



Immigration Reform Affects All

Can Muslim Americans make a difference through active participation the immigration reform movement?

BY MANAR WAHEED

EVER SINCE THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL election, immigration reform has been on the horizon. Despite the daily change of politics, immigration remains the constant issue with the refrain, “the time is now.” Indeed, political parties, the public will and even the media have all called for immediate and significant changes to our broken immigration system. Among those anxiously awaiting immigration reform is our community: Muslim Americans. According to the Pew Research Center, the population of Muslim Americans will more than double by 2030, rising to over six million at a minimum and making our opinions, our concerns and our vote more important than ever. With the growing population of our community, Muslim Americans need immigration reform just as much as any other group. The time is now and we cannot let it pass without raising our voices.

Muslims, like many other communities, are greatly impacted by our inadequate immigration system. Although there seems to be a perception that we are only affected by student or employment visas, the fact remains that our lives are touched by other aspects of the system, as well. Our commu-

nity does not simply include one type of person, profession or immigration status. We are South Asian, Indonesian, Arab, African and Black, to name a few. We are taxi drivers, doctors and engineers. We are undocumented recipients of family and employment visas, students, refugees and asylees. There is beauty in our diversity and in the common thread that holds us together: Islam.

We also understand that fellow Muslims are affected by parts of the immigration system that may not impact us directly; however, each part of our system is interwoven with one another. Though some of us may enter the country through a particular channel, all our lives are still affected by other aspects of the system. For example, a Muslim American man who comes to America through employment-based visa programs might have a wife, sister or child that he would like to join him here, through our family system. For him, bringing over a family member, for example his sister, can take more than a decade in our current system. A Muslim American woman may end up in detention without the right to an attorney, opportunity to practice Islam or information in her preferred language. Though it may not be immediately appar-

ent, all these pieces and more impact us as a community.

Additionally, since 9/11, far too many Muslim Americans have become victims of profiling. In 2002, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System was established, targeting men from predominantly Muslim countries and requiring them to register with the government. This program resulted in the deportation of over 13,000 individuals, though none were ever charged with any terrorism-related activity. Many of us have also been investigated or interrogated by immigration authorities based upon whether we wear hijabs, kufis or topis, have accents or simply “look un-American” based on the color of our skin. It is unacceptable and, frankly, un-American for Muslims to have their fingerprints run through the immigration system simply because a law enforcement officer thought that they “looked” Muslim. History has taught us that profiling has been ineffective for Muslims and other communities. Yet, it remains tacitly approved because there is no prohibition on it within our immigration system. The time is now for these unjust, discriminatory actions to end.

We know that the current status of our immigration laws is simply not working. Under this broken system, Muslim Americans, like many others, face incredible barriers and disparities in treatment. We are often deprived of a pathway to citizenship, spend years separated from our family members, face numerous barriers to employment, suffer from a lack of workers’ rights and are denied due process in detention and deportation.

It is essential that our new immigration system helps, values and respects Muslim Americans. We must make sure that we all have immigration options, are reunited with our families, are protected as workers, are granted basic rights in detention and deportation and are no longer profiled. And, these are just the basics of the changes we need.

As Americans, we have a right to demand these changes to our system and, as Muslims, I believe we have an obligation. We have an obligation to speak up against injustice, rather than sitting silent. We have an obligation to build a society that protects and helps people, not one that hurts us or anyone else. The time is now for us to realize our obligations and stand up for just and humane immigration reform, before it is too late. ■

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