

UN experts slam U.S. crackdown on pro-Palestine student protesters

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In New York, a crowd of pro-Palestinian protesters gathers in Foley Square, outside the Manhattan federal court, in support of Mahmoud Khalil, on March 12th. (AP photo)

United Nations, March 18 (RHC)-- A group of UN experts has condemned U.S. authorities' move to arrest and deport pro-Palestine student protesters. On Monday, the experts accused President Donald Trump's administration of threatening freedom of expression.

U.S. campuses including Columbia University in New York were rocked by student protests against Israel's genocidal war in Gaza following the October 7, 2023 attack by Palestinian resistance groups.

The experts' remarks came after U.S. immigration officers arrested Mahmoud Khalil, a leader of pro-Palestine protests at Columbia University. The Trump administration has also vowed to arrest and deport other students who took part in the protests.

The UN experts described American officials' move as disproportionate, unnecessary, and discriminatory. "These actions are disproportionate, unnecessary, and discriminatory and will only lead to more trauma and polarization negatively impacting the learning environment within university campuses," the UN experts said in a statement.

"These actions create a chilling effect on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association," they added. They added that the government's actions also threaten students' rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association.

The experts also urged U.S. authorities to cease repression of students, including in the form of arbitrary detention of those holding lawful permanent residents.

Meanwhile, a group of students and professors at Cornell University have filed a lawsuit challenging US President Donald Trump's executive orders that empower his administration to deport international students and scholars, who express support for Palestinian rights.

The lawsuit, filed on Saturday in the US District Court for the Northern District of New York, seeks a nationwide temporary restraining order to block enforcement of two executive orders signed by Trump in the first month of his term.

The lawsuit, filed by attorney Eric Lee and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Council (ADC), notes that these orders violate the First and Fifth Amendments of the US Constitution by unlawfully restricting freedom of speech.

The ADC lawsuit comes as nationwide protests are underway in the United States against the arrest of Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian activist who was detained by US Immigration agents on March 8 — without any charges.

Lawyers for Khalil called the Trump administration's actions against him "targeted, retaliatory detention and attempted removal of a student protestor because of his constitutionally protected speech." Last week, a federal judge temporarily blocked the Trump administration from expelling Khalil.

On March 15, a second Palestinian student was arrested over taking part in anti-Israel protests at Columbia University last year.

Trump said earlier this week that Khalil's arrest was just "the first of many to come."

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