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USA

Movement Builds to Free Milwaukee Muslim Leader Detained by ICE

- News from around the world -



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On Monday, March 30, Salah Sarsour, President of the Islamic Society of Milwaukee (ISM) stopped by a dozen vehicles and was arrested by 10 Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents who first took him to the Broadview Detention Center in Illinois, and then to the Clay County Justice Center, near Terre Haute, Indiana. [Photo: At a press conference in Milwaukee earlier this month, community members call for the release of Salah Sarsour after Sarsour's arrest. (Photo by Isiah Holmes/Wisconsin Examiner).]]

Upon learning of his arrest, the Sarsour family called a news conference for the next day and started inviting pro-Palestine activists and ISM members. Six hundred people, including Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson and County Executive David Crowley, turned out to the April 2 news-conference-turned-defense rally at ISM. Other public officials also issued public statements calling for Sarsour's release.

Who is Salah Sarsour?

Sarsour, 53, grew up in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. As a teenager, he spent two years in prison for "throwing Molotov cocktails at the homes of Israeli armed forces." He came to the US in 1994. Prior to his arrest, Secretary of State Marco Rubio pronounced him "a threat to the U.S. foreign policy interest of combatting anti-Semitism."

Hanan Najeeb, a leader of the Wisconsin Coalition for Justice in Palestine, explains what really happened: "He was tortured as a 15-year-old for 80 straight days, forced to confess and sign a confession in Hebrew, a language he did not understand."

After the initial rally, ISM prepared a statement in defense of Sarsour among national Muslim organizations, and then circulated it among a broader group of local and national organizations, getting more than 100 organizational signatures, including Milwaukee Solidarity.

Calling Sarsour a "Milwaukee Community Leader kidnapped by ICE," the statement said: "Salah has been a lawful permanent resident in the United States for over 32 years. He is a pillar of the community and a law-abiding Milwaukee business owner. (After his arrest) his family was left scrambling to determine his whereabouts and his condition.

"Salah grew up in the Occupied West Bank in Palestine, where he faced oppression and torture at the hands of the Israeli occupation forces as a child. After marriage, he moved to the United States and built a strong and loving family. Along the way, he has supported dozens of community members, hiring countless Milwaukeeans who needed a job, and building up advocacy and educational organizations to bring a greater voice to immigrants, Palestinians, and Muslims across Wisconsin and the country.

"Salah's story represents precisely the immigrant-refugee success story that should be celebrated, not demonized, as the cornerstone of this country's professed values. Structural racism against Palestinians and Muslims, especially immigrants, weakens our democracy and erodes human rights for all. DHS (Department of Homeland Security) targeting a community leader like Salah must raise alarms for all of us."

The statement compares Salah's case to ICE's other persecutions of opponents of Israel's genocide in Gaza and the West Bank.

"His detention reflects a troubling trend we've seen with Mahmoud Khalil, Leqaa Kordia, Mohsen Mahdawi and other voices critical of Israeli oppression: this administration is weaponizing the U.S. justice system to advance the interests of a foreign state, Israel, at a time when it is carrying out a genocide in Gaza. Recognizing that it has lost American public opinion, the Israeli lobby is now leveraging the justice system to undermine our constitutional rights and suppress dissent. Salah's arrest also reflects deeper threats to our democracy from an administration that disregards American values and treats constitutional and legal limits as optional. We stand against this coordinated attempt to wield U.S. immigration courts to silence Palestinian voices and advance a racist anti-Muslim agenda."

Not the first ICE attack on Milwaukee

While Milwaukee has not been subject to a full-scale ICE invasion like Chicago and Minneapolis, this is the second attack on a public figure in Milwaukee. In April 2025, Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Hannah Dugan was arrested in her courtroom for helping an undocumented immigrant escape ICE arrest. Eduardo Flores-Ruiz was appearing in Dugan's court facing misdemeanor battery charges. ICE appeared with an administrative arrest warrant for Flores-Ruiz that Dugan did not recognize. She allowed Flores-Ruiz and his lawyer to leave the courtroom after his appearance. The federal agents eventually chased Flores-Ruiz through the courthouse and arrested him. Flores-Ruiz was eventually deported, and Dugan was convicted of a felony count of obstructing federal agents and acquitted of concealing a wanted person. While her case is under appeal, she was forced to resign her judgeship.

Support Builds

The Milwaukee Area Labor Council distributed a statement written by its Immigrant Rights Committee. "Like thousands of other immigrant community members detained by US DHS in the past years, he has had no criminal charges or convictions. ... We join the call for his immediate release and demand that our government uphold free speech for all."

Hundreds of Milwaukee Sarsour supporters gathered on Lake Michigan's shore to wave signs at a steady stream of Sunday traffic on April 12th. The exuberant crowd spread along the sidewalk for about an hour waving signs and Palestine flags, and chanting "We want justice, we want peace! We want ICE off our streets!" Sarsour spoke to the rally by phone from jail, inspiring the crowd.

On April 21, the Milwaukee City Council passed a resolution unanimously calling on DHS to release Sarsour immediately. The resolution was introduced by Alex Brower, a leader of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in Milwaukee who was elected to the council in 2025.

Next Legal Steps

Sarsour's initial hearing is scheduled for April 27 at the Kansas City Immigration Court. The lawyers are seeing to get Sarsour out of the Indiana jail. "It's our position that he should be released and that his detention is unconstitutional," Ahmad told Wisconsin Public Radio in a recent interview.

The persecution of Salah Sarsour represents yet another Islamophobic attack on activists fighting for justice in Palestine and elsewhere in the Islamic world. Free Salah Sarsour! Free them all now!

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For more information about this case: <https://freesalah.org/>.

To contribute to his defense fund: <http://launchgood.com/SalahSarsour>

Send mail to Salah in jail: 611 East Jackson St, Brazil, Indiana 47834

Milwaukee

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