

Judge blocks deportation of 1,400 Iraqis in temporary reprieve

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A federal judge in Detroit, Michigan has halted the deportation of more than 1,400 Iraqi immigrants who were slated for immediate deportation. The ruling came Monday as US District Judge Mark Goldsmith granted a preliminary injunction request by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to block the deportation of any Iraqi citizen who is under a final removal order.

Without warning, many of the Iraqi immigrants whose legal status remained in limbo for decades were picked up and scheduled for deportation in June. Protests against the deportation took place in Detroit following the raids.

While ICE claims they are only deporting dangerous criminals, relatives say that their family members were convicted of only minor crimes committed over decades ago and that they have already served out their sentences.

On June 15, the ACLU sued for the immediate stop of deportations, arguing that the immigrants, many Chaldean Catholics, Sunni Muslims, and Iraqi Kurds, could face persecution, torture, or death as these populations have been the victims of abuse and maltreatment in Iraq, a country that has been devastated by the ongoing 15-year occupation by US imperialism. Their deportations would violate US and international law.

In his July 24 opinion, Goldsmith ruled, “Each Petitioner faces the risk of torture or death on the basis of residence in America and publicized criminal records; many will also face persecution as a result of a particular religious affiliation.” In other words, the US government effectively sentenced the immigrants to possible death.

According to the proceedings, each detainee will now be granted a 90-day stay from the time that the government provides the detainees with two

immigration records that are required to reopen their cases: “Alien Files” and “Recording of Proceedings.” Both files can only be accessed through a Freedom of Information Act request, a process that in itself can take over five months.

The injunction will provide more time for the immigrants to find lawyers and to start building a case for their release. Despite the additional time given to the detainees, they still face hurdles and unforeseeable obstacles. Since the start of the arrests in June, ICE has been transferring detainees from one detention center to the next, often in places such as Youngstown, Ohio; Louisiana, and Arizona, hundreds of miles from their loved ones and from a lawyer that may be able to assist them.

Michael J. Steinberg, legal director of the ACLU of Michigan, paints a gloomy picture for the detainees: “Even under ordinary circumstances, it can take significant time for a family to retain a lawyer and for the lawyer to prove to an immigrant judge that an immigrant faces persecution, torture or death if deported. In this case, where Iraqi nationals have been detained in facilities thousands of miles from their homes, and where many families cannot afford lawyers, it takes even more time.”

Since 2014 more than 150,000 families have sought asylum in immigration courts. Of that number, only 30 percent have secured legal representation. For the rest, fewer than 4 percent have been granted refugees status. 26,000 people received deportation orders without having received so much as a trial.

The sudden decision to deport over 1,000 Iraqi immigrants is part of a deal the Trump administration made with the Iraqi government in March. In exchange for removal from the Trump administration’s travel ban, the Iraqi government agreed to accept deportees.

Iraq was one of seven countries banned under President Trump's initial Muslim Ban executive order, but was removed from his second ban, which is in effect today.

While Trump's large scale roundups mark an escalation from the past, they are at the same time a continuation of the policies of the Obama administration. Obama deported 2.7 million people during his term in office. In 2014, *The Guardian* revealed that in the span of only one year, nearly 100 immigrants were murdered upon arrival in Central America.

If the Iraqis are deported, they will be sent into an active war zone. Since the invasion in 2003, the US has stoked sectarian conflicts in the region, pitting Sunnis against Shias and Muslims against Christians in order to channel popular discontent along religious and ethnic lines. This process has proven particularly disastrous in Iraq's northern region, from which many Chaldeans fled. Today, the US is supporting ultra right-wing Islamic militias in Syria which have carried out atrocities against Chaldeans in both Syria and Iraq. Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, is located in northern Iraq, a short drive from Erbil, a historic center of Chaldean Christianity. The US and its Iraqi puppet forces have spent the last months laying siege to Mosul, killing at least 40,000 people in the process and turning the ancient city to rubble.

The current halt of the 1,400 Iraqis' deportations is only a temporary reprieve, and no faith should be placed in the courts. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld Trump's travel ban, stranding thousands of refugees in the war-torn Middle East.



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