



Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil reunited with his wife, newborn son after spending months at a Louisiana detention center

After missing the birth of his child, his first Father's Day and spending more than three months away from his family, **Mahmoud Khalil** has been reunited with his loved ones.

The Palestinian activist arrived in Newark, New Jersey, Saturday afternoon, a day after he was released from a Louisiana ICE detention center. He was seen embracing his wife and pushing the stroller of his newborn son after reuniting in a private area of the airport.

"Still, the fight is far from over," Khalil said while thanking his supporters at a news conference. "I continue to advocate for Palestinians, for the immigrants who are left behind in that facility."

The crowd embraced Khalil, handed him a Palestinian flag and flowers and broke out into cheers as he hugged them. His friends and family had waited to see him for 104 days.

When asked how it feels to be free, Khalil said, "To be honest I'm still trying to just comprehend that. Of course it feels great."

Wearing a keffiyeh – a scarf seen as a **symbol** of Palestinian identity and resistance – a grinning Khalil pumped his fists as he walked out of the detention center Friday evening with one of his attorneys. Since March, he had been detained at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in the rural town of Jena, Louisiana.

“Although justice prevailed but it’s long, very long overdue, and this shouldn’t have taken three months,” Khalil told reporters Friday outside the detention center.

Judge Michael Farbiarz ordered Khalil’s release on bail Friday after finding he is not a flight risk or a danger to public safety. The judge said it’s “highly unusual” to be seeking his detention at this point.

The judge also cited several “extraordinary circumstances” in Khalil’s case that led him to order his release, including “that there is a due process violative effort to punish” the Columbia University graduate who played a central role in negotiations on behalf of **pro-Palestinian student protesters** last year.

Khalil “is not a flight risk, and the evidence that has been presented to me at least is that he is not a danger to the community, period, full stop,” Farbiarz said.

Khalil, a lawful permanent resident who is married to a US citizen and has not been charged with a crime, was one of the first arrestees in the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown targeting student activism. As his

case dragged on for over 100 days, several **other student activists** targeted for deportation by the Trump administration were released.

Khalil said he is leaving behind immigrants still in detention who are “in a place where they shouldn’t have been.”

“The Trump administration are doing their best to dehumanize everyone here,” he said. “Whether you are a US citizen, an immigrant or just a person on this land, doesn’t mean that you are less of a human.”

Two days after being released from custody, Khalil spoke to supporters and media gathered Sunday outside the Cathedral of St. John the Divine near Columbia University.

Khalil told those assembled that while his release was sweet, it was not a victory. “Not when Palestinians are still being killed under US bombs, and not when supporting their righteous struggle is so heavily criminalized,” he told the crowd

But he said a “wave of repression” initiated with his detention had failed to silence the Palestinian liberation movement, instead amplifying its message.

“It was intended to scare people into silence. It was intended to distract us from the fact that the US government is a killing machine in Palestine and across the world, but they completely failed,” Khalil said.

“I believe that we will win. In Jena, Louisiana, I found myself literally scratching this into my bunk bed, and looking at it as I fell asleep. And as I woke up, I find myself, repeating, repeating it, even now, knowing that I have won in a small way, by being free – by being free today,” he added.

Following the news conference, Khalil briefly marched with the crowd of protesters, leading a chant of: “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

When asked why he thinks the Trump administration views him as a threat, Khalil told **ABC News**, “Because I represent a movement that goes against what this administration is trying to do.”

In an interview with the **New York Times**, Khalil described the moment he was approached by the plainclothes officers who detained him.

“All the ‘Know Your Rights’ information and fliers I read and familiarized myself with were useless,” Khalil told the Times. “It felt like kidnapping,” he said.

“They try to portray me as a violent person. They try to portray me as a terrorist, as some lunatic, but not presenting any evidence, not presenting any shred of credibility to their claims,” Khalil told ABC.

Khalil’s wife, Noor Abdalla, said in a statement Friday that she can “breathe a sigh of relief” knowing that Khalil will be reunited with his family after

missing the birth of his first child during months of detention at a facility over 1,000 miles away.

Judge Farbiarz **previously ruled** the government can't hold Khalil on the premise that his presence in the country is against the national interest, and on Friday found that Khalil doesn't need to be detained based on a second allegation against him that he failed to give required information in his application to become a legal permanent resident of the US.

"It's overwhelmingly unlikely, I found, that a lawful permanent resident would be detained on the remaining available charge" of failing to accurately fill out an immigration application, the judge said during Friday's hearing.

At the hearing, Khalil's attorneys argued that the court should allow him to be released on bail or transferred to a detention center closer to his wife and newborn son. They said the chilling effect of his detention has made it an "extraordinary case."

"I'm aware, of my 20 years of representing immigrants, of no other case where the government announced the day that it detained someone that they were detaining them in order to send a message that their arrest would be the first of many, that they were going after student protesters," Khalil's attorney Alina Das argued before the court.

The federal government requested to temporarily halt Khalil's release, which the judge denied Friday.

“The court concluded there’s no reason he should continue to be detained given the serious harms that are happening, the chill that is happening to his speech and other people’s speech as a result of his detention,” one of his attorneys Baher Azmy told CNN Friday.

In response to the ruling, the Department of Homeland Security said that “The Trump Administration acted well within its statutory and constitutional authority to detain Khalil.”

As the case played out in immigration and federal courts, the administration has argued that Khalil should be deported because his presence in the United States threatens the administration’s foreign policy goal of combatting antisemitism. His lawyers contended that he was targeted for his pro-Palestinian views in violation of his constitutional rights.

“There is at least something to the underlying claim that there is an effort to use the immigration charge here to punish the petitioner. And of course, that would be unconstitutional,” Farbiarz said Friday.

As part of his release conditions, Khalil’s lawyers were required to surrender his passport to immigration authorities in Louisiana and he was prohibited from traveling internationally, limiting travel to a handful of states. The government was ordered to provide Khalil his green card and a copy of his passport, allowing him to board a plane home to New York Friday.

Khalil will however not have to report to **US Immigration and Customs Enforcement in New York**, Magistrate Judge Michael Hammer ordered.

Though he's been released, Khalil's immigration proceedings will continue.

Azmy, Khalil's attorney, said the legal team learned immigration Judge Jamee Comans in Louisiana separately reaffirmed her removability ruling an hour into Friday's hearing. Khalil's lawyers will appeal her decision through immigration court – a long process his lawyers say will be easier now that he is out of detention.

"I'm confident that on appeal, we will prevail," Johnny Sinodis, one of Khalil's attorneys, told CNN's Laura Coates Friday, noting Khalil's insistence throughout court proceedings that he "committed no misrepresentation, no fraud" during his green card application.

Khalil's wife said the ruling doesn't begin to address the injustices their family has been through but said she's "celebrating Mahmoud coming back to New York to be reunited with our little family, and the community that has supported us since the day he was unjustly taken for speaking out for Palestinian freedom."

'Delay tactics'

The ruling comes exactly one week after Farbiarz **ruled** Khalil can remain in detention.

After the judge said the government could no longer hold Khalil on the premise that his presence in the country is against the national interest, attorneys for the Department of Justice said the judge's decision did not prevent them from continuing to hold Khalil on a second claim – that he failed to give required information in his application to become a legal permanent resident of the US.

The judge ruled last week that the administration's interpretation of his order is correct, keeping Khalil in detention.

Khalil's attorneys at the time accused the administration of using "cruel, transparent delay tactics" to keep Khalil in custody.

Azmy on Friday said the charges still pending that Khalil made misrepresentations on his green card application are "baseless" and will be litigated.

When asked if Khalil will continue to protest when released, Azmy said: "He's a peace activist, he's an international human rights activist, and he's Palestinian, and I don't expect he will ever stop advocating for justice for Palestinian people and an end to their continued slaughter and starvation."