

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Trump's Immigration Executive Order Partially Blocked By Judges Following Frenzied Scenes At Airports Worldwide

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Ernice Gilbert **January 29, 2017**



With the stroke of his pen on Friday afternoon, signing an executive order that barred refugees from entering the United States for 120 days, barred Syrian refugees indefinitely, and suspended entry into the United States for 90 days for citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, President Donald Trump created chaos at airports in the U.S. and around the world, as refugees -- and legitimate green card holders -- attempted to enter the U.S., only to be denied entry by Customs and Border Protection law enforcement officers, who at least once, stopped a plane headed to the U.S. and removed a family already on a flight,

advising them that they would not be allowed to travel to the mainland.

But Mr. Trump's travel ban was partially blocked late Friday by a federal judge in Brooklyn, preventing the government from deporting what had been estimated to be about 100-200 people trapped at American airports. Among those caught in the frenzy was an Iranian scientist headed to a lab in Massachusetts, and a Syrian refugee family headed to a new life in Ohio.

Judge Ann M. Donnelly of Federal District Court in Brooklyn, who was nominated by former President Barack Obama, ruled just before 9:00 p.m. that implementing Mr. Trump's order by sending the travelers home could cause them "irreparable harm." She said the government was "enjoined and restrained from, in any manner and by any means, removing individuals" who had arrived in the United States with valid visas or refugee status.

But the ruling is partial, as it does not force the Trump administration to allow the trapped refugees and green card holders into the U.S. -- leaving room for the administration to instead detain them. Lawyers with the American Civil Liberties Union (A.C.U.L.) expressed concern that their clients would remain in detention centers until February 21, the date scheduled by the judge for the next hearing.

The judge's one-page ruling came swiftly after lawyers for the A.C.L.U. testified in her courtroom that one of the people detained at an airport was being put on a plane to be deported back to Syria at that very moment.

Even so, in a statement released early Sunday morning, the Department of Homeland Security said it would continue to enforce all of the president's executive orders, even while complying with judicial decisions. "Prohibited travel will remain prohibited," reads the statement. It said the directive was "a first step towards re-establishing control over America's borders and national security."

The instant chaos caused by the order was also the springboard for instant protests around the U.S., the most pronounced being a massive gathering at the John F. Kennedy International Airport in Queens New York, where protesters stayed for hours demanding the release of the refugees and green card holders, and where they also rejoiced following the judge's ruling.

Moments after the judge's ruling in New York City, another judge, Leonie M. Brinkema of Federal District Court in Virginia, issued a temporary restraining order for a week to block the removal of any green card holders being detained at Dulles International Airport -- a decision prompted by more court action against the Trump order.

The scenes that played out across America caused more harm than had anticipated. There were reports of students attending American universities who were blocked from returning to the United States from visits abroad. According to the New York Times, one student said in a Twitter post that he would be unable to study at Yale. Another who attends the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was refused permission to board a plane. A Sudanese graduate student at Stanford University was blocked for hours from entering the country.

In Washington, at an event witnessing the signing of three more executive actions on Saturday from Mr. Trump -- a five-year lobbying ban, reorganization of the National Security Council, and a plan to defeat the Islamic State -- the president responded to questions regarding the immigration ban; he defended the decision by stating that it was working as planned.

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"It's not a Muslim ban, but we were totally prepared. It's working out very nicely. You see it at the airports, you see it all over," Trump said at the White House.

Homeland Security officials said on Saturday night that 109 people who were already in transit to the United States when the order was signed were denied access; 173 were stopped before boarding planes heading to America. Eighty-one people who were stopped were eventually given waivers to enter the United States, officials said.