



FREE LEQAA KORDIA: AN ACTIVIST TOOLKIT

Leqaa is the only protester still locked up and facing deportation after Trump's attacks on universities and targeting of foreign protesters

BACKGROUND

Crackdowns on peaceful protesters are part of a broader trend of authoritarian practices designed to shrink civic space, silence dissent, and target marginalized communities, especially immigrant and international students.

Leqaa Kordia, is a 32-year-old Muslim Palestinian woman living in the United States. She has been arbitrarily detained since March 13, 2025, when she was detained by immigration authorities during a voluntary meeting with immigration officials at the Newark ICE Field Office. Leqaa's continued unlawful detention, despite being ordered released by a judge twice, matters because no one should be deprived of their rights to peacefully protest and free expression, no one should be separated from their family for taking part in a protest, and no one should be detained solely for immigration processing. While detained, her ability to practice her faith has not been fully respected, raising additional concerns about her treatment. Her case highlights violations of human rights, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, non-discrimination, and religious freedom. Leqaa is currently held in the Prairieland Detention Facility in Texas, far from her attorney and family.

Leqaa's detention is not an isolated incident. She is one of at least 10 individuals including Mahmoud Khalil and Rumeysa Ozturk whose immigration status was terminated, visa revoked, or who were detained and placed in deportation proceedings specifically for their participation in peaceful campus protests or support for Palestinians' human rights.

This pattern of targeting peaceful activists is not only a violation of their rights but creates a chilling effect that discourages students, immigrants, and community members from exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

People have the right to speak out, organize, and protest peacefully without fear of retaliation, detention, deportation, or other punishment. Freedom of expression, association, and assembly are not privileges. They are human rights protected under international law and the U.S. Constitution. When these rights are under attack, it is our collective responsibility to defend them.

WHO IS LEQAA?

Leqaa Kordia is a young Palestinian woman who came to the United States in 2016 on a visitor visa, searching for stability, safety and a chance to build a life close to her mother and relatives in New Jersey, all of whom are U.S. citizens. She became part of her community, studied, worked, and like many others, started the long and complicated process of applying for permanent residency through her mother. The petition for her permanent residency was approved by immigration authorities in 2021. Based on incorrect advice, Leqaa terminated her existing visa believing that the approval of her petition meant that she now had lawful immigration status while she awaited her green card – leaving her without legal immigration status. At the time of her detention, she was still in the middle of this legal process.

In 2023 and 2024, as the crisis in Gaza intensified, Leqaa joined peaceful protests in the area near her home in New Jersey. Approximately 175 members of her extended family had been killed during the ongoing genocide, almost an entire generation of her family. She spoke out and protested because she believed that every person deserves dignity, safety, and the protection of their human rights. She was not a student protester; she was a grieving family member calling for humanity.

In April 2024, during a demonstration in front of the Columbia campus, Leqaa was arrested for “failure to disperse”. The charges were later dropped “in the interests of justice”. However, the arrest placed her on the government’s radar.

Nearly a year later, on 13 March 2025, she attended a voluntary meeting, with immigration officials at the Newark ICE field office with her lawyer, after learning she was under investigation. Despite being assessed as low-risk for public safety and flight, she was suddenly detained. She was then placed on a plane and transferred to Prairieland Detention Facility in Texas, thousands of miles from her family, her community and her lawyer. She has now been detained for more than eight months. While in detention, Leqaa’s religious rights have not been fully respected, including repeated issues accessing halal food and staff refusing to provide her with suitable clothing and a clean space she needs to pray.

Legal setbacks, unfounded accusations and prolonged detention

A judge has twice ordered her release. Both times, the government appealed, relying on allegations that she has refuted in court. She remains behind bars as these appeals and her immigration case continues. Her case has remained largely out of public view, despite its deep human rights and legal implications.

Her cousin, who speaks to her almost every day, shared audio recordings of their phone calls in which she describes her fear, exhaustion and determination to hold onto hope. In Leqaa word’s ***“I came to America looking for freedom and freedom of speech - freedom of everything [...] To be held here in this place [ICE facility in TX] for saying: free Palestine, ceasefire now, that was, like, kind of a shock to me [be]cause that’s not the America that I heard of.”***

Before her detention, Leqaa was actively working to regularize her status and secure permanent residency. She had a home, a supportive community and every intention to continue contributing to her new life in New Jersey. Instead, she is now fighting to prove the rights she has always defended for others should be respected for her. Her detention has torn her away from her mother and family, who fear for her wellbeing as months continue to pass with no resolution in sight.

Leqaa’s story is a powerful reminder that peaceful protest is not a crime. No one should be ripped away from their community or family and sent to detention for exercising their right to protest; no one should be punished for peaceful protest; no one

should be threatened for exercising their right to free speech; and no one should be detained or deported for speaking out for human rights.

Her continued detention is unlawful and must end immediately. We must take action now.

WHAT RIGHTS ARE AT STAKE

Leqaa's case raises serious concerns under the rights to:

Freedom of expression (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 19): No one should be detained or penalized for peacefully expressing their views. Concerns arise that Leqaa's activism for Palestinians' human rights and an end to the genocide in Gaza led to her being targeted.

Freedom of peaceful assembly (ICCPR Articles 21–22): Participating in a peaceful protest is protected under international law and the U.S. constitution. Detention following peaceful demonstrations is inconsistent with these legal and international protections and risks a chilling effect, and thus discouraging others from exercising this right.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (ICCPR Article 18): While detained, Leqaa has reported barriers to practicing her faith, including inadequate halal food, difficulty accessing appropriate clothing to adequately cover her body during prayer, and lack of a clean space to pray, raising concerns about respect for her religious rights.

Freedom from arbitrary detention (ICCPR Article 9): No one should be subjected to arrest or detention without clear legal basis, due process, and necessity. Leqaa's detention raises concerns about whether her deprivation of liberty is lawful, necessary, and proportionate, or instead a punitive response to her protected expression and activism.

Freedom from refoulement (1951 Refugee Convention; Convention Against Torture Article 3): International law strictly prohibits returning or transferring anyone to a country where they face a real risk of persecution, torture, or serious harm. Any attempt to remove Leqaa while these risks remain would constitute a violation of the principle of non-refoulement and the United States' international legal obligations.

STRATEGY

We aim to primarily convince Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem to release Leqaa Kordia from detention and in the meantime, to ensure Leqaa's religious rights are respected while she remains in detention. Secondly, we aim to pressure members of Congress to be more vocal on the case of Leqaa, by:

- Publicly calling for the protection of protest rights and freedom of expression
- Raising Leqaa's case with DHS
- Issuing a statements or social media posts highlighting Leqaa Kordia and calling for her immediate release

- Speak out against the broader pattern of targeting peaceful protesters
- Visit her in detention

Decision Makers

- Secretary Noem: as the Secretary of Homeland Security (DHS), Noem is the decision maker with the legal authority to stop deportations and detention of activists targeted for free expression and protest.
- Secretary of State Marco Rubio: The State Department under Secretary Rubio has been the lead agency in targeting foreign students for the advocacy under its “catch and revoke” program.
- Members of Congress: cannot directly order Leqaa’s release, but they can speak out and call for her release, question DHS, and raise human rights concerns, which adds political and public pressure.
- John Tsoukaris, ICE field officer director: they have direct local authority over detention and release decisions, making them the closest person to the power that can change an individual’s status.

Audience

- Activists
- Amnesty Members
- Community members
- Faith groups
- Students, faculty, alumni, and parents

THEORY OF CHANGE

If Amnesty members, supporters, student activists and community groups take coordinated actions directed at Secretary Noem, and members of Congress, then we increase political, social and reputational pressure on DHS to immediately release Leqaa.

By raising Leqaa’s profile, documenting the rights violations she is facing, and mobilizing respected institutions and elected officials, we make it more costly for DHS to continue detaining her. Public pressure highlights that her detention is inconsistent with international human rights law and contradicts United States commitments to freedom of expression and peaceful protest granted by the U.S. constitution.

As visibility grows, and as more lawmakers and community leaders speak out, DHS becomes more likely to reassess her case and move toward her release, to avoid further scrutiny.

Therefore, the combination of public advocacy, solidarity actions, congressional engagement, and direct pressure on Secretary Noem can influence her review of unlawful discriminatory detention practices, which would lead to the release of Leqaa back to her family.

TAKE ACTION

Leqaa's freedom depends on collective pressure. Whatever your capacity, community, or location, there is a role you can play. Below is a menu of actions tailored by audience and scale, from low-barrier steps to coordinated community mobilization.

SMALL SCALE ACTIONS:

Low-barrier entry points for individuals, new activists, and groups with limited time or capacity.

For Everyone

- **Take digital action:** Quick, accessible, and powerful - Call on Secretary Kristi Noem to immediately release Leqaa Kordia and urge your members of Congress to publicly call for her release.
- **Sign the Urgent Action** Add your name calling on Secretary Noem to immediately release Leqaa
- **Join Write for Rights:** One letter can make a difference. Thousands create real pressure.
- **Send a solidarity postcard** A short message of support helps sustain Leqaa's hope.
- **Share on Social media**
 - Sample Message: Peaceful protest is not a crime. @SecNoem release #LeqaaKordia now to her family. No one should be ripped away from their family, sent to detention, or face deportation for exercising their rights to peacefully protest and free speech.
 - Sample Message: @[insert handle] I'm urging you to speak out for the immediate release of Leqaa Kordia who is still in US immigration detention and facing deportation for peaceful protest. No one should be punished for freedom of expression.
- **Call your Senators and Representative:** you can use the script below:
 - *"Hello my name is [----] and I live in [----] I'm calling to urge you to speak out for the immediate release of Leqaa Kordia, a U.S. resident detained after engaging in peaceful protest. No one should be punished for exercising their constitutional right to free expression. I'm asking you to help protect and defend the human rights and civil rights that belong to us all by raising the case of Leqaa with the Department of Homeland Security."*

For Students

- *Share the [urgent action](#) and [digital action](#) with classmates and clubs*
- *Add the [case card](#) to your student group's newsletter or social channels*
- *Display [flyers](#) on campus and in community spaces*

For faith groups

- *Include a short mention of Leqaa during community announcements or prayers*
- *Share the [digital action](#) link in WhatsApp or email groups*

Mid- SCALE ACTIONS:

Tactics that require some coordination, planning or public presence

For Everyone

- *Call your members of Congress to raise the case.*
Phone script: “Hello, my name is [----] I live in [----], and I am calling to ask you to urge DHS to immediately release Leqaa Kordia. No one should be detained for exercising the rights to free expression and peaceful protest.”
- *Write or co author an op ed or LTE: Highlight the rights to protest, freedom of expression, and Leqaa’s case within the broader human rights landscape. You can use our [student campaign op ed guidelines](#) as a starting point, but be sure to adapt the content to reflect Leqaa’s story, noting that she is not a student.*
- *Write a physical letter to Secretary Noem and Secretary Rubio. Talking points [HERE](#) and in this toolkit!*

For Students

- *Organize an on-campus Teach-In on the right to protest*
- *Partner with student governments or clubs to co-host an action table*

For Faith Groups

- *Distribute [case cards](#) after weekly prayers or services*
- *Host a community conversation on the rights to protest and freedom of expression*
- *Write a collective letter as a congregation to Secretary Noem*

For Local Groups

- *[Share the case](#) during regular meetings*
- *Add the [Free Leqaa action](#) to your group’s monthly activism calendar*
- *Distribute [case card](#) in local businesses or cultural centers (with permission)*

LARGE SCALE ACTIONS:

Escalated tactics involving broader coordination, multi-group mobilization, or public visibility.

For Everyone

- *Meet with your members of Congress: Request a formal meeting (in-district or in Washington, D.C.) to raise concerns and urge them to be more vocal on Leqaa’s case. If you need support, contact your local Legislative coordinator!*
- *Organize a community town hall or teach-in: Bring together local leaders, students, faculty, and faith communities to educate and mobilize.*
- *Table in your community: Hand out [case cards](#), QR codes, or flyers at local libraries, community centers, coffee shops or campuses.*

For Students & Campus Coalitions

- *Coordinate a campus-wide week of action focused on protest rights*
- *Partner with multicultural centers, faculty allies, and student unions*

For Faith Networks

- *Issue a joint statement from faith leaders calling for the release of Leqaa Kordia from detention*
- *Coordinate a multi-congregation moment of reflection or prayer for her release; such as hosting a vigil*

RESOURCES

Download Leqaa Kordia's social media graphics [HERE](#)

Download Leqaa Kordia's printable flyer [HERE](#)

Amnesty International USA: Stop Revoking Visas of Foreign Students. Check it out [HERE](#).

Amnesty International USA: Release Detained Protestor. Check in out [HERE](#)

Amnesty International USA: W4R Campaign: Leqaa Kordia. Check it out [HERE](#)

W4R Leqaa Kordia Case Card. Check it out [HERE](#).

NPR (Nov 3, 2025) Radio Diaries: Columbia protester Leqaa Kordia is still detained. Check it out [HERE](#).

New Yorker (Oct 17, 2025): The Last Columbia Protester in *ICE* Detention. Check it out [HERE](#).

Homeland Security Statement (March 14, 2025): Columbia University Student Whose Visa Was Revoked for Supporting Hamas and Terrorist Activities Used CBP Home App to Self-Deport [HERE](#)

CONTACTS

Reach out about the Campaign, Action, Activism, Collaborations, financial support, and Safety concerns: campaigns@aiusa.org