

# Interview: Syrian student in US separated from family by Trump's travel ban

Zac Corrigan, Kevin Martinez  
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*R is an undergraduate student at San Diego State University [SDSU] in Southern California. She was born in Syria, and is the only member of her family living in the US. Last month, President Trump signed an executive order restricting travel to and from the US for citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries. She attended a rally to defend immigrants and refugees held by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, and later met with World Socialist Web Site reporters.*

WSWS: Can you tell us your story?

R: I was born in Latakia, Syria [population 300,000], on the coast [of the Mediterranean Sea]. When I was young, my family and I moved to Dubai, because of my father's job. After high school, I applied to colleges and I got in to SDSU. So I came to the US in 2015. At that point, the war in Syria had been going on for four years.

My parents moved from Dubai to London last summer. In Dubai if you don't have a job for two months you're deported, so it wasn't very stable. But I can't go to London, because I'm not a minor and my parents can't sponsor me. I applied for a [UK] visa, but they rejected me twice, because they thought I would try to take refuge there.

So I'm here in the US on a two-year visa, which is about to expire, even though it takes four years to graduate from college. A visa allows you to leave and enter the US as you wish. They gave it to me for two years instead of four, and they said, "Just renew it!"

And now with this [executive order], I can't renew it. And my family's US visas are also canceled, according to the ban, so they can't come visit me. For now, I can legally reside in the US until 2019, but if I leave I can't come back. I can be here and continue school, but I'm separated from my family.

WSWS: So what are you going to do?

R: Well, I'm applying to colleges in Canada for next semester. But I go through stress that most 19-year-olds don't have to deal with. Just thinking, where are my parents going to be if my dad lost his job? If I get kicked out [of the US or Canada], where would I go? I would have to go back to Syria.

WSWS: What would happen if you had to go back to Syria?

R: In Syria, it's not like, "Oh, I'm gonna go back, I'm gonna start over."

My grandparents still live in Latakia. They have no electricity and no water service. They buy car batteries to charge their lights. And imagine if you need medicine! When my grandfather got sick, I had to buy medicine here, and send it to someone, who then sent it to him in Syria. He's 82! It wasn't like this before the war. It wasn't a rich city, but it didn't have the kind of poverty, violence and drug problems that it has now. There are so many homeless now. There is basically no system there.

Syrian refugees have become cheap labor. I did a research paper about Syrians working in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan—Syrians who fled through the borders and needed a job. In Lebanon, for example, there is a ban for Syrians, controlling what jobs they can have. You can't be a manager, or work in certain industries. There are people who were college professors now working as janitors. It's hard on your ego, but you have to feed your family.

A whole generation of children that were seeing all this violence, parents killed, living with bullets everyday ... They are going to have mental and emotional problems.

WSWS: How difficult is it to become a refugee in the US?

R: Well, before the ban, if you wanted to take refuge in the US, or seek political asylum, you went to a lawyer and filled out an application. And it's not cheap. You'd pay the lawyer more than \$1,000 for just one person. Then, it can take up to three years to get accepted—it depends on your language proficiency, how much money you have, and so on. After another year, you can get a green card. And then it's about four years to become a US citizen. Total, it can take 7-10 years, and it can be canceled at any moment. That's what has happened to people I know. They were years through the process when they were rejected, and they had to go back.

In the airport they now have the right to check through your phone and laptop and ask you for your social media, and go through that, and interrogate you. My friend who came back from winter break was kept for five hours at the airport. And he's Saudi, which is not one of the seven countries [banned by Trump's executive order].

I saw on the news that a Mexican man at the airport had a joke about Trump on his phone and they canceled his visa! Isn't that kind of like a dictatorship?

WSWS: Is it different for the rich?

R: What a lot of rich Syrians did is they bought passports. There has become a market for this. A passport to a safe country can cost half a million dollars or more. Or there are other ways. If you can afford to buy a house in Greece, for example, you can just become a permanent resident there.

WSWS: What do you think about the actions of the US military in Syria?

R: On the news, they're reporting that the US is supporting a revolution, for freedom and democracy! But what's happening is that they're coming in with troops, and Russia is coming in with troops. Russia has been Syria's ally and they don't want to lose any more authority to the US, like what happened in Ukraine and in Cuba. So it's a power struggle. On the ground in Syria, there is no revolution, it's US versus Russia.

The US's role ... some people say that it was a conspiracy, that there never was any revolution. That it was proven that there were agents sent in to spark this. [The official story is that] there is a war between Alawis and Sunnis. But my family is half and half. You think they're fighting all day? No.

WSWS: What do you think about the claims of

Trump that the ban on refugees and immigrants is needed to protect the US from terrorists?

R: You have to look at the facts. The US comes in with its military, and destroys the Middle East, Afghanistan, and then accuses anyone who fights against them of being a global terrorist. But when [the US] comes into the Middle East with troops and weapons, what do they get? Obama got a Nobel Peace Prize! How? He's killed and deported so many people.



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