

IYSSE (Sri Lanka) condemns repression of Mahmoud Khalil and Momodou Taal

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Sri Lanka)

30 March 2025

The International Youth and Student for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka strongly condemns the ongoing political repression of Mahmoud Khalil and Momodou Taal in the United States by fascist President Donald Trump. We also oppose similar brutal actions at other US campuses.

Khalil and Taal have been targeted for their outspoken opposition to US foreign policy, especially Israel's genocide of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.

On March 8, Mahmoud Khalil was arrested by agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a division of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and, after being secretly transferred, is incarcerated in a private detention centre in Louisiana.

Khalil, a Palestinian activist and graduate student at Columbia University, is a legal permanent resident of the United States and a Green Card holder. A prominent opponent of Israel's military action in Gaza, he was a lead negotiator for students in the discussion with Columbia University's administration during the anti-genocide encampment movement.

Khalil's arrest is a clear attempt to suppress his activity, particularly his role in the Gaza Solidarity Encampment protest and during the occupation of Milstein Library in opposition to the expulsion of pro-Palestinian students. His persecution is a part of a broader strategy by the Trump administration to silence all opposition to its policies, particularly within academic institutions.

Trump has openly boasted about his role in Khalil's arrest, threatening further action against individuals he claims are involved in "pro-terrorist, antisemitic, and anti-American activities."

In line with the suppression of political dissent, the Trump administration has also targeted Taal, a British-

Gambian PhD student in Africana Studies and graduate instructor at Cornell University, for his brave and determined opposition to Trump's fascistic repression of migrants.

Taal has filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of recent executive orders by Trump to suppress pro-Palestinian speech. Almost immediately, Taal was issued with a formal demand to surrender himself to ICE and now potentially faces deportation.

The IYSSE in Sri Lanka salutes the courageous initiative of Mahmoud Khalil and Momodou Taal to defend democratic rights. The Trump administration's targeting of Khalil and Taal sets a dangerous precedent and is part of a widening crackdown on democratic rights in the United States.

It is crucial for students, activists and all who seek justice to recognise the implication of these actions. These are not isolated incidents, but part of a broader assault on political dissent aimed at silencing all domestic opposition to US imperialist wars of aggression.

We fully support our comrades in the IYSSE and Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the US who are in the forefront of defending the democratic rights of students, youth and immigrants, and all workers facing the Trump administration's savage assault on jobs.

These attacks are in line with the anti-democratic actions of capitalist governments everywhere as they attempt to impose the escalating global economic crisis on the working class, creating growing mass unemployment and poverty.

The democratic rights of university students are under attack around the world. In Sri Lanka, the newly-formed Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP-NPP) government is openly serving the interests of international capital.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and his JVP-NPP administration won power last year by exploiting mass opposition to Sri Lanka's traditional capitalist parties. The SEP and the IYSSE in Sri Lanka warned, however, that the Dissanayake government would rapidly ditch its phoney election promises and ruthlessly turn against the working class and the rural masses.

The JVP-NPP government is working closely with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and implementing its austerity measures, making clear that it will trample on all opposition, particularly among workers and youth.

In opposition to Sri Lanka's capitalist parties, as well as the pseudo-left and the trade unions, who all support the IMF's policies, the SEP and the IYSSE are the only organisations fighting to mobilise workers and youth on a socialist program against the government's austerity measures.

As part of this struggle, the IYSSE organised a lecture at Peradeniya University, on the topic of "How to defeat the IMF austerity programme," sponsored by the university's Political Science Students Association. Fearful of increasing support for our lecture, the university administration, under the influence of the NPP/JVP government, banned the meeting.

The meeting ban was a blatant attack on freedom of speech amid signs of growing moves towards dictatorial forms of rule by the Sri Lankan government.

On March 27, the Dissanayake government unleashed a brutal police attack on hundreds of unemployed allied health degree holders demonstrating outside the Ministry of Health in Colombo. Twenty-seven protesters, including members of the Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF), were arrested by police.

The IUSF is controlled by the fake-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), which has declared that the installation of the JVP-NPP government represented "people's expectations." Notwithstanding our unbridgeable political differences with the FSP and IUSF, the IYSSE condemned this vicious police attack.

On December 2, school development officers protested outside the Ministry of Education in Colombo to demand their inclusion in the teaching service. The government responded with a similar police attack,

then initiated a political witch-hunt, falsely accusing the educators of injuring police.

The increasingly repressive actions of the Sri Lankan government vindicates the warnings made by the SEP and the IYSSE. We insist that democratic and social rights can only be defended through the independent mobilisation of the working class on a socialist program.

The IYYSE in Sri Lanka calls on students, youth, workers and all defenders of democratic rights to stand in solidarity with Khalil and Taal. Their persecution constitutes an attack on all those who challenge government policies. The fight against political repression must be a collective effort. Only through international solidarity and relentless opposition to authoritarianism on the basis of an international socialist perspective can we defend the fundamental right to free speech.



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