

## Handout 4.5 - Mahmud's Story – A Family Torn Apart

*From the Detention Watch Network website, June 2, 2008*



**Introduction** - Mahmud is a Palestinian national who lawfully entered the United States in 1996. For the past six years he has been married to Ree—a U.S. citizen who works for a branch of the Department of Homeland Security—and has been stepfather to her five children. Mahmud was denied lawful permanent residency solely because he supported the Palestine Liberation Organization while a college student in Jordan twenty years ago. Though his support was limited to collecting donations and distributing leaflets, and he has had no involvement with the PLO since that time, Mahmud was deemed “inadmissible” to the U.S. for having “engaged in a terrorist activity” and ordered removed to Jordan.

**Experience of Detention** - Mahmud was imprisoned at the Rolling Plains Detention Center in Texas for twenty months while he sought federal court review of the decision. He posed no danger or flight risk and had repeatedly offered to submit to electronic monitoring or even house arrest so that he could be with and support his family while he litigated his case. The government refused to consider his release, never provided him with a bond hearing, and did not even conduct the in-person custody review required by their own regulations. Meanwhile, Mahmud’s wife and stepchildren suffered enormously, both emotionally and financially, because of his absence. His wife was forced to declare bankruptcy, and his older stepchildren were forced to put aside their studies in order to help support the family.

**Conditions in Detention** - While Mahmud was in detention he was treated worse than American prisoners doing sentences for criminal activity. As an American prisoner he would have been guaranteed rights and been supplied with the internet, library, cable TV, decent food, and medical care. However in immigration detention none of these are provided. The food was horrible with very small portions. Many of the detainees suffered from stomach problems. The nurse at the center had never been to nursing school and the doctor who visited weekly was a veterinarian from town. Before being taken into custody, Mahmud was told by a dentist that he needed at least 2 root canals and crowns, yet the detention center doctor gave the diagnoses of "beautiful teeth" when he complained of pain in the teeth.

**Conclusion** - Mahmud served 2 more years in detention, but was eventually released with electronic monitoring to his family. After 2 months at home, he was asked by ICE to report to an office to repair his ankle bracelet but instead was taken into custody. Mahmud had lost his appeal to the 5th Circuit and faced a protracted legal fight with a slim chance of success or removal to Jordan. Tired of fighting the government, he and Ree chose to allow for his deportation. Mahmud now lives in the United Arab Emirates with family. His wife Ree misses him greatly but has been able to visit him. At the same time, she has 5 children in the United States, two of whom are older, and she knows that if she decides to move to the Middle East she will miss many important events in their lives.