

Screen Actors Guild award winners, artists, athletes and others protest US travel ban

David Walsh
2 February 2017

President Donald Trump's executive order banning the entry of refugees and visitors from seven Muslim-majority countries—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen—has aroused widespread outrage and protest, both in the US and around the world.

Many prominent performers, artists and athletes have spoken out since the ban was announced last Friday.

The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) awards ceremony on Sunday night was the occasion for numerous actors and others to state their opposition. Actor Ashton Kutcher opened the event, to considerable applause, by greeting fellow SAG-AFTRA members “and everyone at home—and everyone in airports that belong in my America [referring to those detained by US immigration officials]. You are a part of the fabric of who we are, and we love you and we welcome you.”

Julia Louis-Dreyfus, who received an award for her role on HBO's *Veep*, told the audience, “I want you all to know that I'm the daughter of an immigrant. My father fled religious persecution in Nazi-occupied France. And I'm an American patriot and I love this country. And because I love this country, I am horrified by its blemishes. And this immigrant ban is its blemish and it's un-American.”

Mahershala Ali, a fine actor who was in a number of films in 2016, received an award for *Moonlight*. Speaking of the latter, he referred to learning about “what happens when you persecute people. They fold into themselves.” He went on to suggest that were two ways of dealing with differences among people, “There's an opportunity to see the texture of that person, the characteristics that make them unique—and then there's the opportunity to go to war about it.”

Accepting a lifetime achievement award, actress and comic Lily Tomlin commented, “Trump's changing the laws now. He's trying to change the laws. I don't want to make this comparison, but the Nazis, they changed the laws. They just changed the laws, and they could do whatever they wanted.”

Backstage at the awards, according to *Deadline Hollywood*, actress Emma Stone (*La La Land*) “emphatically” remarked, “We have to speak up against injustice, and we have to kick some ass. We have to speak up. Staying silent only helps the oppressor, not the victim. Right now I hope that people seeing things that are being done that are unconstitutional and inhumane would say something. I would hope that people would fight for what's right.”

To their credit, actor Simon Helberg (*The Big Bang Theory*) and

his wife, Jocelyn Towne, made their opposition to Trump's actions as visible as they could. Helberg held a sign that read, “Refugees Welcome,” and Towne had written “Let Them In” on her upper chest. Over the weekend, on Twitter, Helberg compared the current travel ban to the Roosevelt government's turning away of the MS *St. Louis*, with more than 900 Jewish refugees on board, in 1939. He movingly sent messages in the name of dozens of *St. Louis* passengers who eventually died in concentration camps because of the US authorities' decision.

Other prominent performers took to social media to express opposition. Kumail Nanjiani, from HBO's *Silicon Valley* television series, denounced the ban and its impact on Muslims in the US and abroad. “You're saying to a billion people ‘You're all the same. You're all dangerous to us.’ Children hear this. You breed evil here & everywhere.”

Actress Alyssa Milano posted a photograph of herself and a friend, Alaa Mohammad Khaled, the son of Palestinian refugees, to show solidarity with those affected by Trump's measure. Fellow actress Kerry Washington explained that she was “Sick to my stomach today about the #MuslimBan” and urged her Twitter followers to turn to the history of the *St. Louis* and “learn the awful history of US rejecting refugees.”

Pop singer Miley Ray Cyrus tweeted “Stand with immigrants,” with a graphic of the Statue of Liberty. British singer Lily Allen called the ban “a heinous heinous act.” Referring to the status of immigrants from the seven countries, *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling noted that when she worked for Amnesty International in the 1980s, “these were the kind of stories told by political prisoners in dictatorships.”

Actor George Takei (*Star Trek*) pointed to a Bloomberg News story, “Trump's Immigration Ban Excludes Countries With Business Ties.” The proposed list doesn't include “Muslim-majority countries where his Trump Organization has done business or pursued potential deals. Properties include golf courses in the United Arab Emirates and two luxury towers operating in Turkey.”

Responding to the same news story, actor and comic Patton Oswalt proposed this mock dialogue: “Dad, are we finally safe from people who come from countries where Trump has no business interests?” “Yes, sweetie. Go to sleep.”

The list of those who registered protests also includes Mark Ruffalo, Ewan McGregor, Richard Dreyfuss, Harvey Fierstein, John Leguizamo, Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Kim Kardashian West,

Ricky Gervais, Ronda Rousey, Rihanna, John Legend, Jennifer Lawrence, Michael Keaton, Patricia Arquette and Seth Rogen.

Responding to reports that Iranian director Asghar Farhadi—whose *The Salesman* is nominated in the best foreign language film category—could be prevented from attending the upcoming Academy Awards ceremony, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences released a statement: “We find it extremely troubling that Asghar Farhadi, the director of the Oscar-winning film from Iran *A Separation*, along with the cast and crew of this year's Oscar-nominated film *The Salesman*, could be barred from entering the country because of their religion or country of origin.”

Iranian actress Taraneh Alidoosti, featured in *The Salesman*, indicated through social media that she would not be attending the Academy Awards in protest. She called the travel ban on Iranians “racist.”

In a statement to the *New York Times*, Farhadi commented that Trump’s executive order was “in no way acceptable to me even if exceptions were to be made for my trip.” The filmmaker continued, “To humiliate one nation with the pretext of guarding the security of another is not a new phenomenon in history and has always laid the groundwork for the creation of future divide and enmity. I hereby express my condemnation of the unjust conditions forced upon some of my compatriots and the citizens of the other six countries trying to legally enter the United States of America and hope that the current situation will not give rise to further divide between nations.”

According to *Art Forum*, the ban may disrupt “exhibition programming, archaeological excavations, and research projects in the Middle East” for the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Director Thomas P. Campbell said, “Scholarly exchanges and international collaborations are key to our ongoing work, and we are very concerned that a number of programs we have in place could be threatened, just at a time when the world needs more, not less, exchange and mutual understanding.”

A representative of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art expressed concern about working with artists and curators from the Middle East, “as well as borrowing pieces for an upcoming exhibition of Iranian art, given the current restrictions in place.” The *Art Forum* article further noted that many artists working in the US “are also afraid to leave the country. New York-based Iranian artist Shahpour Pouyan plans to skip an exhibition opening of his work in Toronto due to fear that he won’t be allowed to return.”

Various professional athletes also denounced the executive order. US men’s national soccer team captain Michael Bradley told a *Sports Illustrated* reporter Saturday that “I truly believe the United States is a country that has always been about welcoming people from all over the world and giving them an opportunity for a better life, an opportunity they otherwise wouldn’t have.” A few hours later, interestingly, he took to social media to criticize his own earlier comments for being “too soft.”

Bradley now explained that he had “hoped that the President Trump would be different than the campaigner Trump. That the xenophobic, misogynistic and narcissistic rhetoric would be replaced with a more humble and measured approach to leading

our country. I was wrong. And the Muslim ban is just the latest example of someone who couldn’t be more out of touch with our country and the right way to move forward.”

There are some two dozen Muslim players in the National Basketball Association and the National Football League, along with several in the National Hockey League. Brooklyn Nets forward Rondae Hollis-Jefferson, a Muslim, commented, “People can say what they want, but being denied ACCESS to see your grandchild graduate or to go back to your country is inhumane.”

Detroit Pistons forward Stanley Johnson tweeted, “I’m angry that in 2017 this is our reality. We are all Americans and we ALL have power! I challenge everyone to make their voices heard in whatever way they can to fight injustice.”

Turkish-born Enes Kanter, who plays for the Oklahoma City Thunder, expressed his “disbelief” about the ban. “‘NO’ human should be discriminated for their Race, Religion or Ethnicity.”

Former NBA all-star Steve Nash commented, “Freedom and liberty packing up their things ...”

Golden State Warriors head coach Steve Kerr’s father, president of the American University of Beirut, was killed by members of the Islamic Jihad Organization in 1984. Kerr told the media that, as someone “whose family member was a victim of terrorism,” he found the travel ban “shocking and a horrible idea” and observed that “I really feel for all the people who are affected and the families that are being torn apart.” If anything, the Warriors’ coach suggested, the US government “could be breeding anger and terror.”

The widow of former college and professional football star Pat Tillman, Marie Tillman, condemned Trump’s action. Tillman, a critic of Bush administration foreign policy, was killed by “friendly fire” in Afghanistan in 2004, a fact covered up and concealed from his family for weeks.

Marie Tillman commented on Facebook: “In 2002 my husband enlisted in the US Army, he stood up to serve because he believed in the principles on which our country was founded and, recognizing it wasn’t perfect, was passionate about what it could be. Today I am deeply saddened by the news of the executive order banning immigration. This is not the country he dreamed of, not what he served for and not what he died for.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact