

STATEMENT BY THE COLUMBIA ACADEMIC FREEDOM COUNCIL LEADERSHIP

April 23, 2023

The CAFC condemns in the strongest possible terms the harassment and intimidation of Jewish students that has pervaded our campus.

We strongly support the rights of faculty and students to think, write, publish, teach, as well as speak and demonstrate peacefully regardless of how controversial or painful their views may be perceived to be.

But these rights do not include the right to silence others through disruption and intimidation. We therefore urge the administration to enforce its own rules governing the time, place and manner of protests in a fair, content-neutral and sustained manner. We urge the administration to act decisively, with due process protections and in consultation with the University Senate, to restore safety and a culture of mutual respect, as these are the only conditions in which free expression can thrive.

We also call on our faculty colleagues and all members of the Columbia community to de-escalate tensions and join forces in navigating the challenges ahead. One important long-term challenge is education. We endorse President's Shafik's declaration that education is our most powerful tool, and her stated commitment to viewpoint diversity. Looking ahead to the next academic year, we support efforts to expand courses and programs that teach strategies for responding to disagreements with curiosity, respect, and humility. A second key challenge is upholding the values of academic freedom, independence from interference, and academic self-governance. We urge the Columbia leadership to be resolute in defending these values when contending with critics from inside the university or from the outside.

It is only by adhering to these principles that we can ensure the rights of students and faculty to engage in vigorous advocacy outside of the classroom – short of specific incitement to violence – even if they hold extreme or objectionable views. We hope that our community can quickly de-escalate tensions and reunite around our common values of learning, kindness, and humanity.

Signed,

The Co-Chairs of the Columbia Academic Freedom Council

James Applegate

Professor of Astronomy

Jacqueline Gottlieb

Professor of Neuroscience

Thomas W. Merrill

Charles Evans Hughes Professor of Law

Eli Noam

Paul Garrett Professor Emeritus of Public Policy and Business Responsibility

Jonathan Rieder

Professor of Sociology