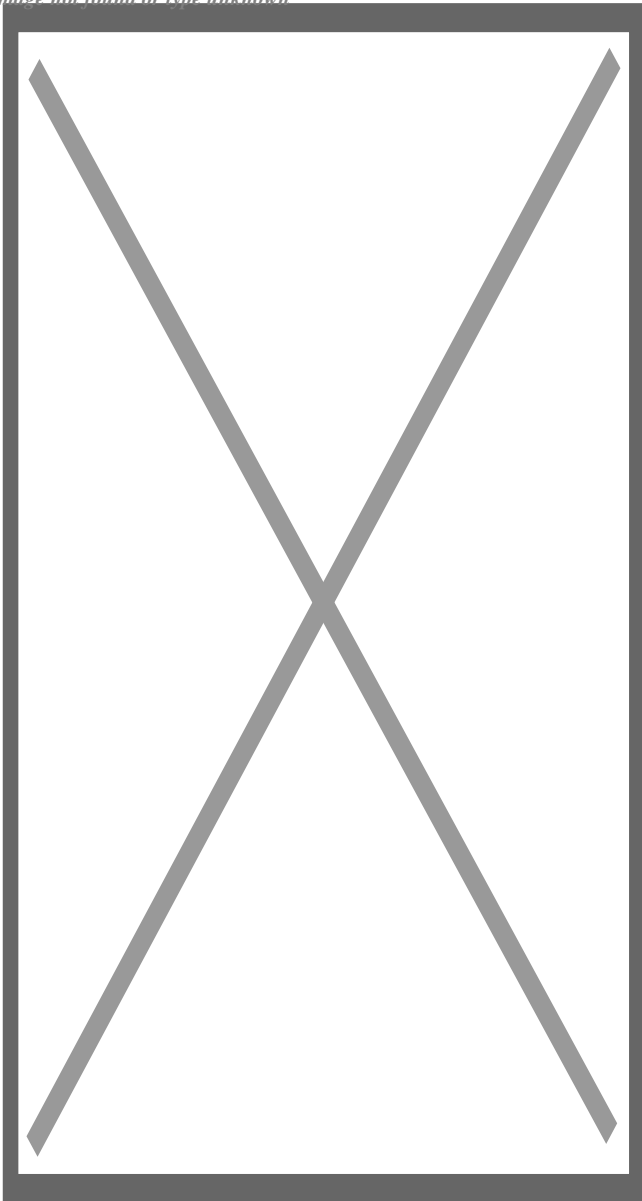


Protesters across U.S. demand release of Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil

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New York, March 17 (RHC)-- Protesters have taken to the streets across the United States to demand the release of Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist who helped organize campus protests against Israel's genocidal war in Gaza across the country last year.

Khalil, a former Columbia University student activist, was taken from his home by U.S. immigration agents on March 8 — without having been charged with a crime.

Protesters gathered on Sunday outside the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) headquarters in Washington, DC, holding banners that read, "Free Palestine," "Release Mahmoud Khalil," and "ICE off our campuses."

Demonstrators later took to the streets, chanting, "Free Mahmoud Khalil now," and "Free all the students today." Protesters also gathered in New York City, and rallied in Times Square before marching through to Columbus Circle. They were wearing traditional Palestinian scarves, known as keffiyehs, and waving Palestinian flags. "Release Mahmoud right now," the protestors shouted.

Rallies have also been planned this weekend for his release in cities including Boston, Phoenix, Charlotte, Oklahoma City, Miami and Indianapolis.

Grant Miner, the former president of a union representing thousands of Columbia student workers who were fired and expelled this week, described Khalil's detention as "a campaign of fear."

"We must stand up together to tell Trump and his billionaire buddies that we're not going to stand for this intimidation and the backsliding of civil rights in this country," he addressed the crowd.

Khalil, 30, is a legal permanent resident of Palestinian descent. His arrest has prompted outrage across the country and fueled tensions between the Trump administration and student movements over immigration policy.

To justify Khalil's arrest, the Trump administration cited an obscure foreign-policy clause that allows the federal government to deport foreign nationals whom it deems "national security threats."

A federal judge temporarily blocked the Trump administration from expelling Khalil on Monday. Khalil filed an amended petition and complaint in federal district court in Manhattan on Thursday, stating he was the target of "retaliatory detention and attempted removal of a student protestor because of his constitutionally protected speech."

For weeks last spring, students staged daily protests and set up an encampment of several dozen tents on college campuses across the United States.

Students, outraged by Israel's genocidal war in Gaza, demanded their universities to divest from companies linked to the Tel Aviv regime. More than 3,100 students were arrested during the protests across the country. Many still face consequences from both their universities and the legal system.

Immigration agents have arrested a second Palestinian student on March 15, over taking part in anti-Israel protests at Columbia University last year.

In a statement on Friday, the Department of Homeland Security identified the student as Leqaa Kordia. It said Kordia's student visa was terminated in January 2022, and she was detained for deportation.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio threatened on Friday that Washington will revoke visas of more students in the coming days.

[SOURCE: PRESS TV and AFP]

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