

Lawyers for Momodou Taal denounce Trump administration's deportation effort as unconstitutional political retaliation

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In a filing submitted Sunday to the US District Court for the Northern District of New York in the case of *Taal v. Trump*, attorneys for Cornell graduate student Momodou Taal denounced the Trump administration's efforts to detain and deport their client as an unconstitutional act of political retaliation.

On Friday, Taal, a British-Gambian student, was issued a formal demand to surrender himself to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) just days after he filed a lawsuit challenging Trump's executive orders targeting protesters for deportation. A filing to the court from Taal's lawyers on Friday afternoon called on the judge in the case to grant an emergency injunction, noting that the government's action "constitutes an unlawful attempt to remove this Court's jurisdiction over this case" by deporting Taal.

A Justice Department filing submitted Saturday night claims that Taal's immigration status "became unlawful before this lawsuit began" and that his arrest is merely the result of a revoked student visa. But the government openly acknowledges that the revocation was based on Taal's political activity and carried out under Executive Order 14188, which calls for using immigration powers against critics of the Israeli state.

Taal's lawyers—Eric Lee and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee—responded Sunday that the government's own account confirms the political motivation behind the targeting. "Defendants acknowledge they are attempting to remove Momodou Taal... because he is a pro-Palestinian activist who attended a protest at Cornell University," the filing states. "Their alleged authority for doing so is the Executive Orders."

The attorneys argue that the government's conduct is

so egregious that it qualifies as "outrageous" under legal precedent—and is therefore subject to review by the court.

According to the government, Taal was identified by federal agencies "to implement Executive Order 14188, Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism," which prompted immigration officials to review "news sources" documenting his involvement in campus protests. Taal's lawyers note, "Defendants admit they are targeting Mr. Taal because ICE identified him as 'a prominent pro-Palestinian activist involved in protests...'"

The Department of Justice's filing confirms a core fact of the case: that Taal is being targeted because he is one of the lead plaintiffs in the first major legal challenge to the Trump administration's executive orders on speech and dissent.

In its Saturday filing, the government claimed that Taal is attempting to "transform this injunction proceeding into a forum to contest" his immigration status, which they assert was invalidated on March 14—one day before the lawsuit was filed. This timing makes clear that the government moved to revoke his visa specifically in response to his planned legal action. As the filing from Taal's lawyers notes:

Though Defendants' declarations do not provide a reason for the sudden urgency to address the protest that had taken place six months prior, Defendants assert that they initiated and finalized a multi-agency review of the evidence of Mr. Taal's protest activity, weighed the potential statutory grounds upon

which he could be deemed removable, underwent the time-consuming review mandated by the State Department for non-immigrant visa revocation by the Foreign Affairs Manual and determined that it was necessary to revoke Mr. Taal's visa all on the same day.

Even more chilling is the government's invocation of vague and unsubstantiated accusations. The filing refers to Taal's participation in peaceful campus protests, claiming that he "created a hostile environment for Jewish students" and engaged in a "pattern of activity" that called into question his visa status.

But this flimsy pretext for deportation is nothing more than political persecution. As his attorneys point out, "Defendants acknowledge that Mr. Taal's purported removability is based on his attendance of a protest in August 2024.... Mr. Taal attended this protest for five minutes, no criminal charges were filed against him, and Cornell did not subject him to discipline that would trigger immigration consequences. The government claims Mr. Taal 'was twice suspended at Cornell for harassment, and antisemitic conduct.' They fail to cite any fact to support this false assertion because there is none."

The *World Socialist Web Site* has previously reported that the Department of Justice's initial demand for Taal to surrender to ICE custody referenced his legal case in the subject line—an implicit admission that the arrest was retaliatory.

In Sunday's response, Taal's lawyers also rejected the government's assertion that the executive orders in question do not restrict speech or political dissent.

Taal's attorneys also refute the government's claim that the executive orders do not restrict speech. EO 14188 calls for the prosecution and removal of individuals accused of "anti-Semitic harassment"—a term so vague it can be used to criminalize virtually any criticism of the Israeli state or US foreign policy. The legal framework created by the orders, they argue, is designed to suppress dissent, particularly opposition to the genocide in Gaza.

"The Executive Orders are in effect nationwide," the filing warns. "Their chill is felt by non-citizens and citizens who want to continue lawfully protesting

government action or listen to such speech... The threat to punish protected speech is unconstitutional in every application and in every location. A nationwide injunction is the appropriate mechanism to remedy such a profound affront to the Constitution."

The lawsuit brought by Taal, along with fellow Cornell student Sriram Parasurama and Professor M?koma Wa Ng?g?, is the first major legal challenge to Trump's executive orders restricting speech. The administration's efforts to deport Taal are intended to send a message to any others considering similar action: sue the government, and you will be silenced, jailed or removed from the country.

Over the past two weeks, Trump has invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to deport hundreds of immigrants without due process. His administration has openly defied a judicial order that these deportations be halted.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on students, workers and youth across the country and internationally to mobilize in defense of Momodou Taal and all victims of this campaign of political persecution. Demonstrations and walkouts should be organized on campuses and in workplaces. Rank-and-file committees must be built to oppose the bipartisan conspiracy against democratic rights.

The fight against dictatorship must be rooted in the independent political mobilization of the working class, armed with a socialist program to bring down the capitalist oligarchy and end the system of war, repression, and inequality it defends.



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