identified the demonstration as a "clear and present danger," but that officers found the students to be peaceful and cooperative. Shafik warned all students participating in the encampment would be suspended. At least three suspensions of Barnard students were confirmed Thursday, including Isra Hirsi, daughter of Congressman Ilhan Omar.

Columbia students and faculty members held a press conference Thursday evening. Palestinian American graduate student Layla Saliba, who has lost 14 family members in Gaza since October 7th, spoke with reporters:

"Today was a dark day for freedom of speech on Columbia's campus, because Columbia is showing that if you do not say — if you say something or do something that the university does not agree with, that they are willing to use violence towards you and that they are willing to endanger the health and safety and well-being of their students to protect their PR and their image. Right here we've got some riot cops. Look, right over there. They're treating us like a national security threat simply for holding a press conference." Layla Saliba was also one of the Columbia students attacked in January's chemical "skunk attack" during a campus rally.

Following the arrests on Thursday, students continued to gather on campus, where large protests carried on through the night, and are ongoing.

Thursday's showdown with the NYPD was the largest arrest on the Columbia campus since 1968, when police apprehended over 700 students protesting the school's ties to the Vietnam War and Columbia's plans to expand in Harlem by building a gymnasium in Morningside Park.

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