

Turkish student Rumeysa Ozturk is freed from U.S. detention



"I lost both my freedom and also my education," Rumeysa Ozturk says after being freed from more than six weeks of immigration detention in Boston, Massachusetts, on May 10, 2025 [Mel Musto/Getty Images via AFP]

Boston, May 11 (RHC)-- A Turkish doctoral student at Tufts University in the United States has returned to Boston after spending more than six weeks in an immigration detention center in Louisiana in what her lawyers call a politically motivated crackdown on free speech.

Upon arrival at Boston Logan International Airport, Rumeysa Ozturk told reporters on Saturday that she was excited to get back to her studies during what has been a “very difficult” period.

“In the last 45 days, I lost both my freedom and also my education during a crucial time for my doctoral studies,” she said. “But I am so grateful for all the support, kindness and care.”

A federal judge on Friday ordered her release pending a final decision on her claim that she was illegally detained. Ozturk, 30, was detained on March 25 when immigration officials arrested her in Massachusetts, revoked her student visa and transferred her to the detention facility in Louisiana.

Supporters believe Ozturk, a Fulbright scholar from Turkiye, was targeted for having co-written an opinion article in her student newspaper, calling on Tufts University to acknowledge Israel’s war on Gaza as a genocide.

A genocide case against Israel is under way at the International Court of Justice. Last week, the former EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell accused Israel of committing genocide.

Ozturk was joined by her lawyers and two of Massachusetts’s Democratic members of Congress, Senator Edward Markey and Representative Ayanna Pressley. “Today is a tremendous day as we welcome you back, Rumeysa,” Markey said. “You have made millions and millions of people across our country so proud of the way you have fought.”

Ozturk’s lawyers say her visa was revoked without notice and she was not allowed to contact legal counsel for more than a day after her arrest.

Appearing in court via video on Friday, Ozturk spoke of her deteriorating health, including severe asthma attacks in detention, and her hopes of continuing her doctoral research on children and social media.

U.S. District Judge William Sessions granted Ozturk bail, saying she presented no flight risk or danger to the public. He found that her claim of unlawful detention raised serious constitutional questions, including potential violations of her rights to free speech and due process.

Ozturk’s case highlights a practice that has become common under President Donald Trump’s administration. Foreign students have been arrested and hundreds of their student visas revoked for their pro-Palestine views.

Mahmoud Khalil, who led the protests against Israel’s war on Gaza at Columbia University in New York, was among the first students detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement on March 8. He remains in custody.

The Trump administration has been accused of conflating criticism of Israel as anti-Semitism.

A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson previously accused Ozturk, without evidence, of supporting Hamas, which has been designated as a “terrorist” group by the US.

Ozturk denied any wrongdoing and said she will continue to pursue her case. “I have faith in the American system of justice,” she said. Her legal battle continues in Vermont while immigration hearings proceed separately in Louisiana, where she may participate remotely.

Videos of her arrest, which show masked plainclothes officers taking her from a street in the Boston suburb of Somerville, Massachusetts, went viral and sent a chill across U.S. university campuses.

Her lawyers at the American Civil Liberties Union argued that her arrest and detention were unlawfully designed to punish her for speech protected by the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment and to chill the speech of others.

Pressley, who with two other Democratic members of Congress from Massachusetts visited Ozturk while she was in custody, said she was held in “squalid, inhumane conditions” and denied proper medical care for worsening asthma attacks.

“Rumeysa’s experience was not just an act of cruelty. It was a deliberate, coordinated attempt to intimidate, to instil fear, to send a chilling message to anyone who dares to speak out against injustice,” Pressley said.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA]

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