

MIX OF DESPAIR, RESOLVE FOR US MUSLIMS

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Farhana Khara, head of the civil rights group Muslim Advocates, said the order "relies on grotesque and bigoted stereotypes of Islam."

In Texas, a state lawmaker recently sent a provocative message to local Muslim leaders asking, among other things, their views of Islamic law and whether they would pledge not to harm Muslims who left the faith. On Wednesday, a businessman attacked a Muslim airline employee at New York's Kennedy Airport, kicking her, shouting obscenities at her and saying that Trump "will get rid of all of you," authorities said.

"The discourse has shifted from good Muslims and bad Muslims to 'how bad is the Muslim you're talking about?'" said attorney Hassan Ahmad, an immigration law specialist in Virginia with many clients from Muslim countries. Muslim leaders acknowledge they are in a relatively weak position from which to advocate, amid the nation's inflamed mood over immigration, religion and terrorism.

The US is home to only about 3.3 million Muslims, which means just a small number of Americans actually know a member of the faith. Many US Muslims come from families that only arrived a generation ago. But they have more organizations, charities and cultural clout than ever, built by a post-9/11 generation eager to assert their American identity.

Companies like Amazon, Nabisco and CoverGirl have recently featured Muslims in their advertisements. The night after Trump's inauguration, comic Aziz Ansari, speaking from one of the most influential platforms in pop culture, as host of "Saturday Night Live", called out anti-Muslim prejudice, white supremacy and other bias that has come to the forefront.

"It's very clear that one of the goals of bigoted language is to make the victims feel isolated and make them feel that they have no allies and they have no power to get them to be silent and intimidate them and make them give up," said Dalia Mogahed, director of research for the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, an American Muslim think-tank. Last month, about 2,600 people filled the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, for an interfaith event expressing support for the community. Among the speakers were US Sen Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Boston Mayor Marty Walsh.

This month, Wardah Khalid, a 30-year-old graduate of Texas A&M University, started a Washington organization called Poligon to train American Muslims how to lobby Congress. She got the idea from working as an analyst for the

Friends Committee on National Legislation, a Quaker public policy organization.

"There are other groups visiting (congressional offices) every single day of the year and it makes a difference in terms of policy asks," Khalid said. She said she's received a strong response to the launch on Facebook and through her website. "It got a lot of momentum," Khalid said. "People are finally waking up."

Muslims for American Progress, a project just launched by Mogahed's institute, aims to highlight American Muslim contributions to the country in medicine, science, sports, business and other fields. The profiles are based in part on data the institute has collected about Muslim professionals. "For 15 years American Muslims have been asked to tell the world what they condemn versus what they contribute, and the conversation in this presidential campaign was with one candidate who thought Muslims were a cancer and the other who basically thought that Muslims were benign and useful as an instrument of counterterrorism. But neither of them understood the value of the American Muslim community to our country outside of counterterrorism," Mogahed said.

Jerusha Lamptey, a professor of Islam and ministry at Union Theological Seminary, a liberal Christian school in New York, had just wrapped up the school's first leadership training program for Muslim women when details emerged over the last week of Trump's plan to sharply restrict refugee flow. "The scheduling turned out to be very important because it created something for us to do that was constructive and somewhat hopeful," Lamptey said. "This anxiety for the American Muslim community is not new. But this last year, it's been wildly out of control."

That angst is causing deep fatigue, especially among Muslim college students and parents desperate to protect their children, said Kameelah Rashad, founder of the Philadelphia-based Muslim Wellness Foundation, which educates Muslims on mental health issues. Rashad's son, who is in sixth grade, heard one of his teachers say people upset by Trump's election "should just get over it," Rashad said.

"We are such a small minority in the country overall, so it will really just take more than us standing up and saying, 'This is inexcusable,'" Rashad said. "We're very resilient, but we also have to comfort our children. We have to figure out if my place of worship is safe on Friday. How will I be treated at work? There's an emotional exhaustion." Surveying Trump's first week in office, she said: "I think it will get worse before it gets better." — AP

TRAVELERS DETAINED, BARRED FROM FLIGHTS TO US...

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"In Iran they're not being allowed to get on the airplane," he said. In Tehran, two travel agencies told AFP they had been instructed by Etihad Airways, Emirates and Turkish Airlines not to sell US tickets or allow Iranians holding American visas to board US-bound flights. Trump's move angered one of Iran's most popular actresses, Taraneh Alidoosti who stars in the Oscar-nominated "The Salesman". She said she would boycott next month's Academy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani did not comment directly on the ban yesterday, but criticized Trump, saying that now was "not the time to build walls between nations". Iran's foreign ministry said it would "respond in kind after the insulting decision of the United States concerning Iranian nationals" until the measure is lifted. It said the decision was "illegal, illogical and contrary to international rules". More than a million Iranians live in the United States.

In Cairo, five Iraqi passengers and one Yemeni were barred from boarding an EgyptAir flight to New York yesterday, sources at Cairo airport said. Dutch airline KLM said yesterday it had refused carriage to the United States to seven passengers from predominately Muslim countries. "We would have liked to have had them fly with us, but it would not have made much sense because they would have been denied entry" to the United States, KLM spokesman Manel Vrijenhoek told AFP.

Qatar Airways, which flies to around 15 American cities, said it would abide by the new regulations, adding however that passengers who have "the proper documentation" will be able to fly. An alert on its website said citizens of the seven barred countries could travel to the US if they have permanent residency there. Government officials and their immediate family are exempt from the travel restrictions along with representatives of international organizations, the Gulf carrier said.

Sudan called the decision to ban entry of its citizens very unfortunate in light of "historic steps" just weeks earlier to lift US sanctions for cooperation on combating terrorism. A 34-year-old Sudanese man who won the US Green Card lottery said he was worried he would be forbidden entry. "If I'm barred...this will destroy my life because I resigned from my work in Sudan and was preparing to settle in America," he said.

Disarray

At least three lawyers from the International Refugee Assistance Project were at the arrivals lounge at New York City's John F Kennedy International Airport's Terminal 4, buried in their laptops and conference calls, photocopies of individuals' US visas on hand. "Just because Trump signed something at 6 pm yesterday, things are coming to a crashing halt," said Mana Yegani, an immigration lawyer in Houston. "It's scary." She and fellow lawyers worked all night fielding calls from travelers with student and worker visas who were being denied entry into the United States and ordered on flights back to the Muslim-majority countries.

Enforcement of the order was spotty and disorganized.

Travelers were handled differently at different points of entry and immigration lawyers were advising clients to change their destination to the more lenient airports, said Yegani, who works with the American Immigration Lawyers Association. The order seeks to prioritize refugees fleeing religious persecution. In a television interview, Trump said the measure was aimed at helping Christians in Syria. Some legal experts said that carve-out showed the order was unconstitutional, as it would violate the US right to freedom of religion. But others said the president and US Congress have latitude to choose who receives asylum.

Lawyers from numerous immigration organizations and the American Civil Liberties Union sued in federal court in Brooklyn on behalf of two Iraqi men, one a former US government worker and the other the husband of a former US security contractor. The two men had visas to enter the United States but were detained on Friday night at Kennedy airport, hours after Trump's executive order, the lawsuit said.

Green card holders

Green card holders were also being stopped and questioned for several hours. Officials also denied travelers with dual Canadian and Iranian citizenship from boarding planes in Canada that were headed to the United States, Yegani said. "These are people that are coming in legally. They have jobs here and they have vehicles here," Yegani said. Those with visas from Muslim-majority countries have gone through background checks with US authorities, Yegani noted.

Trump senior adviser Kellyanne Conway reaffirmed the president's decision in a Twitter post yesterday. "@POTUS is a man of action and impact. Promises made, promises kept. Shock to the system. And he's just getting started," she tweeted.

The order laid the way for what Trump has pledged will be the "extreme vetting" of visa applicants' backgrounds - with some exceptions made for members of "religious minorities", a caveat many see as a way to apply favorable treatment to Christians from majority-Muslim states. "Extreme vetting" is just a euphemism for discriminating against Muslims," said Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union. Romero said Trump's order breached the US constitution's ban on religious discrimination by choosing countries with Muslim majorities for tougher treatment.

Ahmed Rehab, director of the Chicago chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, told AFP his group would mount legal challenges to fight the order "tooth and nail". "It is targeting people based on their faith and national origin, and not on their character or their criminality," he told AFP. On Friday evening, Abed Ayoub of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee said he had fielded about 100 queries from people anxious about the order, which he said he believed could affect traveling green card holders, students, people coming to the United States for medical care and others. "It's chaos," Ayoub said. — Agencies

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