



Judge orders Columbia University protester Mahmoud Khalil freed from immigration detention center

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NEW YORK (AP) — A federal judge on Friday ordered the U.S. government to free former Columbia University graduate student Mahmoud Khalil from the immigration detention center where he has been held since early March while the Trump administration sought to deport him over his role in pro-Palestinian protests.

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Ruling from the bench in New Jersey, U.S. District Judge Michael Farbiarz said it would be "highly, highly unusual" for the government to continue to detain a legal U.S. resident who was unlikely to flee and hadn't been accused of any violence.

"Petitioner is not a flight risk and the evidence presented is that he is not a danger to the community," he said. "Period, full stop."

Later in the hourlong hearing, which took place by phone, the judge said the government had "clearly not met" the standards for detention.

Khalil could walk out of the detention center in rural Louisiana by Friday evening, which is when lawyers for the Trump administration said they expect to release him.

He must surrender his passport and can't travel internationally, but he will get his green card back and be given official documents permitting limited travel within the country, including New York and Michigan to visit family, New Jersey and Louisiana for court appearances and Washington to lobby Congress.

Khalil was the first person arrested under President Donald Trump's crackdown on students who joined campus protests against Israel's devastating war in Gaza. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said Khalil must be expelled from the country because his continued presence could harm American foreign policy.

Farbiarz had ruled earlier that the government couldn't deport Khalil on those grounds, but gave it leeway to continue pursuing a potential deportation based on allegations that he lied on his green card application. Trump administration lawyers repeated that accusation at Friday's court hearing. It's an accusation Khalil disputes.

In issuing his ruling Friday, the judge agreed with Khalil's lawyers that the protest leader was being prevented from exercising his free speech and due process rights despite no obvious reason for his continued detention. The judge noted that Khalil is now clearly a public figure.

Khalil's lawyers had asked that he either be freed on bail or, at the very least, moved from Louisiana to New Jersey so he can be closer to his wife and newborn son, who are both U.S. citizens.

Khalil's wife, Dr. Noor Abdalla, said she can finally "breathe a sigh of relief" after her husband's three months in detention.

"We know this ruling does not begin to address the injustices the Trump administration has brought upon our family, and so many others," she said in a statement provided by Khalil's lawyers. "But today we are celebrating Mahmoud coming back to New York to be reunited with

our little family."

The judge's decision comes after several other scholars targeted for their activism have been released from custody, including another former Palestinian student at Columbia, Mohsen Mahdawi; a Tufts University student, Rumeysa Ozturk; and a Georgetown University scholar, Badar Khan Suri.

Khalil was detained on March 8 at his apartment building in Manhattan over his participation in pro-Palestinian demonstrations.

The international affairs graduate student isn't accused of breaking any laws during the protests at Columbia. He served as a negotiator and spokesperson for student activists and wasn't among the demonstrators arrested, but his prominence in news coverage and willingness to speak publicly made him a target of critics.

The Trump administration has argued that noncitizens who participate in such demonstrations should be expelled from the country as it considers their views antisemitic.

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