Opinion
Guest Voices



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September 16, 2025

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On the morning of July 9, 2025, I stood outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Blue Ash, Ohio, watching as individuals entered for routine check-ins. One by one, they left freely, all except Ayman Soliman. The Cincinnati-based imam was detained by ICE officials following the sudden revocation of his asylum status, and he now faces deportation from the United States.

This is not just another deportation case. Soliman's legal issue has drawn national attention. The National Catholic Reporter, ProPublica and Rolling Stone magazine have covered his story, Congressman Greg Landsman, Democrat of Ohio, and religious leaders, including Catholics, have advocated for his release, and protesters have been arrested for demanding his freedom.

Soliman's detention represents a critical moment in America's ongoing struggle over immigration policy, religious freedom, and democratic integrity. If the U.S. government proceeds with his deportation, especially under questionable legal grounds, it will send a dangerous message: that America no longer stands as a refuge for the persecuted, and that due process is negotiable.

What his case says about immigration today

Soliman was granted asylum in 2018 after proving a well-founded fear of persecution in Egypt, where he had been arrested and tortured for his work as a journalist during the Arab Spring. His case was solid up until June 2025, when an asylum officer abruptly revoked his status, claiming he had provided "material support for terrorism." The basis for this claim was his former role on the board of a charitable organization that the officer alleged had ties to the Muslim Brotherhood.

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The flaws in this reasoning are glaring. The U.S. has never designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, and the Egyptian government has never accused Soliman's charity of any terrorist links. The flimsiness of the case possibly suggests a politically motivated effort to dismantle asylum protections, which falls in line with the Trump administration's broader assault on immigration.

Since returning to office, President Donald Trump has aggressively targeted immigration, from slashing refugee admissions to attempting to end birthright

citizenship. One of his first acts was scrapping the Biden-era CBP One app, which allowed asylum seekers to schedule border appointments. Overnight, tens of thousands of migrants had their appointments canceled.

Historically, the U.S. has long responded to humanitarian crises driving displacement by allowing itself to be a place of refuge. This was solidified in the Refugee Act of 1980, which created the right to asylum as it is known today, and was designed to ensure a fair and workable asylum system that is free from politicization.

But today, the system is being weaponized. If Soliman, a man with no criminal record, who has contributed to his community as a hospital chaplain and imam, can be stripped of his status immigration status on the flimsiest of grounds, then no immigrant's rights are secure.

Broader implications for civil liberties

Soliman's case comes at a time when America's moral standing is collapsing. Domestically, trust in government is at historic lows. Internationally, America's image is being tarnished by a range of crises, most recently for its support of Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza. Deporting Soliman, a man who faced torture under a U.S.-allied regime in Egypt, would further cement the perception both domestically and internationally that American ideals are weakening.



Ayman Soliman, a former chaplain at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, was detained by ICE agents July 9. (Courtesy of CAIR-Ohio)

Soliman's case is not just about immigration, it represents whether America still values civil liberties and religious freedom. At a time when civil rights and religious liberties are being eroded, if Soliman is deported, there is no denying the government is continuing to chip away at both.

Up until now, Soliman has benefited from the U.S. government's commitment to protect civil liberties and religious freedom. These freedoms that have allowed him to work as an imam, serve as a chaplain at a children's hospital, speak freely and associate with whomever he chooses. However, if he is deported for his past faith-based work and subsequently persecuted in Egypt, America's promise of religious liberty and constitutional freedoms will appear no stronger than Egypt's. Such an outcome would effectively punish him for exercising the very rights that have enabled his successful life here.

His deportation would, at best, reinforce the perception that America selectively enforces rights, or, at worst, signal an abandonment of its foundational principals.

Litmus test for the US

Soliman's case presents the government with a choice. It can allow him to stay, which would be a small step toward reaffirming that due process still matters, and that the U.S. is still a refuge for the persecuted. Or, it can continue its democratic backslide by deporting him, proving that civil rights and religious freedom are either conditional or abandoned. The answer lies in Soliman's fate.