



International Refugee  
Assistance Project

**Statement by:  
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and  
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Mevlûde Akay Alp

We are concerned about a number of discriminatory immigration policies and practices of this government in its treatment of non-citizens and refugees, that are flagrant violations of the right to family life and cause undue family separation, and are based on discrimination against Black, Brown, Muslim and other historically marginalized communities.

Today we will address one ongoing violation: the unresolved impact of the Muslim Ban. The Committee raises the Muslim Ban at Issue 8 of its List of Issues and our joint shadow report, submitted by the International Refugee Assistance Project and other organizations that have filed lawsuits on behalf of impacted people, provides a fuller report.

I want to invite Ramez Alghazzouli to share how his family was impacted by the Muslim Ban.

Ramez Alghazzouli

I stand before the Committee today, not just as Ramez Alghazzouli but as a representative of countless individuals who have endured the profound impact of the Muslim Ban. An arbitrary, unjust, and discriminatory Presidential Executive Order.

As a U.S. citizen now, who fled Syria in 2012, I once lived my American dream working as a Business Analyst for a US state government, and have always been contributing to my community. However, in 2017, former president Trump introduced the Muslim Ban, fulfilling his presidential campaign promise to exclude Muslims from the United States and targeting mostly Muslim majority countries, turning my life into a nightmare.

Because of the ban, the love of my life, Asmaa, a Syrian national who was living in Turkey under temporary protection status, was denied a visa to join me in the United States in 2018, just because of her religion and nationality. We know this for a fact because the consular officer told my wife during her visa interview that nothing is preventing her from issuing the visa but the Presidential Proclamation that bans Syrians from entering the United States. This Ban tore us apart. The emotional impact was immense, affecting my daily life and my sense of belonging in the United States. All I wanted was to live with my wife in the place I call home. I couldn't concentrate at work and my dreams were shattered. How not; we are being targeted by our own government, solely because of our religion and country of origin.

Our struggle to be together was met with silence and bureaucracy. We reached out to state and federal authorities, contacted government representatives, and the White House, and in the end

we even shared our story with the media. It was only through months of relentless advocacy and activism that Asmaa was finally granted entry to the U.S. in 2019.

Our story proves how this Ban tore families apart and denied fundamental human rights based on both faith and nationality.

Unfortunately, the scars of this experience will not ever go away. Just google my name: my identity has become the person associated with the Muslim Ban. It is going to be part of our lives, and history will write this as a shameful period of the American journey.

I implore this committee to recognize the deep and lasting scars such policies leave on individuals and communities. Discrimination based on religion and/or nationality should have no place in our world, and we must work together to ensure that no one else suffers as we did. Thank you.

### Mevlûde Akay Alp

Thank you for sharing your story today. Despite the pain and trauma that Ramez and his wife endured, they are actually some of the lucky ones, now reunited, not least because of Ramez's tenacity, high capabilities and willingness to make huge sacrifices. Yet thousands of other families remain separated because of the ban.

The Muslim Ban was unprecedented in recent history in its blatant religious discrimination, which is why it is very important that the Committee issues strong recommendations to ensure that a racist ban like this is not passed again.

The Biden Administration formally rescinded the Muslim Ban and promised to review all actions taken as a result of the ban. But it has failed to see this commitment through, allowing the racist legacy of the ban to continue.

Thousands who were wrongfully denied waivers under the ban still have not received visas. Many practices and policies that targeted refugees under the refugee specific portion of the Muslim Ban continue to separate refugee families today. 50% of our clients whose refugee family reunification cases were approved and were ready to board a flight to the United States when the ban came down have subsequently been denied, without explanation. Many refugees who had cleared intense vetting when the ban came down, are now facing years of unexplained delay, indefinitely separating them from their loved ones in the United States. Forcing parents to live apart from their children and forcing spouses to live apart, for years.

We ask the Committee to reaffirm its Concluding Observations made in its last review of the United States on the extraterritorial application of the Covenant. But, we also ask the Committee to clarify to the government that even under the government's restrictive position on extraterritorial application of the Covenant, the Covenant applies to those affected by the Muslim Ban because it is discriminatory towards, and violates the right to family life of people in the United States; people like Ramez.

We therefore consider it important for the Committee to include in its Concluding Observations that the right to family life under the Covenant includes the right to live together with a family member in the country where the family member resides.

We ask the Committee to recommend that the US government completely rescind the Muslim Ban by publicly abolishing all of the policies and practices that it introduced, and we ask the Committee to recommend that the US ensure swift reunification of refugee families. Thank you.