

Hearing begins today on Momodou Taal's case against Trump

Kevin Reed
24 March 2025

A hearing is scheduled for 2:00 p.m. Tuesday before a US federal district judge in Syracuse, New York, where arguments will be presented in the lawsuit brought by Cornell University student Momodou Taal challenging President Trump's executive orders targeting free speech and seeking to deport protesters.

In the same proceeding, US District Judge Elizabeth C. Coombe will also hear arguments on Taal's motion for a temporary restraining order (TRO) to block the Trump administration's unprecedented attempt to apprehend and deport him in retaliation for filing the lawsuit—before the case can be adjudicated.

The attack on the democratic rights of Taal, a British-Gambian student, is part of the broader fascistic rampage by the Trump regime. It follows a series of similar actions, including: the March 8 abduction of Columbia University student Mahmoud Khalil, transferred to a detention facility in Louisiana; the March 11 suspension of Yale Law School scholar Helyeh Doutaghi based on false claims spread by a pro-Israel media outlet; and the March 17 detention of Georgetown University researcher Badar Khan Suri by masked federal agents outside his home.

Additionally, on Monday, 21-year-old Yunseo Chung—a legal permanent resident from South Korea who has lived in the US since age seven—filed a lawsuit against President Trump and top administration officials after immigration authorities attempted to arrest and deport her for participating in pro-Palestinian protests.

The events leading up to the US district court hearing on Tuesday reveal the extraordinary context within which it is being held:

On **Saturday, March 15**, Taal filed his lawsuit alongside fellow Cornell student Sriram Parasurama and Professor M?koma Wa Ng?g?, challenging the constitutionality of two executive orders issued by Donald Trump that seek to deny the right to free speech for all non-citizens.

A hearing was originally set for **Wednesday, March 19**, before Judge Coombe, but she canceled it an hour before it was to begin and rescheduled the proceeding for an in-

person hearing on Tuesday, March 25. She also ordered both parties to submit written arguments ahead of Tuesday's session.

That same day, unidentified law enforcement agents were seen staking out Taal's residence near the Cornell campus in Ithaca, New York, in an apparent attempt to arrest him. In response to the intimidation and surveillance, Taal's attorneys filed an emergency request for a temporary restraining order (TRO) to block his detention.

On **Thursday, March 20**, Taal's attorney Eric Lee read a statement on his behalf at a campus demonstration at Cornell University. Hundreds of students, faculty and supporters gathered to defend Taal and denounce the political repression being carried out by the White House.

At 1:00 a.m. on **Friday, March 21**, Taal's attorneys received an email from the Justice Department "inviting" him to surrender to authorities. In a filing that afternoon, Taal's lawyers urged Judge Coombe to issue an emergency injunction, arguing that the government's actions amounted to "an unlawful attempt to remove this Court's jurisdiction" by deporting their client.

On **Saturday, March 22**, the Justice Department submitted a court filing absurdly claiming that Taal's immigration status "became unlawful before this lawsuit began" and that his arrest stems solely from a revoked student visa. However, the government openly admitted the revocation was based on Taal's political activity and carried out under Executive Order 14188, which targets critics of the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza for deportation.

On **Sunday, March 23**, Taal's lawyers responded to the court that the government's own filings confirm the political motive behind his 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, citing the executive orders as the basis for their actions.

Tuesday's hearing comes amid growing protests and support for Taal. On Sunday, Jewish students, faculty and alumni at Cornell issued a statement condemning the Trump

administration's claim that Taal created a "hostile environment" for Jewish students on campus.

The scathing statement says:

In revoking of Taal's student visa, surveilling his home and threatening his right to due process, the administration is once again enacting unconstitutional, anti-immigrant policies on the false pretense of protecting Jewish people, specifically Jewish Cornellians.

The statement, entitled, "Not in Our Name: Jewish Cornellians Stand with Momodou Taal," also says:

Taal's statements expressing his deeply held personal political opinions are well within the confines of his First Amendment rights.

It adds:

We recognize that such accusations of antisemitism are being used as fronts for xenophobia, and Jewish students are being used as pawns for the advancement of authoritarianism.

Finally, the statement draws a crucial parallel between Trump's assault on immigrants and how Hitler used antisemitism to build a repressive apparatus targeting the broader population:

These days, we often hear Martin Niemöller's adage "First they came for ..." that describes the complicity of everyday people during the Nazi regime. When the Trump administration threatens any member of our community, we must stand up to them with the knowledge that further repression and violence will follow if we do not act and speak out now.

On Monday, the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GPSA) at Cornell passed a resolution defending Taal and denouncing the Trump administration's attack on his First and Fifth Amendment rights.

The GPSA resolution exposes the false basis upon which the Trump administration's actions against Taal have been pursued, as well as the complicity of the Cornell University administration in the conspiracy against him.

The resolution demands:

We recommend that because Momodou Taal has not been subjected to any criminal charges and his disciplinary processes did not lead to a revocation of his visa, the University Administration repeal actions that are being used by the current administration's decision to revoke his visa.

While students, faculty and alumni are mobilizing against the moves by Trump to implement authoritarianism in the US on behalf of the financial oligarchy, the Democratic Party and the academic institutions are bending their knee to the would-be-dictator.

While Cornell University is assisting the attack on Momodou Taal, Columbia University on Friday capitulated to the demands of the Trump White House and implemented a series of sweeping measures that attack free speech and academic freedom on campus.

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 the Trump regime's campaign of political persecution against free speech and other basic rights. 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.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact