New York University suspends student for removing Zionist posters

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Amid the ongoing wave of right-wing attacks by university administrations on students opposing the US/Israeli genocide against Palestinians, a New York University (NYU) freshman has been suspended and her scholarship rescinded in retaliation for her removal of pro-Israel posters on campus.

The suspension is to last until the beginning of the Fall 2024 semester, and the student, Hafiza Khalique, has been barred from participating in any student organization events or activities. She is appealing the suspension while planning to continue her education elsewhere. Several other students are also threatened with suspension over expressions of support for the Palestinian people.

The news about the suspension of Khalique broke just days before the president of the University of Pennsylvania was forced to resign as a result of a fascistic witch hunt, spearheaded by wealthy donors to the university and far-right Republicans, but with the support of the Biden White House and Democratic politicians. It is part and parcel of a state-led campaign that involves the military and intelligence agencies and is aimed at silencing the overwhelming opposition to the mass murder of civilians in Gaza among workers and young people.

The basis for Khalique's suspension—and the entire campaign against opposition to Israel's genocidal war in Gaza—is the false equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Khalique was targeted for disciplinary action by the administration after a video and photos of Khalique and two other students removing posters at NYU were posted on a prominent Zionist social media account in October, doxxing Khalique and another student.

In an email announcing the suspension obtained by *Washington Square News*, NYU's Office of Student Conduct [OSC] states that although "a different level of sanction" was previously communicated, the university is now taking a "strong stance" on conduct policy violations after consulting with "relevant university stakeholders." The email absurdly describes the student's action of removing posters as a case "involving calls for violence and offensive or intimidating conduct."

The email continues:

> The fact remains that the posters related to the recent attacks by Hamas, which targeted Jewish and Israeli people, and the posters displayed victims of those attacks… Accordingly, OSC has determined that the act of tearing down the posters is inherently based on the actual or perceived national origin, ethnicity and/or shared ancestry of Israelis and individuals of Jewish ancestry.

There can be no doubt that the actions of NYU, whose administration is closely tied to the Democratic Party, the CIA and the military, as well as Wall Street hedge funds, were directly coordinated with the state apparatus and the Democratic administration of Governor Kathy Hochul.

In a principled statement responding to NYU's suspension posted on her GoFundMe page, Khalique wrote:

> On October 11th, 2023, I took down inflammatory, university unaffiliated fliers which were created and used to normalize Israel's genocide against Palestinians. At that time after October 7, over 1,000 Palestinians had been killed—these posters were used as a tool to justify the U.S. orchestrated and U.S. backed genocide of Palestinians… That very night, photos and videos circulated on social media, and by the next morning, right-wing media, news outlets, influencers, celebrities, and Zionist platforms were calling for my firing, expulsion, deportation, and death.
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> As a result, I was forced to drop most of my classes for my physical and mental safety, due to the fact that I received no accommodations or support. NYU reassured me that suspension and expulsion were not

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> being considered at the time of my hearing and prior to my hearing. However, they went back on their word. On November 13, I was suspended by NYU despite the racist doxxing, harassment, intimidation, and physical threats because of "relevant university stakeholders." During a time of need for support, my university abandoned me, all while discriminately targeting and disciplining me.
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> As a first-year student, my entire college experience thus far has been any Muslim student's nightmare.

Khalique told *Washington Square News* that she had to stay in her dorm room for weeks following her doxxing due to a wave of threats. "The backlash was relentless… My face was broadcast on the news and people were demanding that I should be expelled and deported for tearing down posters that were unauthorized to be there."

"I don't regret my actions that day and I will not apologize for them as well. It was an act of supporting Palestinian liberation unequivocally. It was an act of standing against genocide, and I am proud to be on the right side of history."

In an interview with *BreakThrough News*, she said, "Because I was suspended, I would have to move off campus after the semester, essentially kicking me out of the dorms, leaving me unhoused, and also denying me access to any higher education until fall 2024."

In response to NYU's actions, an open letter and petition by NYU student organizations have been circulating. Some 8,000 people have already signed the petition.

The letter demands an "immediate reinstatement of all students suspended for Palestine activism," and characterizes Khalique's suspension as "legally indefensible and morally reprehensible." It also raises the broader context of right-wing attacks, including violent ones, on students throughout the US protesting Israel's genocide in Gaza.

NYU uses the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism in the formulation of its student policies. This definition equates criticisms of the state of Israel with anti-Jewish hatred. This definition is not only false and slanderous, in drawing an equal sign between Jewish people and the Zionist state and its crimes against the Palestinians, it provides fodder for real antisemites.

It serves to legitimize and strengthen actual fascist and antisemitic elements which, in the US and many other countries, are vocally supporting Israel's slaughter of the Palestinian population.

Despite the vicious and expanding drive to criminalize opposition to the genocide in Gaza, the already broad and deep hostility among students at NYU and across the US to the daily war crimes of the Israeli military and its American accomplices continues to grow.

Last week, NYU's Student Government Assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution to "Reaffirm protection of pro-Palestine speech and civic activity on campus." The resolution states that NYU has not only failed to protect pro-Palestinian students who seek to exercise their right to protest, it has actively intimidated students and student groups involved in pro-Palestinian activism. Among its demands, the resolution calls on the university to "explicitly prohibit and work diligently to protect its students from doxxing and targeted harassment campaigns," and to provide "a clarification on the exact definition and interpretation of antisemitism that it adopts to enforce student conduct policies."

Just a few days before Khalique's suspension, Ryna Workman, an NYU law student who took a principled, pro-Palestinian position on the genocide, was removed as the president of the Student Bar Association. Workman continues to voice opposition to the genocide on social media and other platforms.

In a recent interview with *Al Jazeera*, Workman said people should be alarmed at how "comfortable the state is getting with this surveillance and this repression."

Workman continued:

> I think there's the very public suppression that we're seeing, for example at Columbia University, where they've suspended the Students for Justice in Palestine group and the Jewish Voice for Peace. We see people losing their jobs like me and not being offered any support by the academic institutions they go to.
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> We're also seeing a more silent suppression from the administrations who are telling groups quietly not to host that event or not to have that guest speaker or taking down posters or fliers advertising teach-ins. So I think as we're seeing this suppression, students are just getting more organized and more energized and will continue to speak up for Palestinians because we know that we are in the right here."

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