

Cornell student suspended and threatened with deportation for protesting Gaza genocide

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Cornell University academic worker and international graduate student Momodou Taal was suspended by the university administration on Monday and is facing imminent deportation from the US for his participation in Palestinian solidarity protests on campus.

In a post on Twitter/X on Friday, Taal wrote of a “targeted campaign of intimidation and harassment against me from Cornell’s administration and police. I have been suspended again. I had no chance to dispute the charges, nor see the evidence or appeal. They informed me that I am effectively being deported by the weekend.”

After the university responded by stating it did not have the power to deport anyone, Taal posted a screenshot of a message he received from a Cornell University immigration adviser stating that the academic suspension will impact his F-1 visa status.

The message states,

For students who have been suspended or discontinued from their academic program by their academic department or Cornell University, then our office is required to close the student’s F-1 record. Closure of your F-1 record affects the student’s ability to remain or enter the US in F-1 status. There is no grace period for exiting the US. If the student is in the US, then they should exit as soon as possible or work with a licensed immigration lawyer to change their immigration status to another appropriate status. Hope this helps. Feel free to contact me if needed.

Taal, a British-Gambian international student, also wrote on Twitter/X that the actions against him were “taxing and taking its toll. Every day we witness the horrors that Israel inflicts on people. And those of us who

still have our humanity and are rightly incensed at what we see ... [A]re facing so much repression. You’d never think these institutions are responding to people protesting a genocide.”

On September 18, more than 100 pro-Palestinian protesters marched on a career fair at the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations and effectively shut it down. The fair included defense contractors Boeing and L3Harris, two companies that students voted last April in a referendum that the university must divest from for “supporting the ongoing war in Gaza.”

In response to the protest, Vice President for University Relations Joel M. Malina issued a statement that claimed protesters “pushed and shoved” campus police officers, guests of the university “felt threatened” and students “were denied their ability to experience the Career Fair.” Malina said the protesters’ actions were “a violation of university policy and illegal.”

The university administrator also said that Cornell police were “working to identify those who violated our policies,” including seeking students and employees to provide names of those who participated in “this shameful behavior.” Malina said that those identified would be referred to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards for “immediate action including suspension,” faculty and staff would be referred to university human resources, and these individuals will be “subject to potential criminal charges.”

Taal received a communication from Christina Liang, director of the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards, saying that he had been reported to the University by Cornell University Police Department (CUPD) Lieutenant Scott Grantz for not complying with orders from university officials at last week’s protest.

According to Grantz’s complaint, a copy of which was obtained by the independent *Cornell Daily Sun*, Taal

entered the career fair alongside other protesters after being warned not to do so by university officials. It said Taal participated in “unreasonably loud” chants. The email also said Taal’s behavior demonstrated “escalating, egregious behavior and a disregard for the University policies.”

The graduate student was called to a same-day noon meeting at Day Hall. At the meeting, Taal was handed a physical copy of a no-trespass order barring him from entering campus. Director Liang told Taal that his F-1 visa would be terminated and referred him to a senior immigration adviser.

A report in the *Daily Sun* noted protesters banged drums, pots and pans and chanted “Free Palestine” as they entered the Statler Hotel, where the career fest took place. The *Daily Sun* report said,

Protesters presented the Boeing recruitment table with a letter titled “People’s Court Indictment of War Crimes and Genocide,” as well as a list of the Gaza death count for children under the age of one.

The letter delivered to Boeing “charged” the company with “the crimes of aiding and abetting human rights violations, war crimes and genocide” under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the U.S. War Crimes Act and the Genocide Convention Implementation Act.

The *Daily Sun* also reported that there was no evidence of any physical violence towards law enforcement but “noted distress among recruiters, students and University officials at the career fair.”

Taal said the allegations in the CUPD complaint were false. He told the *Daily Sun* that he delivered a speech outside Day Hall before participating in the career fair disruption for five minutes before promptly leaving.

Taal was suspended during the spring semester for his involvement in the pro-Palestinian encampment at Cornell University which was set up as part of a nationwide series of protests across the country against the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza. According to the *Daily Sun*, international students with a second or third suspension are in violation of F-1 regulations and “could have their visas pulled,” which would require them to leave the country.

Taal, an instructor for a first-year writing seminar under

the African Studies and Research Center, was informed by administrator Liang that he would no longer be permitted to teach the course, and he was removed from access to the university’s online teaching platform.

In a statement to the *Daily Sun*, Taal said he had been singled out for his vocal stance in defense of Palestinians. “They are doing this to shift the focus away from their complicity in genocide. It’s telling that they think it’s more important to suspend me than taking seriously their investment in the slaughter of thousands of innocent civilians.”

A petition is being circulated by students, staff and faculty at Cornell University demanding Taal’s reinstatement. The petition says the university is setting a “dangerous pattern of using deportation and ‘temporary suspension’ alongside threats of escalating action as a means of avoiding due process. Imposing severe punishments before an investigation has even taken place, let alone a hearing, is a breach of Cornell’s own administrative procedures.”

The petition says that the university is not following its own Student Code of Conduct Procedures by imposing temporary suspensions. It says that the suspension of Taal is the first time “a Cornell graduate worker is facing immediate deportation without administrative due process or the ability to review evidence of their alleged misconduct,” and it is “a wildly disproportionate response to any alleged violation.”

The attack on Momodou Taal at Cornell University is part of a nationwide crackdown on college and university campuses against free speech rights with methods of a police state that have included violent assaults by police on protesters, criminal charges against student demonstrators, and the use of advanced surveillance technologies to identify and punish students and faculty for exercising their fundamental democratic rights.



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