

Columbia University student hunted by ICE, Yunseo Chung, sues Trump administration

Sandy English, John Conrad
25 March 2025

On Monday, Yunseo Chung, a 21-year-old Columbia University student and legal permanent resident in the United States, sued US President Donald Trump and other high-ranking officials in the administration following efforts by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to detain and deport her. At present, she remains in the US in hiding from the ICE-Gestapo.

On Tuesday, a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order preventing Chung from being kidnapped by ICE.

The judge, Naomi Reice Buchwald, said, “Nothing in the record has indicated in any way that she is a danger,” in barring ICE from detaining Chung as her lawsuit against the Trump administration proceeds. According to Gothamist, “The temporary restraining order also prevents the federal government from transferring Chung to another court jurisdiction. [Columbia protest leader Mahamoud] Khalil was transferred from a Newark ICE detention center to Louisiana shortly after he was arrested. ‘No trips to Louisiana, here,’ Buchwald said.”

The pursuit of Chung is part of the dramatic intensification of the Trump administration’s efforts to establish a presidential dictatorship in the US. The administration is seizing and detaining individuals for exercising their First Amendment rights, has invoked the reactionary Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to deport hundreds of immigrants without due process and openly defied judicial rulings against these actions.

Chung, a junior at Columbia, is being targeted for her participation in numerous mass pro-Palestinian protests that have erupted on campus over the last 17 months since the beginning of Israel’s genocidal onslaught in the Middle East. She has lived in the US since the age of seven when her family immigrated from South Korea.

The Trump administration is once again putting forward the malicious argument that Chung’s presence in the US “hinders” the administration’s foreign policy agenda of

“halting the spread of antisemitism.” This is the same slanderous rationale that has been advanced by the administration in justifying the illegal detention earlier this month of Columbia graduate student Mahmoud Khalil, also a green card holder and now detained in Louisiana, and Georgetown University researcher Badar Khan Suri. Both Khalil and Suri were detained by unidentified federal agents outside their homes.

British-Gambian Cornell University student Momodou Taal, a vocal opponent of the genocide in Gaza at Cornell, is the latest target of the vicious political intimidation and repression of the Trump administration. Taal, along with fellow Cornell student Sriram Parasurama and Professor M?koma Wa Ng?g?, filed a lawsuit on March 15 challenging Trump’s executive orders as unconstitutional violations of free speech. He is presently attempting to avoid detention by ICE after the Trump administration revoked his student visa.

On Monday, US District Judge Elizabeth C. Coombe in Syracuse New York heard Taal’s motion challenging Trump’s executive orders targeting free speech and seeking to deport protesters as well as for a restraining order to prevent the Trump administration’s illegal attempt to seize and deport him in retaliation for filing the lawsuit before the case can be brought to court.

The lawsuit filed by Chung in federal court in Manhattan details the extensive, Gestapo-like efforts of ICE to detain her. ICE officials, working closely with federal prosecutors, visited several residences with ties to Chung, including her parents’ house on March 9. The next day, a federal law enforcement agent told Chung’s lawyer that her status as a permanent resident had been revoked. ICE then searched Chung’s university housing on March 13 with warrants that cited a criminal harboring statute, directed at individuals who provide shelter to noncitizens who have committed a crime, even when they are in the US legally.

The lawsuit notes:

ICE's shocking actions against Ms. Chung form part of a larger pattern of attempted U.S. government repression of constitutionally protected protest activity and other forms of speech. The government's repression has focused specifically on university students who speak out in solidarity with Palestinians who are critical of the Israeli government's ongoing campaign in Gaza or the pro-Israeli policies of the U.S. government and other institutions.

Now officials at the highest echelons of government are attempting to use immigration enforcement as a bludgeon to suppress speech that they dislike, including Ms. Chung's speech.

Chung, unlike Khalil, was not a prominent figure in the mass demonstrations at Columbia last year. She was one of numerous student protesters arrested, on a misdemeanor, by New York Police Department (NYPD) officers at Barnard College earlier this month when two dozen pro-Palestinian demonstrators occupied the lobby of the school's main library.

The cases of Chung, Khalil, Taal and others strike one as nothing so much as the resistance against the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, a federal law that mandated that runaway slaves in free states in the north had to be returned to their owners in the south, empowered slave-catchers to go into northern cities and seize them, and punished local officials who prevented implementation of the law.

In the cases of Chung, Khalil and Taal, however, people are not being rounded up because they are, in the eyes of the law, chattel property, but because they expressed ideas that are hostile to war, Zionism and American imperialism.

Two other suits filed in New York are worth noting. First, Columbia University faculty have challenged the withdrawal of \$400 million in federal funding by the Trump administration to the university.

The withdrawal of the funds is ostensibly what caused the university to clamp down on student protesters last week, banning masks, hiring new security personnel empowered to arrest students, and putting special oversight over the university's Middle East, South Asian, and African Studies department, although, as the WSWS

has noted, a far deeper social cause of collaboration with Trump lies in the character of the upper-middle class elements that staff the highest echelons of university administrations, a social layer grown not only richer but more and more openly hostile to democratic principles in the last several decades.

The suit, filed by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), "challenges the Trump administration's unlawful and unprecedented effort to overpower a university's academic autonomy and control the thought, association, scholarship, and expression of its faculty and students. The Trump administration is coercing Columbia University to do its bidding and regulate speech and expression on campus by holding hostage billions of dollars in congressionally authorized federal funding ..."

On Monday, scores of Columbia faculty members assembled to protest the university's capitulation to Trump.

The second suit was filed by a high school student in Brooklyn federal court against the Half Hollow Hills Central School District, in the small suburban community of Dix Hills in Suffolk County, Long Island, because the school had painted over a parking spot that the student had decorated with a watermelon—a symbol of Palestinian resistance—denying the student her right to free speech and inflicting emotional trauma.

The decoration of parking spaces was an annual student tradition of Half Hollow Hills High School West. According to the *Brooklyn Eagle*, "The senior painted a watermelon slice featuring a keffiyeh scarf-like pattern followed by the phrase, 'Peace Be Upon You' and her name written in Arabic." The suit maintains that the school's principal interrogated and threatened the student in a closed office.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact