

# US brands DACA recipient Yaa'kub Vijandre a “terrorist,” then offers \$3,000 to “self-deport”

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The US government has offered imprisoned Dallas resident Yaa'kub Ira Vijandre \$3,000 to leave the country, a move that decisively exposes the fraudulent character of the Trump administration's claim that he is a “terrorist.”

The government is seeking to deport and has imprisoned Vijandre for nearly three months, branding him a “terrorist” based solely on his social media posts opposing genocide in Gaza, criticizing prison abuse and defending religious liberty. He has not been accused or convicted of any crime. The \$3,000 payoff offer now confirms that the government itself does not believe he poses any threat. If Vijandre were in fact a terrorist, offering him cash to leave the country would constitute material support for terrorism.

According to a statement released December 22 by Vijandre's legal team, ICE officers approached him inside the Folkston detention center in Georgia and offered him a cash payment to “self-deport.” According to the statement, “Mr. Vijandre refused this insulting offer. He has called this country home for 24 years.”

In November 2023, shortly after the start of Israel's US-backed genocide in Gaza, Vijandre was approached by FBI agents to inform on his community. He refused.

The attempted payoff appears to be among the first applications of a newly announced Department of Homeland Security program offering cash payments and free flights to immigrants and longtime residents pressured to leave the country. Announcing the program December 22, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem declared, “Illegal aliens should take advantage of this gift and self-deport because if they don't, we will find them, we will arrest them, and they

will never return.”

Vijandre was not an “illegal alien” when ICE abducted him in October, just as he was not a “terrorist” when the government revoked his Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) protections in December. He entered the United States as a 14-year-old child and lived in the US without documentation for over two decades. His DACA status was terminated only after federal agents targeted his social media posts opposing genocide and prison abuse.

Responding to an immigration judge who accused him of “endorsing or espousing terrorist activity,” in an interview with *The Guardian* earlier this month from inside the Folkston detention center, Vijandre said, “I never expected anything like that ... being accused of ‘glorifying terrorism;’ they attacked my religion, my faith.”

He described degrading and abusive conditions inside the ICE facility. He said guards treated detainees “like animals” and recounted being denied basic human needs. While visiting the detention center's library, Vijandre said he asked a guard for permission to use the bathroom. The guard responded by instructing the Filipino American photojournalist to “just piss on yourself.”

An immigration judge has refused to release Vijandre solely on the basis of his social media posts, which the government has classified as “terrorism.” Federal court filings confirm that Quranic verses, opposition to genocide in Gaza, criticism of prison abuse and an instructional martial arts training video were all treated as evidence of “endorsing or espousing terroristic activity.”

In his interview with *The Guardian*, Vijandre stated that the government's actions endangered not only him but his family, saying that under conditions of rising anti-Muslim violence, "ignorant people could use violence against my family."

Like Vijandre, another ICE detainee, Leqaa Kordia, a Muslim Palestinian woman and US resident, has been imprisoned for months solely for voicing opposition to the Gaza genocide and US imperialism. Kordia has been detained since March 13. Immigration Gestapo grabbed her on the basis of a prior arrest at a 2024 protest against the Gaza genocide. Although the protest-related charges were dropped and two separate immigration judges ordered her released on bond, ICE has kept her detained.

After receiving a message of support from Kordia earlier this month, Vijandre replied, "It was a beautiful moment being able to talk to Leqaa and she continues to inspire me every single day." Petitions to #freeyaakub and #freeleqaakordia are available online.

The persecution of Vijandre and Kordia is part of a far broader assault on immigrants and the working class. The Trump administration, with the support of the Democratic Party, which has provided votes to keep the government and its mass deportation operation functioning, is stripping all protections from immigrants and asylum seekers.

On Tuesday, CBS News reported that ICE has filed more than 8,000 motions seeking to void asylum claims by forcibly rerouting asylum seekers to third countries they have never lived in, including Honduras and several African nations. Immigration lawyers told CBS that the campaign has intensified in recent weeks as the administration moves to dismantle what remains of asylum protections.

These measures are being enforced through an expanding network of for-profit detention facilities, where immigrants are being subjected to inhumane and deadly conditions. The destruction of asylum rights is inseparable from the growth of a nationwide system of concentration camps which will be used against all sections of the working class, regardless of immigration or citizenship status.

Less than 48 hours before CBS News executive Bari Weiss censored a report on inhumane conditions at the

Vijandre and Kordia prison" in El Salvador, the *El Paso Times* documented similar life-threatening conditions at the Camp East Montana detention center in El Paso, the largest immigrant concentration camp in the United States.

Based on records obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request, the newspaper reviewed 911 calls placed from inside the facility and found that the most common medical emergencies were chest pain, seizures, suicide attempts, abdominal pain, breathing problems and fainting episodes. Ninety emergency calls were made between August 17 and December 1, an average of about five per week since the facility opened.

Five of the calls involved suicide attempts, including a December 1 call requiring an ambulance for a 22-year-old detainee. Texas Representative Veronica Escobar (Democrat) stated that approximately 3,000 people were being held at the facility as of December 19.

Despite these conditions, Escobar admitted that her office had not been informed of any suicide attempts. "We have asked about detainees' mental health," Escobar told the newspaper. "Not once have staff at Camp East Montana informed me that there have been several suicide attempts at the facility. It speaks volumes that staff at the facility have not volunteered this information during those lengthy visits and conversations."

The revelations underscore the futility of relying on the Democratic Party to defend democratic rights. The same party that postures as a defender of immigrants oversees and finances a detention regime in which suicide attempts and systematic abuse are concealed and normalized.



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