URGENT ACTION

RELEASE MAHMOUD KHALIL

On March 8 US immigration authorities unlawfully arrested and arbitrarily detained Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist and student organizer who recently graduated from Columbia University. He is a lawful permanent resident in the USA. Mahmoud was targeted for his role in student protests at Columbia University, where he was exercising his rights to freedom of expression and peacefully assembly. He has not been charged with a crime. He is being held in a detention center and authorities have informed him that they have "revoked" his permanent residency status and placed him in deportation proceedings. We demand authorities release Mahmoud immediately and respect his rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and due process.

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 the evening of March 8th, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents stopped Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian student activist and recent graduate student at Columbia University, as he was walking home from an Iftar celebration with his 8-months pregnant wife and unlawfully arrested and detained him.

Mr. Khalil is a legal permanent resident and was informed by federal officials that his immigration paperwork was being revoked. Mahmoud Khalil has not been charged with a crime. He was actively involved in the protests and encampments at Columbia University in support of Palestinian rights and against the ongoing genocide in the occupied Gaza Strip.

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

Mr. Khalil's arrest and ongoing arbitrary detention are the latest attack 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 human rights. This targeting sends a chilling message to people across this country, on and off campuses, that anyone exercising their rights will be subject to repression, detention, and possible deportation. And for the 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.

Mahmoud Khalil should be released immediately. I implore you to rescind your order revoking his lawful permanent residency status and leverage your power to ensure that the Trump administration respect Mr. Khalil's human rights, including his right to due process, and free him from ICE custody so he can return to his home in New York with his family.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mahmoud Khalil is a Palestinian activist and graduate student at Columbia University who was active with Columbia's Gaza Solidarity Encampment, serving as negotiator with the university and speaking to press. He is also a lawful US permanent resident and is married to a US citizen who is expecting their first child in April.

On March 8, 2025, plainclothes US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents arrested Mahmoud at his university apartment and threatened to arrest his pregnant wife. The agents stated that the US Department of State had revoked Mahmoud's student visa. When his wife showed the agents that Mahmoud is a lawful permanent resident (otherwise known as a green card holder), not attending school on a student visa, they said that his permanent residency was revoked as well. Mahmoud was initially held for a short period in an immigration detention in New Jersey and then transferred to immigration detention in Louisiana without notice to counsel or his wife, despite the fact that his habeas case was pending in New York. The family and attorneys did not know of his whereabouts for 24 hours.

Lawful Permanent Residents normally cannot have their residency revoked without a court hearing and conviction(s) for 2 crimes of “moral turpitude” or one “aggravated felony”. Mahmoud Khalil does not have any criminal convictions and was never arrested during the protests at Columbia University during the spring of 2024. Instead, the US government is relying on an obscure and rarely used statute to revoke his status and try to deport him. The statute, 8 USC 1251(a)(4)(C)(i), allows the Secretary of State to deport any noncitizen whom he has reasonable grounds to believe the noncitizen's "presence or activities...would have potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences for the United States."

On 12 March, a US District Court Judge at the Southern District of New York held a hearing on the habeas petition that was filed by Mahmoud Khalil’s attorneys. His attorneys claimed in court that they have not had a single attorney-client-privileged meeting with Mahmoud since he was detained. His attorneys are requesting that the court deem the actions of immigration authorities unlawful and that he be returned to the New York region and immediately released. He also has an initial immigration hearing in Louisiana scheduled for 25 March. He is currently being held in the Central Louisiana ICE Processing Center, known as the LaSalle Detention Center, in Jena, Louisiana, a facility with a long history of cruel conditions, physical and sexual abuse, and improper medical care

Mahmoud was targeted for his role in student protests at Columbia last year, and his arrest comes on the heels of the State Department’s announcement that it plans to revoke the visas or green cards and deport students affiliated with pro-Palestine protests. DHS stated that his detention and deportation were in response to President Trump’s Executive Orders on antisemitism. Amnesty International previously condemned the Executive Order as an infringement of students’ rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

The U.S. government must release Mahmoud Khalil immediately. Colleges and universities must also take steps to protect their immigrant students, faculty, and staff from unlawful and arbitrary ICE enforcement and ensure that the human rights of all of their students and faculty to protest in support of Palestinian rights and other issues is respected and protected. In October 2024, Amnesty International USA, the American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights Watch posted an open letter to all universities and colleges regarding the protection of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly for all of the students, staff and faculty.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 22 august 2025
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: [Enter Name] Mahmoud Khalil, he/him

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: N/A