# Federal judge orders release of Columbia student detained during citizenship interview



A federal judge in Vermont has ordered the release of Mohsen Mahdawi, a Columbia University student who was detained during his U.S. citizenship interview. Mahdawi, a lawful permanent resident and Palestinian holding a green card for over a decade, faced the unexpected arrest on April 14 when federal agents took him into custody at a Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Colchester, Vermont. The detention occurred without criminal charges.

District Judge Geoffrey Crawford ruled on Wednesday that Mahdawi should be released. Upon exiting the courthouse, Mahdawi was greeted by supporters and raised two peace signs, stating, “We are pro-peace and anti-war. To my people in Palestine: I feel your pain, I see your suffering, and I see freedom and it is very very soon.” Born and raised in a refugee camp in the West Bank before moving to the United States in 2014, Mahdawi has been active in student advocacy, particularly related to Palestinian issues.

His arrest comes amid a broader pattern of actions against Palestinian student activists under the administration of former President Donald Trump. This administration revoked hundreds of student visas, particularly targeting activism perceived as sympathetic to Palestinian causes. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has played a significant role in these visa revocations. Several international scholars advocating for Palestinian rights have been arrested and held in detention centres in the southern United States, as the administration has linked demonstrations against Israel’s Gaza conflict with antisemitic violence.

The Trump administration issued executive orders aiming to prevent noncitizens from supporting groups deemed national security threats, pledging to take swift action against what it described as anti-Jewish racism on college campuses, including promises to deport individuals labelled as Hamas sympathizers.

Mahdawi, who helped organise the Palestinian Student Union at Columbia alongside fellow detainee Mahmoud Khalil, describes himself as a committed Buddhist and advocate of non-violence and empathy. His legal team argues that his detention is retaliatory, infringing upon his First Amendment rights by punishing him solely for engaging in constitutionally protected speech. Lia Ernst, legal director at the ACLU of Vermont, said that Mahdawi’s activism “eased tensions on campus” and promoted understanding. She criticised the government for lacking any substantial record against him, calling the detention “part and parcel of the Trump administration’s attempt to condition liberty on political views.”

Shezza Abboushi Dallal, staff attorney at the Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility (CLEAR) Project, which is involved in Mahdawi’s defence, highlighted the political dimensions of his detention.

In an interview recorded by Vermont Democratic Senator Peter Welch inside an Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centre, Mahdawi expressed concern over the government’s interpretation of anti-war activism as antisemitism. He emphasised his commitment to peace, explaining, “My work has been centred on peacemaking,” and expressed hope for “an end to the war, an end to the killing, and to see a peaceful resolution between Palestinians and Israelis.”

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders and the state’s congressional delegation have publicly supported demands for Mahdawi’s release.

The Independent is reporting that this case highlights ongoing tensions in U.S. immigration policy relating to activism on college campuses and raises questions about the balance between national security measures and constitutional rights. The story is evolving as further developments are anticipated.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/federal-court-orders-columbia-student-mohsen-mahdawi-released-on-bail> - This ACLU press release details the federal court's order for Mohsen Mahdawi's release, highlighting his arrest during a citizenship interview and the legal arguments for his release.
* <https://www.apnews.com/article/dd95ffff78464df1b485d5912f1b3fcb> - An Associated Press article reporting on Mahdawi's release after his arrest during a citizenship interview, including statements from Mahdawi and his legal team.
* <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-immigration-release-detained-palestinian-student-following-judges-order-cbs-2025-04-30/> - Reuters coverage of Mahdawi's release on bail, discussing the legal proceedings and the broader implications for free speech and immigration policy.
* <https://www.apnews.com/article/716ce8e67e2c3093eba4092e57ba1612> - An AP News article discussing the expansion of grounds for canceling international students' legal status, relevant to the context of Mahdawi's case.
* <https://www.wbur.org/news/2025/04/14/palentianian-columbia-student-ice-vermont> - WBUR News report on Mahdawi's detention during his citizenship interview in Vermont, providing details of the incident and reactions from local officials.
* <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/15/student-activist-arrested-by-ice-at-his-citizenship-appointment> - NPR coverage of Mahdawi's arrest by ICE during his citizenship appointment, including interviews and legal perspectives on the case.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/mohsen-mahdawi-release-ice-student-visa-b2742417.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data