Re: Update on Effect of U.S. Executive Orders “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States”

Dear Commissioners Eguiguren Praeli, Macaulay, and Vargas Silva, and Executive Secretary Abrão,

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, write to update the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on President Trump’s Executive Order “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” with a focus on developments since the March 21, 2017 hearing\(^1\) on this matter. Although revised, this Executive Order and related initiatives continue to violate, or threaten, fundamental human rights of American citizens, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. We ask the Commission to maintain its involvement in monitoring and responding to this situation, including by taking the specific actions listed at the conclusion of this letter.

Background and Update on Effects of Executive Order “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States”

On January 27, 2017, the President of the United States signed an executive order (“EO-1”)\(^2\) including a 90-day ban on entry by citizens of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen;\(^3\) a 120-day suspension of all refugee admissions;\(^4\) and an indefinite suspension of the admission of Syrian refugees.\(^5\) From the outset, and as two federal appeals courts have held, this was clearly a discriminatory ban that violated the U.S. Constitution in targeting Muslims. Soon after it was issued, individuals, organizations, and four states—Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, and Washington—filed or joined suits to challenge this Executive Order, and on February 3, Judge James L. Robart of the United States District Court for the

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\(^3\) Id. § 3(c) citing 8 U.S. Code § 1187(a)(12), available at https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/8/1187.

\(^4\) Id. § 5(a).

\(^5\) Id. § 5(c).
Western District of Washington granted a temporary restraining order, enjoining the implementation of the executive order nationwide. The Ninth Circuit then refused to stay that injunction on February 9. In response to the Ninth Circuit’s ruling and implementation challenges, a revised Executive Order was issued on March 6, 2017. In the days leading up to this new order, senior White House officials reiterated the President’s view that EO-1 was fully lawful, and that the new order (“EO-2”) would be “tailored” to address “minor” and “very technical issues” they claimed troubled the courts with regard to EO-1. Then-press secretary, Sean Spicer, affirmed that “[t]he principles of the executive order remain the same.” Stephen Miller, a senior advisor to President Trump, explained that EO-2 would constitute “the same, basic policy outcome for the country.”

As promised, the new order remained largely the same: it banned entry for a new 90-day period for individuals from six of the same seven predominantly Muslim countries in EO-1, preventing the issuance of visas to nationals of six Muslim majority countries. EO-2 did include some modifications in response to public pressure and judicial decisions (for example, it removed the language prioritizing and providing exceptions for religious minorities and did not apply to legal permanent residents or visa holders), but remained very similar in its operation and provisions to EO-1, cutting the number of refugees to be admitted to the United States, allowing some discretionary waivers, and requiring a report based on a worldwide review to identify whether foreign countries provided sufficient information to ensure that visas issued to their nationals would not present a security or public safety threat.

At the time of the IACHR’s hearing on this and other executive orders, EO-2 had already been challenged in district courts in Hawaii and Maryland. In International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) v. Trump, a Maryland federal district court enjoined the implementation of section 2 of EO-2 on March 15, 2017, and the Fourth Circuit affirmed the injunction on June 1, 2017. A district court in Hawaii issued a similar, broader injunction in Hawaii v. Trump. The Ninth Circuit also upheld that district court’s order.

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enjoining sections 214 and 615 on June 12, 2017, which refer to the 90-day ban on admissions of citizens of the six listed countries and the 120-day suspension of refugee admissions.16

On June 1, 2017, the Trump administration took the matter to the Supreme Court, seeking an emergency stay of both injunctions and certiorari review.17 On June 26, the Supreme Court issued a decision agreeing to review the Fourth and Ninth Circuit rulings on EO-2.18 In the same decision, the Supreme Court granted in part the U.S. Government’s request to stay the lower courts’ injunctions prohibiting the government from excluding individuals with a “credible claim of a bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States.”19

On September 24, 2017, the Trump administration issued Presidential Proclamation No. 9645, entitled “Enhancing Vetting Capabilities and Processes for Detecting Attempted Entry Into the United States by Terrorists or Other Public-Safety Threats.”20 The Presidential Proclamation (“Muslim Ban 3.0”) operates like the previous travel bans, denying visas to individuals from eight countries, including Chad, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria, Somalia, Venezuela and Yemen—but now on an indefinite basis.21 According to the Proclamation, the countries included in this new ban were designated in a September 2017 report to the President from the Department of Homeland Security based on risk factors and inadequate information-sharing protocols (for example, Somalia was not identified as having inadequate protocols and Iraq, excluded from the list, did not meet the baseline criteria).22 While only specific government officials and their relatives from Venezuela are impacted by this ban, the Proclamation suspends indefinitely the entry on immigrant visas of nationals from Iran, Libya, Somalia, North Korea, Syria, Chad, and Yemen. In light of this Proclamation, the Supreme Court dismissed as moot both the Fourth Circuit and the Ninth Circuit’s rulings on EO-2.23

Following the Proclamation, plaintiffs resumed litigation in the Federal District Courts of Maryland and Hawaii challenging the Presidential Proclamation.24 On October 17, Judge Derrick K. Watson in United

14 Executive Order § 2, “Temporary Suspension of Entry for Nationals of Countries of Particular Concern During Review Period.”
19 Id.
21 Id.
22 Id.
24 We’re Challenging Muslim Ban 3.0, Which Is Just More of the Same, AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOUNDATION (Oct. 3, 2017), https://www.aclu.org/blog/immigrants-rights/were-challenging-muslim-ban-3-0-which-just-more-
States District Court for the District of Hawaii issued a nationwide temporary restraining order (subsequently converted to a preliminary injunction) preventing the federal government from enforcing or implementing enforcing Section 2 of the Proclamation, which suspended the entry of nationals from the specified countries (except as to nationals of North Korea and Venezuela). 25 Judge Watson held that this Proclamation lacked sufficient evidence that the entry of nationals from the six specified countries would be harmful to the interests of the United States. 26 Also on October 17, Judge Theodore Chuang in the United States District Court for the District of Maryland issued an injunction prohibiting the federal government from enforcing Section 2 of the Proclamation (likewise exempting North Korea and Venezuela). However, this injunction only applies to those individuals who have a *bona fide* relationship with a person or entity in the United States. 27 The government has appealed both injunctions, and the IRAP plaintiffs have cross appealed the limit of relief in that case to those with *bona fide* relationships. 28

On a parallel track, the U.S. government has dramatically reduced the number of refugees to be accepted into the United States for resettlement from 110,000 to 45,000 for fiscal year 2018 (which started October 1, 2017). 29 The EO-2 120-day review of the refugee program concluded on October 24, 2017 and with its resumption, the Trump administration announced a new executive order entitled, “Resuming the United States Refugee Admissions Program with Enhanced Vetting Capabilities.” 30 While noting that “a general resumption” of the resettlement program “is consistent with the security and welfare of the United States,” the order notes that changes and enhancements to the existing vetting procedure had been made while the program was on hold. 31 Even with these changes, however, the U.S. government has essentially halted resettlement of nationals of 11 countries (almost all Muslim-majority) over the next 90-day review period. 32 Moreover, the applications of relatives of refugees to come to the United States to join their resettled family members have also been halted. 33

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26 See id. at 2.


31 Id.


While the Executive Orders and most recent Proclamation continue to be challenged in domestic courts, their impact is significant. Recent data regarding refugee admissions and arrivals to the United States show a marked decrease in the number of refugee admissions in March, April, and May (a total of 9,375 individuals) as compared to the preceding three months (a total of 18,728 individuals). Further, visitors from the countries targeted by the bans—Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen—have seen a decline in the six months following the initial travel ban. Moreover, refugee arrivals from Muslim-majority countries have also plummeted. Given the turmoil and war many Muslim-majority countries are facing, Muslims made up nearly half the number of refugees admitted to the United States last year. However, in the first seven months of the Trump administration, the number of Muslim refugees admitted dropped to 37 percent of the total number of refugees—notably, it dropped by 73 percent as compared to last year. The monthly issuance of visitor visas from six of the countries targeted by the ban has fallen by 40 percent this year. Visitor visas issued to people from all Arab nations have fallen 16 percent, and visitor visas issued to people from Muslim majority countries fell by eight percent.

Simultaneously, advocacy organizations and community members around the country have risen up to show their disdain for the Muslim ban and in support of the Constitution and of Muslim communities in the U.S. Beginning with the outpouring of individuals in airports following the first version of the Muslim ban, communities continue to demand an end to the ban, whether by the administration or by Congress. On October 18, the scheduled implementation day of Muslim Ban 3.0, a coalition of 15 organizations delivered a petition of over 110,000 signatures to Congress demanding that members immediately pass legislation to rescind the illegal and unconstitutional Muslim ban. That day, 28 Senators introduced a bill to block Muslim Ban 3.0, led by Senator Dianne Feinstein and Senator Chris Murphy. Though it was not the first bill to be introduced in Congress to rescind the Muslim Ban, members continue to demand answers from the administration regarding the Muslim ban and ask their colleagues to support a legislative solution. Simultaneously that day, thousands of people marched in Washington, DC, demanding an end to the Muslim ban. This rally was endorsed by nearly 200 organizations and approximately 70 additional events were held in 20 other cities around the country.

**Update on Related Immigration Policy Initiatives**

38 Id.
39 Id.
In addition to the Proclamation formally and indefinitely preventing nationals of six Muslim majority countries from entering United States in most circumstances, the Trump administration issued a memorandum implementing immediate heightened screening and vetting for applications for visa applicants, which has been described by experts as a “de facto Muslim ban.” This extreme vetting was implemented by way of “supplemental questions” for visa applicants which dig back 15 years into their residence, employment, and travel histories among other things and ask for their social media handles without definition or limitation as to how they will be used or how the information of their colleagues, family, or friends who are associated with them online might be used. These questions will not get asked of every applicant, but those who might need more vetting for “terrorism, national security-related, or other visa ineligibilities.” For some questions, applicants will be asked if it appears that the applicant has been “in an area while that area was under the operational control of a terrorist organization,” yet no training or guidance is detailed as to how officers will know this nor how they will decide who needs additional vetting.

In the past, this type of vague language has been used in other programs and policies, like those used to conduct surveillance and place people on watchlists, and has resulted in the unjust discriminatory treatment of Muslim, Arab, Iranian, Middle Eastern, and South Asian communities. Notably, the President also made the purpose of these extreme vetting measures clear through his repeated calls for “ideological certification” and “extreme vetting” while making specific reference to Islam, Muslims, or people from Muslim-majority countries, incorrectly and unjustly conflating these categorically with terrorism. On October 2, 2017, the Brennan Center for Justice filed a public records request to the U.S. State Department seeking the release of information on the Trump administration’s visa-applicant vetting policies and procedures.

These and other recent policy changes excessively burden visa applicants and persons seeking resettlement without concretely identifying the national security benefits that they are meant to

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46 Id.
47 Id.
achieve.\textsuperscript{50} With regard to the regional and human rights norms that may be infringed by some or all of these policy measures, we refer to our coalition letter of February 6, 2017.\textsuperscript{51}

**Requested Action**

We urge the Commission to engage with the United States government and initiate a constructive dialogue concerning its obligation to respect the human rights of U.S. citizens, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. In particular, we reiterate the specific recommendations for follow-up on this matter that we made at the March 21 hearing.\textsuperscript{52} With regard to this Executive Order, those recommendations include, \textit{inter alia}, asking the Commission to:

1. Urge the United States government to rescind the Muslim Ban Executive Order/Proclamation, the Executive Order on refugee admissions and enhanced vetting and related measures, and related guidance and corresponding memoranda on their implementation as necessary to comply with its obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of U.S. citizens, migrants regardless of immigration status or religion, including asylum seekers, refugees, and their families;

2. Engage in ongoing monitoring of implementation of these executive orders and related policy developments, including by:
   
   2.1. initiating and maintaining close coordination between the IACHR and relevant United Nations human rights mechanisms on these issues. In particular, we request that IACHR – including through its Rapporteurship on the Rights of Migrants, communicate and coordinate with the United Nations special procedures in the relevant thematic areas for the purpose of conducting any country visits or follow-up to country visits and issuing joint statements regarding pertinent developments; and,

   2.2. gathering information on the impacts of the executive orders in other countries of the region during hearings and country visits.

3. Follow up on implementation of its recommendations issued in previous cases involving the human rights of migrants in the United States, and fulfillment of the general obligations identified therein, including the cases of Wayne Smith, Hugo Armendariz, \textit{et al.}; Andrea Mortlock; Ferrer-Mazorra \textit{et al.}; Leopoldo Zumaya, Francisco Berumen Lizalde, \textit{et al.}; and Haitian Interdiction.


Sincerely,

International Justice Resource Center (IJRC)
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for Justice & Accountability
Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)
Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
Four Freedoms Forum
Global Justice Center
Hawai’i Institute for Human Rights
Human Rights Advocates
Human Rights Center, UC Berkeley School of Law
International Human Rights Clinic at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles
International Human Rights Clinic, University of Chicago Law School
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
Labour, Health and Human Rights Development Centre
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
National Immigration Law Center
Pozen Center for Human Rights, University of Chicago
Project South