

Stateless Palestinian Ward Sakeik released after five months in ICE custody

Kevin Reed
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Ward Sakeik, a 22-year-old stateless Palestinian newlywed, was released late Tuesday from the Prairieland Detention Center in Texas after enduring nearly five months in US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody.

While her release marks an important victory for immigrant rights, it is a warning that the lawless and punitive policies of the Trump administration continue to target thousands with no criminal record, in open defiance of basic legal protections and constitutional rights.

Sakeik's release came after a long series of brazen attacks on her rights by Trump's immigration Gestapo. Her ordeal with ICE began during her honeymoon in February 2025, when she was detained at the St. Thomas Airport in the US Virgin Islands while returning home with her husband, Taahir Shaikh.

Sakeik, a stateless Palestinian born in Saudi Arabia, had lived in the US since age eight after her family's asylum claim was denied. Though she had a deportation order from 2011, she was allowed to stay in the US under supervision, regularly checking in with immigration authorities and fully complying with all requirements.

Despite her compliance and a pending green card application, Sakeik was detained and transferred to several ICE facilities, including Prairieland Detention Center in Texas. ICE then attempted to deport her twice without warning.

On June 12, ICE officers brought her onto the tarmac at Fort Worth Alliance Airport and told her they were deporting her to "the border of Israel," despite the government's knowledge that she is stateless and has no path to citizenship in Israel or in the West Bank.

Her deportation was only halted due to the launching of a war against Iran by Israel. Sakeik's family has

described her situation as a "procedural black hole," with no bond eligibility and no clear path to legal status.

Despite a federal court order explicitly prohibiting her removal from the country, ICE attempted to deport Sakeik on June 30 for the second time.

At 5:00 a.m. on Monday, June 30, guards at the Prairieland Detention Center woke Sakeik and ordered her to pack her belongings, telling her she was being removed from the facility immediately. She was not told where she was being deported to, and her belongings had already been placed outside the intake door.

Buses were waiting outside to take her away. When Sakeik tried to explain to officers that a federal judge had issued an order forbidding her removal, she was told, "It's not up to me." She was denied the opportunity to contact her husband or attorneys. Her husband, Taahir Shaikh, only learned of the attempted removal from another detainee.

Her legal team scrambled to alert ICE and reiterated the court order, while ICE officers refused to provide information about her destination or the justification for the removal attempt.

Ward Sakeik's defense was led by a team of attorneys, including Eric Lee, Waled Elsaban and Maria Kari with Project TAHA, an advocacy group for stateless individuals and Palestinian rights.

Eric Lee condemned the government's actions:

The Trump administration's brazenly unconstitutional attempt to deport this young woman in violation of a federal court order should shock the conscience of every American. Had we not intervened, she may very well be in

a foreign country right now, separated from her family like so many others illegally deported to third countries. As the Supreme Court sits on its hands and lets this happen, the American people must stand up and oppose Trump's descent to dictatorship.

Maria Kari, who works with Project TAHA, stated:

Today marks a powerful step forward for Ward who has been released from immigration detention and reunited with her spouse, Taahir, after 141 days. This is a moment of much needed relief and joy—one that every family deserves. Ward's case is one of too many that are emblematic of this administration's cruelty-based immigration enforcement system where daily we are seeing loved ones torn apart.

Sakeik's husband, Taahir Shaikh, has been at the forefront of the campaign to secure her release, organizing public protests, media outreach, and petition drives. His tireless efforts kept her case in the public eye and mobilized support from immigrant rights groups and the broader community.

Reflecting on her release, Shaikh said:

We are overjoyed that Ward is finally free, but we will not forget the trauma and fear inflicted on our family. This nightmare should never have happened. We will continue to fight for justice for Ward and for all those still trapped in ICE detention.

Sakeik's case is part of the criminality and attack on basic democratic rights that define the Trump administration's fascist political program. ICE's repeated attempts to deport her despite a federal court order are not an aberration but part of a broader pattern of belligerent rejection of judicial oversight.

Immigrant rights organizations have condemned the treatment of Sakeik, and thousands like her. In a

statement, Project TAHA said:

Ward's case demonstrates the utter lawlessness and cruelty of the Trump administration's immigration policies. Detaining and attempting to deport a stateless woman—married to a U.S. citizen and fully compliant with the law—shows that no one is safe from this regime's attacks.

Godshall-Bennett, an advocate with Project TAHA, added:

The cruelty the government inflicted on Ward and her family puts in stark relief just how depraved this administration's immigration policies are. Ward was arrested and almost deported simply because she is Palestinian and ICE thought they could get away with it. The new American secret police are out of control, but the fault lies with generations of legislators who have happily demonized immigrants in their race to the fascistic bottom.

Ward Sakeik's release is a victory for her family, her legal team, and all of those fighting for immigrant rights. But her case is also a warning: the Trump administration's immigration apparatus is openly defying the courts and targeting and trampling on the rights of the most vulnerable. As long as this administration remains in place, and with the complicity of the Democratic Party, thousands remain at risk of indefinite detention, deportation, and family separation.



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