

U.S. Homeland Security agents arrest pro-Palestinian student from Columbia University



Student negotiator Mahmoud Khalil on the Columbia University campus in New York at a pro-Palestinian protest encampment on April 29, 2024. (File photo by AP)

New York, March 10 (RHC)-- U.S. federal immigration officers, who claimed to be acting on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), have detained a prominent pro-Palestinian Columbia University student.

Mahmoud Khalil, a recent Columbia University graduate who helped lead last year's solidarity protests in support of the Gaza Strip, was detained on Saturday at his university-owned apartment block from Columbia's Manhattan campus in New York City.

U.S. law requires federal officers to have an arrest warrant to enter non-public university areas, including apartment buildings.

Upon arrest, Khalil contacted his lawyer, Amy Greer, to intervene by phone. His lawyer asked the two plainclothes immigration agents why his client was being detained, and whether they had an arrest warrant, while explaining to them that Khalil was a green card holder. The agents hung up the phone on Khalil's lawyer.

"He has a green card," an agent, confused by the revelation, reported to his superior on the phone. But then after a moment, the agent claimed that the State Department had "revoked that too."

The State Department "has broad authority to revoke visas ... under the Immigration and Nationality Act," media quoted a department spokesperson as saying. The Department "exercise[s] that authority when information comes to light at any time indicating that a visa holder may be inadmissible to the United States or otherwise ineligible for a visa," the spokesperson added.

Khalil, who is a Palestinian, was initially kept in custody at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office in downtown New York. However, his attorney said that he was moved to the Elizabeth Contract Detention Facility in New Jersey.

Greer told media: "We have not been able to get any more details about why he is being detained." "This is a clear escalation," she insisted.

Khalil's detainment comes as U.S. President Donald Trump vows to deport foreign students and imprison "agitators" involved in protests against the Israeli genocidal war against Palestinians in Gaza.

During last year's protest, Khalil was one of the most visible faces of the pro-Palestinian movement at Columbia. As students set up tents on campus last spring, Khalil was picked to serve as a negotiator on behalf of students and met frequently with university administrators. "The administration is following through on its threats," Khalil's lawyer Greer told media.

In related news, the Trump administration mounted pressure on Columbia by canceling grants worth \$400 million to the university under the pretext of combating "Anti-Semitism" harassment at schools and on college campuses.

Leo Terrell, head of the taskforce and Senior Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, said the funding cuts aimed at Columbia University were "only the beginning" and further measures will be taken after the investigations are finished.

"Freezing the funds is one of the tools we are using to respond to this spike in anti-Semitism. This is only the beginning," Terrell said.

Columbia is one of five colleges currently under the new federal investigation, and it is one of 10 being visited by the taskforce in response to allegations of anti-Semitism.

In the meantime, Columbia University has set up a new disciplinary committee and initiated its investigations into the pro-Palestinian students critical of the Israeli regime and its genocidal war against

Gaza.

The New York-based educational institution was central to campus protests that broke out across the United States and beyond to show solidarity with the innocent people targeted by Israeli regime forces in its genocidal campaign against Palestinians in Gaza.

Following the Israeli onslaught, which started in October 2023, pro-Palestinian students in April 2024 set up an encampment on the university campus which inspired a wave of similar protests in many other educational institutions in the US and across the globe.

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