

By Joan Muwahed

Due to the surge of Muslim majority countries listed on Trump's travel ban, immigrants from neighboring middle eastern nations cultivate fears that they could be next, according to a director of research and analysis at the Arab Center Washington D.C., Friday.

Imad Harb, 63, said difficulties would arise for all immigrants in the United States, especially in the U.S.'s present day strict immigration policies.

"Open it up. It's time for the United States to simply stop this ban and open the border to anyone who would like to legally enter the country. This is a country of immigrants, the immigrants built this country," he said.

Middle Eastern immigrants should continually be on the "lookout" on administration policies that are against them or their safety, Harb said.

"For those who are attempting to immigrate to the U.S., god help them," Harb said.

The Trump Administration decided that the U.S. should not be as "hospitable to immigrants," he said.

This also touches on other issues such as the U.S.'s reluctance to accept refugees, he said. According to the Pew Research Center analysis of data from UNHCR, the U.S. migrated fewer refugees than the rest of the world as their numbers fall below other countries.

"The U.S. is probably the worst industrialized country in receiving refugees," Harb said.

Meanwhile, the Conservative Caucus, an American public policy organization and lobbying group issued a statement on their website that said, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton wanted to admit tens of thousands of Islamic refugees from Syria and other neighboring countries and that is a "formula for national suicide." They said Americans are watching Europe get destroyed by a Muslim invasion.

According to the Conservative Caucus website, 25 percent of Muslims in America believe that "violence against Americans here in the United States can be justified as part of global jihad."

Harb said that agents of the state and the public sometimes harass Middle Eastern immigrants that could potentially "pose a threat to their country," just as they walk down the street.

Amanda Pulliam, 43, held an anti-Trump poster near the White House, reading, "Make America Great Again, Resign." When commenting on the immigration policies of Trump's travel ban, Pulliam said, "If you don't use your rights, you are most likely to lose them."

Middle Eastern Immigrants in D.C. should be vigilant, Harb said. There are laws that protect their rights and their right to live in liberty and dignity without harassment, he said.

Khalil Jahshan, 70, a Palestinian-American activist and executive director of the Arab Center Washington D.C., said the rigid anti-immigration policy that the Trump administration has been advocating has had a disastrous effect on immigrants, psychologically and quantitatively.

The U.S. sends the impression to potential immigrants worldwide that this country is no longer what it used to be, he said.

When the supreme court of the land, who people usually depend on to protect the interest of the public, becomes a rubber stamp, that diminishes the statute of the U.S. as a democratic country that has a long standing history of immigration and political asylum being open for people seeking refuge and protection, Jahshan said

Jahshan said the U.S. is no longer as welcoming to immigrants. There is a common message immigrants see in this country that says, “we don’t want you here,” Jahshan said.

The average immigrant from the Muslim or Middle Eastern world do not know if they are welcomed to the U.S., he said. One of Jahsan’s colleagues, Radwan Ziadeh, is a Syrian asylum seeker in the U.S. The 42-year-old man is a prominent political opponent of the Assad regime, Jahshan said. Although Ziadeh is well-known to U.S. authorities, he was prevented from re-entering the U.S following the ban, Jahshan said.

Senators and congressmen are currently trying to help Radwan re-enter, but homeland security and immigration services are not, he said.

“It’s unfortunate that a leading figure like Radwan, a well-known asylum seeker, has been welcomed in this country for years and is now stuck in Qatar and can’t come back to his family in the U.S.,” Jahshan said.

As long as laws remain imposed, there are suspicions fueled by politically motivated statements and people pay a price for that, Jahshan said.

Cori Alonso-Yoder, practitioner-in-residence in the Immigrant Justice Clinic of the American University Washington College of Law said she worked with a family from Iraq for a number of years. The husband was detained for several months before it was cleared up that he was not the suspected terrorist that the government was seeking, following suspicion and confusion surrounding his identity in the aftermath of September 11 attacks, she said.

He subsequently won his case and became a U.S. citizen, however, the recent political state of immigrants has re-traumatized him, she said. Although he is legally protected, the increased suspicion of people from Iraq in the U.S.’s political mind has him concerned for whether or not he will be safe in this country and continue to be welcomed, Alonso-Yoder said.

The majority of conversations around the travel ban are the most problematic, she said. Such policies have a chilling effect on the desire for immigrants to come into the U.S., she said.

“It’s like the statue of liberty turned its back on immigrants and is facing the wrong direction,” Jahshan said.