

“Local Muslims Confront Travel Ban With Humility and Grace”

by Eric Carlon

Syria, a predominantly Muslim nation, is a war-torn country divided by three armies, the Syrian Army, the rebel army, and the Islamic state. Amidst this chaos there are thousands of residents who have no choice but to stay within the parameters of their home and hope that no stray bullets hit them. Meanwhile, millions more attempt to flee to safety or sanctuary, including several that were resettled in Northeast Ohio.

Syrians immigrants are one of many nationalities that worship at the Islamic Center of Cleveland (ICC), the largest mosque in Northeast Ohio. Mohamad Shafi, a member of the ICC who served on its board of directors, is a Muslim who immigrated to the United States in 1979 from Gaza City, Palestine. He then attended Cairo University in Egypt where he studied civil engineering. After university he was granted a visa to work in the United States. Eventually he received his green card granting him lawful permanent resident status in the United States. When he became a U.S. citizen, there were limited amounts of immigration legislation stalling him from entering the United States. Today however, thousands of immigrants and refugees are being prevented entry into the United States as a result of President Trump’s recent immigration legislation.

After his win in the 2016 Presidential election, Donald J. Trump made several political maneuvers in effort to “Make America Great Again.” However, some such political maneuvers seem ill-advised and caused many to question the direction America was taking. One such maneuver would be the implementation of the travel ban, or as some would call it “the Muslim ban.” This ban initially prohibited residents from Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Libya, Iran, and Iraq, all predominantly Muslim countries, from entering the United States. This caused an

outrage, as many skeptics of the ban called out Trump for being discriminatory and racist against Muslims. Due to the criticism he received, Trump removed Iraq and Sudan from the ban but added Chad, North Korea, and Venezuela. This maneuver barely swayed skeptics into thinking the travel ban was not racist. Not to mention Saudi Arabia is not on the list. Shafi made a note of this in his interview emphasizing that, “most of the 9/11 attackers were from Saudi Arabia and they are not even on the list of countries banned.” This aspect alone makes Trump’s ban suspect, since the ban was created to lessen terrorism. Some analysts believe Trump did not ban Saudi Arabia because he has business there, but that is a different story altogether. This fact contradicts the reasoning behind Trump’s ban, which was to keep Muslim extremists from entering the country. Considering an overwhelming majority of Muslims follow the religion in a peaceful manner, the ban is punishing a large majority for something an extremely small minority of extremists did.

Shafi is one of many Muslims who have a passionate, but logical dislike of the travel ban Trump implemented, which banned several predominantly Muslim country citizens from entering the United States. The hope of implementing this ban was to reduce the amount of terrorist attacks, however many people had a powerful dissatisfaction with the ban. Shafi explained, “[The ban] is immoral, unconstitutional, they cannot discriminate like this.” On two separate occasions, the courts have ruled that by restricting citizens from countries that are mainly Islamic, Trump is discriminating against a single religion, which is unjust and unconstitutional.

Trump’s travel ban inspired thousands of protesters across the nation to rise up in response to its unconstitutional nature. While Shafi mentioned that although he did not know of anyone who protested from his mosque, hundreds of Northeast Ohio activists protested at

Cleveland Hopkins International Airport on Sunday, January 28th to show their disgust over the ban.

Trump's travel ban is not the first time there has been discriminatory action against Muslims in relation to the United States. After the September 11th attack a drunk man who was obviously distraught because of the attack drove his car straight into the front doors of the ICC's mosque. Interestingly enough after an ambulance took the man to the hospital, the leaders of the mosque visited him at the hospital. Later on the leaders even forgave the man who drove his car through the front doors of the mosque. Based on this incident it is safe to say that Northeast Ohio Muslims will respond to President Trump's travel ban with humility and grace.