

Center for the Victims of Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2020/04/28/trump-plays-politics-coronavirus-immigration-2020-campaign-column/3030329001/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

President Donald Trump is once again using immigration as political theater, issuing an [executive order to suspend entry to the United States](#) for certain classes of new immigrants in an appeal to fear. The order builds upon similar recent actions the president has taken, including closing the southern and northern borders to nonresidents during the coronavirus pandemic, halting the refugee admissions program, and imposing country- and region-specific travel bans.

He has defended each of these steps as necessary to protect Americans health or jobs as the death toll from COVID-19 rises and the stock market falls. While the president and his advisers may believe that's a smart political tactic to convince his base he's doing something to protect Americans, it simply isn't true.

The cruel irony of his actions now is that immigrants of all stripes including thousands of torture survivors, many of whose wounds have not healed are disproportionately on the front lines providing all of us with essential services, often at tremendous personal risk.

Immigrants are more likely to work in the very jobs we depend on at this perilous moment. Nearly 30% of doctors and 40% of health aides in the [United States are foreign born](#), and immigrants disproportionately work in the service or food industries that keep us fed during this crisis. They are also becoming sick and dying in alarming numbers to do so.

A 5-year-old died from the coronavirus: [It's important you know her story, and so many more](#)

The president said he issued the executive order as a [solemn duty](#) to ensure (that) unemployed Americans regain their jobs and their livelihoods.

But implicit in the exemptions stated in the order is an acknowledgment that we desperately need foreign scientists, doctors, nurses, entrepreneurs and armed service members and their families, as well as those needed to perform medical research or other research intended to combat the spread of COVID-19; or to perform work essential to combating, recovering from, or otherwise [alleviating the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak](#).

Although the president's executive order is ostensibly temporary, he has made it clear he may extend it much longer. Moreover, even before the pandemic, he had eviscerated U.S. asylum policy, [reduced refugee admissions](#) from 110,000 several years ago to 18,000 for this fiscal year, and enacted his odious Muslim and related bans.

Why are we turning away refugees, asylum seekers and other immigrants rather than adopting sensible measures recommended by experienced [public health experts](#), like screening and quarantining (only to the extent permissible under international law, and with the safeguards it requires)? Especially when COVID-19 has already spread through the United States, turning people away doesn't make anyone safer.

Worse yet, it violates longstanding international human rights and refugee protection standards. People who are forced to flee conflict and persecution should not be denied safety and protection [on the pretext, or even as a side effect, of responding to the virus](#). Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, reiterated last week.

The damage that the president is inflicting goes beyond those directly impacted and manifests in ways that further endanger all Americans. Torture survivors receiving rehabilitation services at the Center for Victims of Torture are increasingly scared, as much by the president's rhetoric as the policies themselves. These are people who have endured unimaginable brutality at the hands of dictators, terrorists and other oppressors often for representing quintessentially American ideals and are still recovering from the profound physical and psychological consequences of their torture.

People are in need: [My morning working in a food distribution line shows the COVID-19 impact on America](#)

The climate of fear that the president has created is exacerbating [survivors symptoms](#), which often include depression, anxiety, nightmares about their experiences, and post-traumatic stress disorder. When the symptoms become acute, they can be debilitating.

If the president were serious about protecting public and economic health, he'd be looking for ways to support these brave men and women and so many other immigrants like them who have brought new meaning to the concept of giving back. Instead, he's playing politics with COVID-19 to prove, as November approaches, that he's still committed to scapegoating them. We all deserve better.

Linda Chavez, director of the [Becoming American Initiative](#), was director of the Office of Public Liaison in the Reagan White House. She

is the author of [Out of the Barrio: Toward a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation](#) and founder and chair of the Center For Equal Opportunity, a conservative think tank. Scott Roehm runs the Washington, D.C., office for the [Center for Victims of Torture](#). He previously served as vice president of programs and policy at the Constitution Project.