

Urgent Action Office 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca
First UA: 25/25 Index: AMR 51/9127/2025 USA of March 13, 2025

USA RELEASE MAHMOUD KHALIL

On March 9, 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 peaceful 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.

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. We demand authorities release Mahmoud immediately and respect his rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and due process.

Write to the Secretary of Homeland Security urging the administration to:

- Release Mahmoud Khalil immediately.
- Rescind your order revoking his lawful permanent residency status.
- Leverage your power to ensure that the Trump administration respects Mr. Khalil's human rights, including his right to due process.
- Free him from ICE custody so he can return to his home in New York with his family.

Write to:

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

And copy:

Mrs. Marybeth Krumm Turner
Minister-Counsellor & Chargé d'affaires, a.i.
Embassy of the United States of America
490 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON K1N 1G8
Tel: (613) 238-5335 / 688-5335 (24h) Fax: (613) 688-3082

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mahmoud Khalil is a Palestinian activist and graduate student at Columbia University. He was actively involved in Columbia's Gaza Solidarity Encampment, serving as a negotiator with the university and

speaking to the press. Mahmoud is also a lawful U.S. permanent resident. He is married to a U.S. citizen, and they are expecting their first child in April 2025.

On March 8, 2025, plainclothes agents from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) arrested Mahmoud at his university apartment. They also threatened to arrest his pregnant wife. The agents claimed the U.S. Department of State had revoked his student visa. However, when his wife showed proof that Mahmoud is a lawful permanent resident, not a student visa holder, they declared that his residency had been revoked as well.

Mahmoud was first detained in New Jersey, then transferred without notice to Louisiana. His attorneys and family lost contact with him for 24 hours. This transfer happened despite the fact that his habeas case was pending in New York—a clear violation of due process.

Normally, lawful permanent residents cannot lose their status without a court hearing and a conviction for serious crimes. Mahmoud has never been convicted of a crime. He was not even arrested during the 2024 student protests at Columbia. Instead, the government is using a rarely enforced statute, 8 USC 1251(a)(4)(C)(i), which allows deportation if a noncitizen's presence is believed to harm U.S. foreign policy.

On March 12, 2025, a U.S. District Court Judge in New York held a hearing on Mahmoud's case. His attorneys revealed they have not been allowed a single private meeting with him since his detention. They are demanding that the court declare his detention unlawful and order his immediate release. Meanwhile, he has an initial immigration hearing in Louisiana set for March 25, 2025. He remains jailed in the Central Louisiana ICE Processing Center, a facility known for inhumane conditions and abuse.

Mahmoud's detention is part of a broader crackdown on student activism. His arrest follows the U.S. State Department's recent pledge to revoke visas and deport students involved in pro-Palestine protests. DHS cited President Trump's Executive Orders on antisemitism as justification. Amnesty International has condemned these orders as attacks on students' rights to peaceful protest and free expression.

The U.S. government must immediately release Mahmoud Khalil. Universities must also take action to protect their immigrant students, faculty, and staff from unlawful ICE enforcement. All students and faculty must be free to protest in support of Palestinian rights or any other cause without fear of detention or deportation.

In October 2024, Amnesty International USA, the ACLU, and Human Rights Watch issued an open letter to universities, urging them to uphold students' rights to free expression. Now, more than ever, schools must stand by these commitments.

Please take action as soon as possible until April 24, 2025. The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.