

*Statement from Musa, an activist & journalist who was targeted by DHS,  
detained, and had their devices seized*

Returning from international travel, Musa was detained and interrogated for over three hours at Tampa airport before having their phone and computer confiscated

**On Tuesday, April 8, I was unlawfully detained and interrogated by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the Tampa airport while returning to the United States from international travel.** I was told that “most of your rights are suspended” because “this airport is a border crossing,” including my right to a lawyer. I was interrogated by a Counterterrorism agent and treated like a criminal and a terrorist—synonyms this empire has long made interchangeable with being Black, Muslim, and politically active.

**For roughly over three hours I was held without access to legal counsel, aggressively questioned, patted down, and subjected to an invasive groin search.** My passport was taken, all of my belongings were searched, and eventually my devices—my cell phone and laptop—were seized without justification. After seizing my devices, three CBP agents attempted to coerce me into powering on the devices and surrendering my device passwords; when I refused, which I knew was my right to do, they were very visibly aggravated.

**This targeting was not random. It was retaliation for supporting a friend—an international student activist targeted by the Trump administration—as they made the difficult but legal decision to leave the country rather than face prolonged detention for free speech.**

Returning from a trip to Cuba, one of many fully legal visits I’ve taken over the years, and my solidarity organizing on behalf of Palestinian liberation, were used as the basis for the politically-motivated interrogation: CBP agents asked whether I had received so-called ‘military training’ in Cuba or the Middle East, questioned if I was involved in political activity on the island, and pressed me for information on my potential connections to several foreign students and professors engaged in Palestine solidarity.

From my first interaction with an aggressive CBP agent whose entire tone shifted after reading my name on my passport, to overhearing others say “he’s not going anywhere for a while” and witnessing multiple agents whisper and yell about me, it was clear they intended to intimidate me and extract information to expand their repression, even if it meant trampling my alleged ‘rights’.

**This experience is part of a broader pattern. Across administrations, DHS has operated as a politically charged agency to escalate surveillance, harassment, and criminalization of individuals involved in movements for justice, liberation, and in this case, against genocide.** Now, we’re witnessing a dangerous heightening of this weaponization.

While the repression of immigrants and foreign students is rightly drawing public attention, my experience confirms that U.S. ‘citizens’, especially Black and Muslim ones, are also targets. As

activists and legal professionals have loudly warned: The repression of international students has served as a testing ground, through which the rest of us are increasingly vulnerable and within the crosshairs.

**On Tuesday, April 15, we filed a motion in federal district court in Florida to demand the immediate return of my devices and information related to any data accessed by the government.** I am sharing this information to share what happened to me, and importantly to issue a broad warning: the state is escalating.

**Be strategic, brave, and smart in equal measures.** Protect one another, because no part of this system nor what is to come is designed to protect us.

Activists and organizers should document everything, travel with secondary phones, leave laptops at home, and memorize the number to legal counsel and trusted individuals. When crossing a border, attending a protest, or going through customs, power down your devices, use encrypted messaging software, and use strong numeric passwords instead of biometric ones.

**Create emergency contingency plans within your organizations and networks, remember you have the right to remain silent at all times,** and build networks of legal and communal defense protocols that anticipate the level of repression that is our reality.

**What happened to me could happen to anyone, and it is a chilling reminder that these agencies are not designed to merely police borders—they police dissent.**