

4 University of Michigan anti-genocide protesters plead not guilty, are released on bond in federal conspiracy frame-up

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Four of the eight defendants indicted in a federal conspiracy case targeting anti-genocide protesters at the University of Michigan (U-Mich) appeared before a federal judge in Detroit on Friday afternoon for a detention hearing and arraignment. The eight were involved in protests at U-Mich to demand that the university divest from companies linked to Israel.

Paige Feyock, 26, of Ann Arbor; Zainab Hakim, 23, of Canton Township; Colin Weger, 24, of Ann Arbor; and Jonathan Zou, 22, of Ann Arbor had been held in the custody of US Marshals since their arrests in coordinated FBI raids across southeast Michigan and Milwaukee on Wednesday. All four defendants entered pleas of not guilty and were released on bond.

Ahmet Korkaya, 28, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin was arrested in Milwaukee and faces a separate arraignment on June 15, together with Alexander Sepulveda, 23, of Chicago, a co-founder of the Jewish Voice for Peace chapter at U-Mich. Miriam Odeh, 24, of Dearborn, will be arraigned July 1. Odeh served as president of Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE), the U-Mich chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, which the university banned in early 2025, the first suspension of a legacy student organization in the university's history. As recently as April, Odeh worked as a staffer for the Abdul El-Sayed for US Senate campaign.

The docket does not list a date for the arraignment of Amatullah Hakim, 21, of Ann Arbor, the sister of Zainab Hakim. She previously worked on the Democratic state Senate campaign of State Rep. Ranjeev Puri of Canton Township and was a columnist for the *Michigan Daily*, the university's student newspaper. Defense attorneys have indicated that she is currently in India on a work-study program.

All eight are charged with conspiracy to transmit a threat, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. In addition, Zainab Hakim and Paige Feyock face a charge of conspiracy to tamper with a witness, a 20-year felony. The indictment alleges that in the summer of 2024 they confronted a fellow university student whom they believed was cooperating with federal authorities. Alexander Sepulveda faces an additional charge of destruction of property

to prevent seizure for deleting the contents of his phone and computer, which carries a five-year maximum sentence.

These arrests advance the drive by the Trump administration to construct a pseudo-legal framework for the criminalization of left-wing political opposition. On September 22, 2025, Trump issued an executive order designating Antifa as a "domestic terrorist organization." Three days later, he issued National Security Presidential Memorandum-7 (NSPM-7), a fascistic blueprint that names "anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism and anti-Christianity" as "common threads animating" domestic terrorism. In March, nine North Texas activists were convicted of "material support for terrorism" for their alleged role in a July 4, 2025 protest at an ICE detention center, the first large-scale application of that charge against left-wing protesters.

The *Detroit News* has amplified this narrative, running a series of headlines branding the U-Mich case as a "terror" prosecution: "UM group orchestrated terror campaign to sever Israel ties, feds say" (June 10); "What's known on terror suspects in alleged campaign against UM leaders" (June 11); and "New UM terror case details emerge as feds push for indefinite jail" (June 11).

On the eve of Friday's hearing, prosecutors filed a brief arguing for indefinite detention. The central device of the brief is to equate opposition to the Israeli genocide, support for Palestinian resistance and left-wing politics with allegiance to Hamas. It cites Zainab Hakim's reading of *Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, described as "an anarchists' guide to committing crimes aimed at overthrowing governments."

It notes Colin Weger's purchase of "various flags, patches and stickers reflecting various terrorist, militant and communist groups," including the Chinese Red Guards, Sendero Luminoso, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. It presents a visual exhibit juxtaposing a famous photograph of a Palestinian militant with a photo of defendant Amatullah Hakim making a similar gesture. This is placed alongside a Hamas propaganda video frame showing an inverted red triangle and a photo of vandalism at a targeted U-Mich related residence.

Amy Doukore, a staff attorney at the Counsel of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)-Michigan, challenged the legal basis of the prosecution in an interview following Friday’s hearing. She said:

“They’re charged with conspiracy to make a threat using a telecommunication device. That means they got together as a group and they conspired to use the internet or social media to threaten certain people...

But when you read what the Twitter feed says, it seems like purely political speech. It says, “We want divestment. We’re going to organize. We’re going to mobilize. We’re going to escalate for divestment.” None of that seems like a threat when you’re talking about First Amendment law... [T]he threat has to be a really real threat. It has to be very specific. And I would challenge anybody to go through that document and figure out what the really real threat was from Twitter.”

None of the indicted conduct involves physical injury to any person. The allegations of vandalism and property damage would, if prosecuted at all, ordinarily be handled as state-level misdemeanors. Instead, the government has invoked conspiracy statutes and the interstate commerce clause to transform them into federal charges.

This is similar to the method used against Chinese researchers at U-Mich over the past year, where the routine shipment of harmless biological materials was fraudulently presented as “conspiracy,” “agroterrorism” and “smuggling,” exposing young scientists to 25-year sentences. The Chinese researchers were subjected to indefinite detention, coerced into plea deals and deported. This witch-hunt, enabled by the collaboration of the U-Mich administration, led to the suicide of post-doctoral scientist Danhao Wang in March.

Two of the indicted defendants, Zainab Hakim and Jonathan Zou, are simultaneously plaintiffs in federal civil rights lawsuits against the university.

Zou, an undergraduate engineering student and international student from China, is the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit filed February 3, 2025 by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Michigan and the Sugar Law Center. Zou was issued a campus-wide trespass ban in October 2024 after a campus police officer accused him of excessive “noise amplification” for using a megaphone at a pro-Palestinian demonstration. The lawsuit challenges the university’s “disruptions” policy as unconstitutionally vague and overly broad.

Zainab Hakim is the lead plaintiff in a separate federal lawsuit with representation from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and the Sugar Law Center. Hakim was fired in April 2025 from her position at the Center for

South Asian Studies and banned from future employment. On April 1, 2026, US District Judge Stephen J. Murphy III rejected the university’s motion to dismiss, ruling that the plaintiffs had plausibly alleged they were fired specifically because of their protected political speech.

Josiah Walker, a U-Mich student and SAFE leader who is not part of the eight arrested this week, filed a third civil lawsuit on May 21, 2026. Walker’s suit alleges that the university waged a two-year targeted surveillance operation against him, collaborating with City Shield, a subsidiary of the private security firm Ameri-Shield, to stalk and record him on and off campus. The *Guardian* exposed this operation in June 2025, revealing that U-Mich had paid the firm at least \$850,000 to deploy plainclothes operatives against pro-Palestinian protesters.

Civil rights organizations and student groups have denounced the indictments of the “U-Mich Eight.” The TAHRIR Coalition mobilized supporters for “Drop the Charges” rallies outside the federal courthouses in Detroit and Milwaukee.

The U-Mich administration has declined to comment, referring all inquiries to the Department of Justice. Regent Sarah Hubbard, whose home was among the alleged targets, publicly welcomed the indictments, stating she was “very appreciative of the tireless work” of law enforcement and resharing the FBI’s arrest announcements.

The frame-up of the U-Mich Eight is the culmination of a bipartisan campaign to suppress anti-war dissent. It has developed through state felony charges (later dropped by Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel in May 2025), university disciplinary proceedings against 11 students, trespass bans, the banning of SAFE, FBI raids in April 2025 and U-Mich President Domenico Grasso’s May 2 censure of Professor Derek Peterson.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality demand the immediate dropping of all charges against the University of Michigan Eight and an end to the persecution of anti-war protesters nationwide. The fight against this crackdown must be linked to the building of an independent political movement of the working class against both big business parties and the capitalist system that breeds war, dictatorship and repression.



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