

Trump travel ban shuts an important doorway to Canada: Ottawa lawyer



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Canadians with dual citizenship in one of seven affected countries could be banned from entering the United States. JASON KRYK /POSTMEDIA WIRE

Like other immigration lawyers interviewed Saturday, **Julie Taub** said she received several calls from clients worried about the impact of the travel restrictions introduced by the new Republican president. Trump imposed a temporary ban on all refugees and an indefinite one on Syrian refugees; he also imposed 90-day restriction on travellers from seven predominantly Muslim countries.

Most of the inquiries she received, **Taub** said, were from Middle East refugees in Ottawa concerned that the new measures would close an important door for their relatives.

For years, refugees in Ottawa have been meeting relatives at the Canada-U.S. border, **Taub** said. The family members enter the U.S. on visitor visas; they're then allowed to make a refugee claim on this side of the border as an exception to Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement provided they have close family members in Canada. The circuitous route was often used because many people from the Middle East found it easier to obtain visas to the U.S. "Now they don't know how to get them to Canada," she said. "That was the easiest route: It used to be very easy for Middle East refugees to get visas to go the United States, then come to the Canadian border."

Another local immigration and refugee lawyer, Negar Ahtari, said she received panicked calls Saturday from people living in the U.S. on green cards. One Iranian-born woman, she said, was torn between visiting her sick mother and risking the life she had built in the U.S. during the past 19 years.

"She said, 'It's a very sad day when I have to make a choice between my ailing mother and my life in the United States,'" Ahtari said. "Unfortunately, if she leaves, she won't be able to come back even with a green card that means they're effectively a permanent resident. It really is outrageous."

It remains unclear, Ahtari said, how the new restrictions will affect Canadians who hold dual citizenship from one of the seven countries that Trump has targeted: Iraq, Syria, Iran, Yemen, Sudan, Libya and Somalia.

"Casting such a wide net, I think it's going to divide people," she said. "I think it will embolden those who have an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim view."

Late Saturday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's director of communications, Kate Purchase, said on Twitter that U.S. National Security Advisor Michael T. Flynn has "confirmed Canadians, including dual citizens, will not be affected" by Trump's executive order.

Julie Taub said the local fallout from Trump's immigration restrictions may take time to unfold. But it's likely, she said, that more refugees will land here, and more will attempt to cross the border illegally into the U.S. from Canada.

Ottawa immigration lawyer Hadi Hakimi said many of the people he spoke to Saturday were upset and confused by Trump's edict. "I personally think this decision will not serve any security purpose," Hakimi said. "Banning people based on country of birth, religion, nationality, it's ridiculous."

The Afghan-born Hakimi said he spoke Saturday with one man, a dual U.S.-Iranian citizen, who was concerned he might not be able to return to the U.S. if he travelled to Iran.

Under one interpretation of Trump's new order, tens of thousands of Canadians with dual citizenship from one of the seven countries face a 90-day travel ban.

Transport Minister Marc Garneau said on Twitter late Saturday that the Canadian government was seeking more information from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Department of Transportation: "We are in contact with U.S. DHS and U.S. DOT to get more clarity on the impacts of the restrictions on travels. We will be providing further information to Canadians as it is available."

It's possible that Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen will fall under the temporary ban if he's not travelling on a diplomatic passport. Hussen, who was appointed to cabinet earlier this month, was born in Somalia and came to Canada as a refugee.