

Refugees speak out, fear for family still in homeland after Trump's executive order



Qussay Al Juboury, center, an Iraqi refugee, describes the worry his family is experiencing because his adult daughter in Jordan cannot join them in the United States. Rather than leave her there alone, the family may join her, abandoning their efforts to start over in this country. At a press conference in Troy Thursday, Al Juboury was one of several refugees who shared stories of family members in harm's way who cannot come to the United States because of President Donald Trump's executive order banning refugee travel. Anne Runkle-The Oakland Press

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Sube Jafas, a Syrian refugee, has a few words for President Donald Trump that may be surprising.

“I say to Mr. Trump, we Muslims, we love you,” Jafas said through an interpreter at a news conference Thursday, Feb. 2, at the Troy offices of Samaritas, the state’s largest refugee resettlement agency.

“I think he got the wrong image, the wrong picture of Islam.”

Jafas, like many Syrians who have fled a civil war in their homeland, fears for relatives who are still in harm’s way.

He was one of several refugees who shared accounts of family members whose travel was canceled due to Trump’s Jan. 27 executive order that puts a 120-day halt on refugee arrivals from any country and an indefinite ban on refugees from Syria.

Qussay Al Juboury, an Iraqi refugee, is worried about an adult daughter in Jordan. She can’t come here, so he and his family may leave the United States, after struggling to start over in this country, to be with her. Under Muslim custom, as a woman, she shouldn’t be left alone, he said.

This week, 26 Syrian and Iraqi refugees were scheduled to arrive in Detroit. They have all been denied entry and will be sent back to their homeland, said Sean de Four, vice president of Samaritas, formerly Lutheran Social Services of Michigan.

Samaritas has resettled 272 refugees in southeast Michigan since last October; 191 were Muslim and most of the rest were Christian.

To obtain refugee status, those fleeing their homeland must meet specific criteria and go through many levels of security checks, which could take months or years.

Most are financially self-sufficient within six months of landing on American soil, even if they haven’t fully mastered the English language, de Four said.

“They are a diverse group but share a desire to start over,” he said.

Trump’s order applies even to non-refugees from seven Muslim-majority nations who are in the United States. That includes college students, who can’t go home to visit family, nor can their family visit them here.

de Four said that contrary to popular opinion, the order differs from travel bans imposed by past presidents. Previous bans usually were in response to a specific credible threat and were in effect for shorter periods of time, he said.

It’s also significant that Trump’s order singles out Syrian refugees for a total ban, as the country is in the midst of “the largest humanitarian crisis in the world,” he said.

Also contrary to popular consensus, Trump’s order does not address undocumented immigrants.

de Four said Samaritas officials hope the 120-day ban isn’t renewed.

“Continue to hope and pray, and encourage others to do the same,” de Four said.

“God calls us to welcome the stranger and protect the vulnerable, and those are values that are common to all religions.”