

# Students and faculty at New York University rally against the banning of anti-genocide protesters

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On Wednesday, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) intervened at a pro-Palestinian rally near New York University's Bobst Library in Lower Manhattan.

The rally, titled "We are all PNG," was called to demand that NYU lift the loathsome "persona non grata" (PNG) status it imposed on dozens of pro-Palestinian students and faculty for protesting against the Gaza genocide at Bobst Library on December 12. Eight people, including three members of the faculty, were arrested at that protest. Under PNG, students and faculty are banned from the library and other campus buildings without an end date or the right of appeal.

Members of the IYSSE leafleted with the statement, "New York University bans pro-Palestinian faculty and students," which demands that NYU's PNG bans be lifted immediately, connects the bans at NYU to the broader pro-genocide purge on campuses across the United States and calls on students and youth to turn outward to the working class to stop the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza and defend democratic rights.

Chenjerai Kumanyika, a professor of journalism at NYU and a member of NYU's Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine (FSJP), read to the rally from the email he received informing him of his PNG status. He received this email after filming and observing, but not participating in, the protests at Bobst Library:

Dear Chenjerai Kumanyika,

This letter is to advise you that you have been banned from accessing Bobst Library, Kimmel Center, Paulson Center, and Vanderbilt Hall, and designated persona non grata (PNG) from Bobst Library, Kimmel Center, Paulson Center, and Vanderbilt Hall effective immediately due to a violation of university policy. Any future attempts to

gain access to Bobst Library, Kimmel Center, Paulson Center, and Vanderbilt Hall will be considered trespassing, and the NYPD will be notified. This may result in your arrest.

Signed,  
New York University Department of Campus Safety

"Despite requests from people in my department, from my colleagues, and from myself," Kumanyika said, "I've not been told what the violation was. I've not been told any sense of how long this PNG will last, nor have I been told if there's any process for recourse or appeal. This is outrageous. And, you know, I believe in civil disobedience and have stood with my colleagues in civil disobedience in the past, but in this case, I just want to point out I was documenting a protest as a journalist who covers police."

Associate Professor of English Sonya Posmentier said in a speech to the rally, "I am an unwelcome faculty member at NYU. The president of this university says that we are not peaceful because we disrupt the normal functioning of the university. I want to ask [NYU President] Linda Mills, what do you mean by peaceful? And I want to ask all of you here, is the normal functioning of this university peaceful? Is it? No!"

She explained, "The normal functioning of this university is checkpoints between our offices, classrooms, homes, and dorms. It is surveilling and recording students, faculty, and staff with cameras in every corner and on the streets, and probably right now, right here... It is Vice President of Global Campus Safety Fountain Walker standing proud with dozens of armed cops... The normal functioning of the university is letting right wing supremacist terror groups threaten to meet up and blow up our students who fight for justice in Palestine."

A student speaker who participated in the sit-in at Bobst Library on December 11 reported the following:

I was made PNG without written notice of the change, without explanation or formal charges made. It has now been almost a week without even an e-mail sent my way. I was nearly prevented from sitting for a final exam due to this disregard of due process, and as of yesterday, even the very Deans of my school have been given no official justification for my ongoing access restriction.

Last night, I attempted to enter the Islamic Center where I have prayed for years and after hearing from others that only folks at Kimmel were restricted, my face was recognized by a CSO [Campus Safety Officer] I had never met, who yelled my name and threatened to confiscate my ID indefinitely mid-finals because I was breaking rules I was not told how to follow and as they continued to be arbitrarily changed.

I apparently am and remain a threat to NYU's greater community after sitting in peaceful protest because I dared to talk back to our administrators with no prior disciplinary offenses on my record, while students identified, on camera, by the school, making threats out loud to protesters have received no consequence. My speech and our speech has been deemed more threatening and so no offer has been made still for either my hearing or appeal. I am not alone in any of this.

In his conclusion, the student said, "I refuse to be a 'welcome person' if this means welcoming my complicity in genocide," to which the crowd responded with applause.

A student at the rally whom NYU has designated PNG agreed to be interviewed for the WSWS under condition of anonymity. The student noted, "Even when we did have a meeting after we got PNG, there was no explanation. I tried asking. I don't know what rule specifically got me there, but they didn't offer any evidence, so it seems like there's no due process. It's really overwhelming."

The WSWS asked what the general reaction of the NYU community has been to the attacks on democratic rights. The student said, "I think what's been shocking about this one is that anyone who was in the library who's on their record or unofficial blacklist was included in everything... for me it was like, 'you blocked elevators or the stairwell' – I did not do that – or 'you committed an act of violence or a threat of physical violence' – and no, I did not. So, they're just doing these huge blanket charges now.

"I think that what's scary is moving forward, even if you're doing something really low risk – let's say you're an international student or you're on probation – you're not

safe at all. You can't do anything. Even people sitting in the lobby with keffiyehs who had a record of disciplinary hearings got looped into everything. So, it just seems like they're trying to make it to where even if you're following all the rules, you're still not safe, or like any kind of protest isn't okay.

"There are people who are doing research projects or things like that and that's a big deal [to not have library access]. Another issue is, 'Well, do I tell my advisor? Do I tell my professors?' It's a very weird position.

"I'm banned from both the library and Kimmel [the student center], which is strange because Kimmel wasn't involved at all. It just seems like those are the two spots that aren't basically walled off, where people could actually have a protest. So it doesn't really make sense. There's no logical way to follow that.

"When they sent [the email notifying PNG status], it was indefinite. There was no end date. Then we had a meeting, but we're still waiting to hear. Which is frustrating because I'm like, am I going to be suspended next semester? It's coming up pretty soon. So I don't know, I have no idea. They didn't set an end date. They just said, basically, 'We'll let you know.'"

She added, "It just shows how fake their branding is. They promote themselves as this welcoming international, progressive, city university and it couldn't be more the opposite. I went to a private college in the Bible Belt that was very Christian and I thought when I went to NYU it would be different in some ways, like in terms of protests, but it's been worse than anything I've ever experienced."

We asked the student what she thought of the fact that the NYU faculty arrested a week earlier were Jewish.

"Yes, they don't really care about protecting Jewish students. They just care about protecting Zionist students and they love to conflate that."

The student finished by saying, "I hope to stay, but it's just hard because it's such an expensive city, so not knowing if you're going to be suspended. Financially, it's really rough. I hope to stay because I feel like the one thing they'd love is for us to just leave."



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