

US: 13,000 Arab and Muslim men face deportation

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Of the more than 82,000 Arab and Muslim men who came forward to register with US immigration authorities in recent months, more than 13,000 now face deportation, according to government officials. The men were responding to a special government program that required male non-citizens, aged 16 and older, from 25 countries to register with immigration authorities between December 2002 and April of this year.

The government's order was not based on any evidence of criminal wrongdoing or suspicion of terrorism on the part of those required to comply with the program, and authorities demanded that everyone who fell under the program's guidelines register with immigration officials. There were numerous statements at the time from Justice Department and other government officials that those who complied had nothing to fear from registering.

About 16 percent of those who came forward have now been met with deportation orders. According to the *New York Times*, the deportation will be the largest since the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

Fayiz Rahman of the American Muslim Council told Agence France Presse, "People did register out of their good conscience, because they wanted to follow the rules." He asserted that the program was "targeted only towards Muslims.... They are planning to reduce the number of Muslims on American soil ... discourage Muslim immigration, make our lives difficult." The 25 countries of origin designated by the government are those considered by authorities to be harboring Al Qaeda and other terrorists.

While Attorney General John Ashcroft claimed the immigrant registrations were an integral component of the government "war on terror," only 11 out of 82,000 are suspected of having any ties to terrorism, according

to the *Times*. Exactly what these alleged "ties" are is not reported.

News of the planned deportations comes on the heels of an internal Justice Department report, released June 2, that documented widespread civil liberties violations against the hundreds of immigrants rounded up and detained in the post-9/11 dragnet. These abuses included verbal and physical abuse, withholding of counsel, denial of bond, and other violations against the 762 mostly Arab and Muslim men picked up and jailed by the government.

The new mass deportation is the Bush administration's latest action targeting Arab and Muslim men in the wake of the 911 attacks. While aimed against this segment of the population, it constitutes an escalation of the government's widespread assault on civil liberties whose ultimate target is the general population, immigrant and non-immigrant alike.

In the first several months following the September 11 attacks, more than 600 Arab and Muslim immigrants were deported from the US. Although the Justice Department refused to release information on the identity and status of those rounded up in the post-9/11 anti-immigrant sweep, it is believed that most of them have now been deported and a smaller number released.

Another surge of deportations was initiated last year when government authorities began arresting immigrants whom they claimed posed a "security threat" and who had already received deportation orders.

According to the *Times*, deportations of immigrants from Asian and African countries have risen by nearly 27 percent in the last two years, with the numbers of Pakistani, Jordanian, Lebanese and Moroccan immigrants expelled doubling and the numbers of

Egyptians tripling. The Pakistani Embassy reports that since September 11 more than 15,000 immigrants without current documentation have fled to Canada, Europe and Pakistan to avoid deportation.

In early 2002, the Justice Department initiated the “Absconder Apprehension Initiative,” which targeted an estimated 314,000 foreign nationals who have remained in the US after having received deportation orders. “Apprehension teams” comprised of agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the US Marshals Service began in February 2002 searching for about 1,000 Middle Eastern and Pakistani men, whom they had identified as convicted felons.

The vast majority of the 314,000 immigrants targeted for arrest by the “Absconder” program were at most guilty of overstaying their visas. While in the past, this infraction would have been considered relatively minor, such violations have now become the basis for incarceration—sometimes indefinite—and deportation.

The fate of a large number of immigrants is also complicated by the fact that many of their visas have been delayed due to a tremendous backlog at the INS, creating conditions where individuals and families can wait for months and even years for action on their applications. Many of the 13,000 facing deportation in the government’s latest expulsion of immigrants fall under this category.



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