URGENT ACTION

RELEASE DETAINED PROTESTER

On 13 March US immigration authorities detained Leqaa Kordia, a 32-year-old Muslim Palestinian woman and US resident who had been arrested at a protest in 2024 against Israel's genocide in Gaza. She was in the process of obtaining legal residency. The protest-related charges were dropped. In March 2025, she was detained and flown to a facility in Texas after voluntarily meeting with immigration authorities. She has experienced violations of her right to manifest one's religion while detained. We demand her immediate release and respect of her rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Secretary Kristi Noem
300 7th St SW,
Washington, DC 20024,
United States
Email: kristi.noem@hq.dhs.gov

Dear Secretary Noem,

On 13 March 2025, Leqaa Kordia, a 32-year-old Muslim Palestinian woman, voluntarily met with Department of Homeland Security agents after she learned she was being investigated by immigration authorities. She was immediately detained and transferred from New Jersey to Prairieland Detention Facility in Texas, far from her family.

Ms. Kordia was in the process of obtaining legal permanent residency in the USA. She came to the attention of immigration authorities after her arrest at a protest in 2024 outside of Columbia University against Israel's ongoing genocide against Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip. The charges were later dismissed in the interests of justice.

Ms. Kordia's arrest and ongoing arbitrary detention are a part of the continued attacks on human rights by the Trump administration. The rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are human rights, not grounds for deportation.

Targeting peaceful protesters and threatening their immigration status for the content of their protest, such as advocating for the human rights of Palestinians, is a violation of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. This targeting sends a chilling message to people across the country that anyone exercising their human rights will be subject to repression, detention, and possible deportation. For immigrant communities already living in fear throughout the U.S., they are now only further pushed into the shadows with fear that they could be deported for speaking out.

No one should be ripped away from their family and sent to detention for exercising their right to protest, and no one should be deported for speaking out for human rights.

Leqaa Kordia has suffered violations of her rights to practice her religion while detained in Texas. She poses no threat to the public or flight risk and is a caregiver for family members in New Jersey. She should be released immediately to her family.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Leqaa Kordia is a 32-year-old Muslim Palestinian woman who came to the USA on a visitor visa, to see her mother she had been separated from as a child. She then obtained a student visa in order to study English. Her mother also filed a family-based visa petition. The visa was approved by immigration authorities in 2021. Based on incorrect advice, Leqaa terminated her student visa believing that the approval of her petition meant that she now had lawful immigration status while she awaited her green card – leaving her without legal immigration status.

Leqaa has lost approximately 175 family members during Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza. Since 2023, she attended multiple protests in New Jersey and the surrounding area where she lived. On April 30, 2024, she attended a protest on a public street outside the gates of Columbia University. New York Police Department ("NYPD") officers ordered the demonstrators to disperse. Officers arrested Leqaa and others, releasing her the following day. The charges, for failure to disperse, were later dismissed.

President Trump issued two Executive Orders in January 2025 calling for the arrest, detention, and deportation of noncitizens who expressed support for Palestinian rights, which Amnesty International condemned. Immigration authorities began identifying individuals whom they believed protested in support of Palestinian rights on or around university campuses. They later received Leqaa's 2024 arrest report from the NYPD. On March 6, immigration agents visited Leqaa's home to interrogate her mother, who called Leqaa in the agents' presence. They informed Leqaa that there was an issue with her immigration status and that they needed to speak with her. She met with authorities soon after at the Newark ICE Field Office in New Jersey with her attorney. Leqaa was immediately detained, despite being found by Immigration and Customs Enforcement to present a low risk to public safety, flight or criminal history. She was transferred overnight to Prairieland Detention Facility in Texas, a facility far from her attorney and family and that has a history of documented human rights violations.

Leqaa's immigration case is taking place in Texas. Since April 2025, Leqaa has had two bond hearings before an immigration judge, who has twice ordered that Leqaa may be released on payment of $20,000 bond. ICE has prevented her release by using and seeking automatic and discretionary stays with the Board of Immigration Appeals. Leqaa is also pursuing release through federal court.

Leqaa has experienced repeated violations of her religious rights in detention. She has received only one halal meal in detention and instead has been provided with meals which often do not meet her religious dietary restrictions. As a result, she has lost a significant amount of weight. While fasting during Ramadan, staff repeatedly refused her requests to provide her food or set it aside until a time that she could break her fast forcing her to either go hungry or break her fast early interfering with her religious rights. She has also not been provided clothing that adequately covers the body for prayer or a clean place to pray as required by her religion. Staff have also repeatedly ignored her requests to provide notice when male staff enter her dorm area when she is without her hijab.

In addition to her family-based petition for lawful permanent residency, Leqaa filed claims for asylum, withholding of removal and protection under the Convention Against Torture. She was previously living in New Jersey and helped provide caregiving support to two immediate family members with health issues or disabilities.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 7 April 2026 or until released
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFFERED PRONOUN: Leqaa Kordia (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: N/A