

SEP (UK) delivers letter to British Foreign Office demanding action over Momodou Taal

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (UK)'s Assistant National Secretary Tom Scripps visited the Foreign Office in London Monday afternoon to deliver a letter raising the case of Momodou Taal and insisting the British government act to defend the rights of its citizen.

Taal is being threatened with detention and deportation by the US Trump administration for exercising his rights to free speech and protest over the genocide of the Palestinians. He is a legal resident of the US, studying at Cornell University.

A member of Labour Foreign Secretary David Lammy's office received the letter, the text of which is below.

Dear Foreign Secretary,

Momodou Taal, a British-Gambian citizen, is currently at risk of unlawful detention and deportation from the United States for his pro-Palestinian activism at Cornell University.

The great-grandson of Gambia's first president, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, Taal has been studying, teaching and working on his Ph.D dissertation in Africana Studies at Cornell since 2022. He is now one of the hundreds of international students the Trump administration is, according to Secretary of State Marc Rubio, already actively seeking to remove from the country on bogus charges of antisemitism. This includes Columbia University students Mahmoud Khalil who has been arrested and imprisoned, and Yunseo Chung, a legal US permanent resident since the age of seven.

Taal's persecution is being mounted on the basis that, on September 18, 2024, he took part in a peaceful and legal protest opposing a recruitment drive by defence contractors L3 Harris and Boeing. He was threatened

with de-enrolment by Cornell University, which would have forced him to leave the United States within 48 hours.

Cornell was forced to withdraw its threat under the pressure of popular protest, but this disciplinary action became the basis for the Federal Government citing Taal under Executive Order 14188, signed by President Trump on January 29. Taal became one of the signatories to a March 15 challenge to Trump's Executive Orders 14188 and 14161. Four days later, he was put under state surveillance and, on March 21, ordered by the Justice Department to surrender to ICE for deportation.

Civil libertarians and lawyers for Mr. Taal have said efforts to deport him are an unprecedented violation of his First Amendment rights. Eric Lee, representing Mr Taal, said, "There's nothing in the Immigration and Nationality Act that makes someone deportable for attending a protest" and to do so would mean the government can jail people for their speech.

The threat to Taal is grave. Individuals ordered to be deported by the US government have been disappeared into foreign jails, or to Guantanamo Bay.

The British government has a responsibility to defend Momodou Taal's freedom of speech and lawful political activity against the arbitrary and unconstitutional action taken against him by the Trump administration.

In your own 2022 Labour Party conference speech as then shadow foreign secretary, you pledged that a Labour government would introduce a legal right to consular assistance, specifically criticising the Conservative government's approach in dual national cases including Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Morad Tahbaz and Jagtar Singh Johal. In October 2023, you also announced that a new Special Envoy for Arbitrary

Detention would be introduced if Labour won the general election.

As Foreign Secretary of a government headed by the former human rights lawyer Sir Keir Starmer, you are clearly obligated to defend Momodou Taal against the exercise of arbitrary state power by any government, including and above all one that the UK is declared to have a “special relationship” with.

You must formally insist that he is extended his full constitutional protections guaranteeing free speech and that he be allowed to remain in the United States to continue his studies without fear of persecution.

Moreover, should the Trump administration proceed with its threats against Taal, and should he choose to leave the United States, your government must guarantee him safe and dignified passage to the United Kingdom.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Marsden

National Secretary, Socialist Equality Party (UK)



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