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Mahmoud Khalil denounces bipartisan genocide, attacks on democratic rights from Louisiana jail



Student negotiator Mahmoud Khalil on the Columbia University campus in New York at a pro-Palestinian protest encampment on Monday, April 29, 2024. [AP Photo/Ted Shaffrey]

On Tuesday, Mahmoud Khalil, a legal resident of the United States who has been kidnapped and imprisoned by the Trump administration for his role in anti-genocide protests at Columbia University, released a powerful statement from inside an immigration detention facility. The administration is seeking his deportation.

Khalil, 30, has not been charged with a crime, yet he remains incarcerated in an ICE detention facility over 1,300 miles from his wife, an American citizen who is expecting their first child in April. These are his first public comments since he was abducted on March 8 in New York City.

Khalil's statement, first published by the *Guardian*, is titled "Letter from a Palestinian Political Prisoner in Louisiana" and was dictated over the phone from inside the prison. It reads, in part:

My name is Mahmoud Khalil and I am a political prisoner. I am writing to you from a detention facility in Louisiana where I wake to cold mornings and spend long days bearing witness to the quiet injustices underway against a great many people precluded from the protections of the law.

Who has the right to have rights? It is certainly not the humans crowded into the cells here. It isn't the Senegalese man I met who has been deprived of his liberty for a year, his legal situation in limbo and his family an ocean away. It isn't the 21-year-old detainee I met, who stepped foot in this country at age nine, only to be deported without so much as a hearing.

Justice escapes the contours of this nation's immigration facilities.

Khalil described being taken by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents "who refused to provide a warrant, and accosted my wife and me as we returned from dinner." He continued. "Before I knew what was happening, agents handcuffed and forced me into an unmarked car."

He noted:

DHS would not tell me anything for hours—I did not know the cause of my arrest or if I was facing immediate deportation. At 26 Federal Plaza, I slept on the cold floor. In the early morning hours, agents transported me to another facility in Elizabeth, New Jersey. There, I slept on the ground and was refused a blanket despite my request.

My arrest was a direct consequence of exercising my right to free speech as I advocated for a free Palestine and an end to the genocide in Gaza, which resumed in full force Monday night. With January's ceasefire now broken, parents in Gaza are once again cradling too-small shrouds, and families are forced to weigh starvation and displacement against bombs.

After briefly detailing his family history, including growing up in a refugee camp in Syria after his family was displaced during the 1948 *Nakba*, Khalil indicted the Biden and Trump administrations as well as officials at Columbia University not only for his detention, but for trampling on the democratic rights of everyone. He wrote:

I have always believed that my duty is not only to liberate myself from the oppressor, but also to liberate my oppressors from their hatred and fear. My unjust detention is indicative of the anti-Palestinian racism that both the Biden and Trump administrations have demonstrated over the past 16 months as the U.S. has continued to supply Israel with weapons to kill Palestinians and prevented international intervention.

He continued:

While I await legal decisions that hold the futures of my wife and child in the balance, those who enabled my targeting remain comfortably at Columbia University. Presidents Shafik,

Armstrong and Dean Yarhi-Milo laid the groundwork for the U.S. government to target me by arbitrarily disciplining pro-Palestinian students and allowing viral doxing campaigns—based on racism and disinformation—to go unchecked.

“Columbia” he wrote:

surrendered to federal pressure by disclosing student records to Congress and yielding to the Trump administration’s latest threats. My arrest, the expulsion or suspension of at least 22 Columbia students—some stripped of their B.A. degrees just weeks before graduation—and the expulsion of SWC (Student Workers of Columbia) President Grant Miner on the eve of contract negotiations, are clear examples.

After recounting the role of students in leading protests against war and racism historically, Khalil warned:

The Trump administration is targeting me as part of a broader strategy to suppress dissent. Visa-holders, green-card carriers and citizens alike will all be targeted for their political beliefs. In the weeks ahead, students, advocates and elected officials must unite to defend the right to protest for Palestine. At stake are not just our voices, but the fundamental civil liberties of all.

Khalil’s statement, came on the same day that President Donald Trump, on his Truth Social account, viciously attacked Federal District Judge James Boasberg for issuing a 14-day temporary restraining order blocking the deportation of immigrants under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798.

Trump wrote:

This Radical Left Lunatic of a Judge, a troublemaker and agitator who was sadly appointed by Barack Hussein Obama, was not elected President—He didn’t WIN the popular VOTE (by a lot!), he didn’t WIN ALL SEVEN SWING STATES, he didn’t WIN 2,750 to 525 Counties, HE DIDN’T WIN ANYTHING! I WON FOR MANY REASONS, IN AN OVERWHELMING MANDATE, BUT FIGHTING ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION MAY HAVE BEEN THE NUMBER ONE REASON FOR THIS HISTORIC VICTORY. I’m just doing what the VOTERS wanted me to do.

He then called for the judge to be impeached, writing:

This judge, like many of the Crooked Judges’ I am forced to appear before, should be IMPEACHED!!! WE DON’T WANT VICIOUS, VIOLENT, AND DEMENTED CRIMINALS, MANY OF THEM DERANGED MURDERERS, IN OUR COUNTRY. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!!!

Trump's rantings are not just "mean tweets," but an incitement of his fascist followers, including Proud Boy and Oath Keeper militia elements who sought to overthrow the 2020 election and whom he pardoned earlier this year. Unlike Hitler, who came to power with thousands of SA brownshirts under his command, Trump is trying to build up a paramilitary force using the office of the presidency, a fascistic Republican Party and a complicit Democratic Party.

Trump's attacks on the judiciary compelled Chief Justice John Roberts to issue a rare statement Tuesday rebuking Trump. In a message sent to the corporate media, Roberts wrote: For more than two centuries, it has been established that impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision. The normal appellate review process exists for that purpose.

In an interview with Laura Ingraham on Fox News, Trump responded to Roberts' statement by continuing to attack the judge, while claiming that he had not violated the judge's court order—a flagrant lie as Trump defied the judge's order to turn planes with kidnapped Venezuelan migrants around and return them to the US. Some 260 alleged members of the Tren de Aragua gang are in custody in the notorious terrorist prison in El Salvador, where they were flown by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Trump said:

I never did defy a court order... However, we have bad judges. We have very bad judges, and these are judges that shouldn't be allowed... I think at a certain point you have to start looking at, what do you do when you have a rogue judge?

The judge that we are talking about... He's *a lunatic*.

Trump's incitement against "bad judges" is part of his open defiance of the courts and his crossing of the political Rubicon into presidential dictatorship. Eight weeks into his second term, Trump, as promised, is ruling "as a dictator," ignoring Congress and the courts and ruling by decree.

While Trump claimed that he "never did" defy a court order in his interview with Ingraham, top officials in his administration have publicly stated they will not comply with court orders. On Monday, Trump's attorney general, Pam Bondi, in an interview on Fox News accused Boasberg of "attempting to meddle in national security and foreign affairs," adding that "he can't do it."

She continued:

What he's done is an intrusion on the president's authority. You know, this one federal judge, again, thinks he can control foreign policy for the entire country. And he cannot and right now we are evaluating our options.

Asked if the administration "planned to continue doing these flights" Bondi replied:

Absolutely. These are foreign terrorists. The president has identified them and designated them as such and we will continue to follow the Alien Enemies Act.

Trump's "border czar" Tom Homan likewise promised to ignore court orders. "I'm proud to be a part of this administration," he said Monday. "We are not stopping, I don't care what the judges think, I don't care what the Left thinks, we are coming."

Trump's fascist allies in the House, including Reps. Eli Crane, Andy Ogles, Andrew Clyde and Brandon Gill, circulated posts on social media Tuesday calling for the impeachment not only of Boasberg, but also Judges Paul Engelmayer, John Bates and John McConnell, Jr.

Crane, Ogles and Clyde all played leading roles in the "Stop the Steal" movement leading up to Trump's January 6, 2021 putsch. The fact that none of them are behind bars, and instead in a position to overthrow the Constitution is entirely the fault of the Democratic Party. Last Friday's vote for Trump's continuing resolution to fund his dictatorship proved that the Democratic Party is not an opposition party, but a partner in the bipartisan assault on democratic rights and social rights such as public health, education and retirement benefits, in the service of the financial oligarchy and imperialist war.

Khalil's call to action to demand his freedom and that of all persecuted immigrants and opponents of genocide and war must be taken up through the independent mobilization of the working class against their source—capitalism—and both of its political parties.