

Columbia University students protest invitation to ex-Israeli prime minister

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Pro-Palestine students participate in a protest rally at Columbia University over the hosting of

former Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett, on March 4, 2025.

New York, March 5 (RHC)-- In New York City, pro-Palestine students have held a protest rally in front of the Columbia University to denounce a speech by former Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett, calling on the university administration to immediately cancel the event organized for “war criminals.”

More than 200 students at the Columbia University demonstrated Tuesday afternoon against planned speech by Bennett at an event organized by the Kraft Center for Jewish Life, Columbia/Barnard Hill, and the Columbia School of International and Public Affairs’s Institute for Global Politics.

During the protest, started at around 6:30 p.m. local time, students expressed their strong solidarity with Palestinians, particularly those living in the besieged Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, stressing that “war criminals” were not welcome in New York City, in a clear reference to Bennett, who served from 2021 to 2022 as the 13th prime minister of the occupying entity.

“Say it clear and say it loud, Naftali Bennett off campus now,” protesters chanted.

Demonstrators marched on 114th Street to Amsterdam Avenue and stood near the Law School on 116th Street and Amsterdam Avenue at around 7:20 p.m. Ten minutes later, a banner that read “War criminal off our campus” and “Free Palestine” was unfurled on Law Bridge.

“In response to these developments, students are demanding immediate action from university leadership and trustees. We are calling on the Acting University President, Katrina Armstrong, to cancel the event, issue a formal condemnation of Bennett’s visit, and launch a full investigation into the university’s handling of this situation,” said Columbia Palestine Solidarity Coalition (CPSC) in a Tuesday news release.

The release described Bennett as “widely known for his violent rhetoric and actions” against Palestinians, highlighting a 2018 quote from him about Palestinian children that said, “They are not children, they are terrorists.”

Separately, Columbia Jews for Ceasefire also released a statement ahead of the event, condemning the “political project of Naftali Bennett.” “By agreeing to host Naftali Bennett while excluding students who feel comfortable challenging his reprehensible policy proposals, CBHillel is implicitly endorsing these policies, intentionally or not,” the statement read.

Suchitra Vijayan, a New York-based lawyer and activist, also denounced Bennett’s appearance at Columbia University, questioning why top-ranking US universities should invite “war criminals.”

“Why do elite universities—Yale, Columbia, Harvard—invite war criminals to teach and speak to students? Naftali Bennett, embroiled in the 1996 Qana massacre that killed over 100 civilians, is one such figure. Accused of defying orders and panicking under fire, his actions contributed to the deadly artillery strike. Yet, institutions legitimize men like him, presenting them as figures to emulate rather than perpetrators of violence,” she said on X.

In 2013, Bennett proudly declared: “I have killed lots of Arabs in my life – and there is no problem with that.” What does it say about American academia that it treats men like this as role models?,” Vijayan further asked.

[SOURCE: PRESS TV and NEWS AGENCIES]

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