

# Center for Constitutional Rights

## Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://ccrjustice.org/hany-ibrahim>

### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Hany Ibrahim

Hany Ibrahim is one of the original plaintiffs in [Ziglar v. Abbasi](#) (formerly *Turkmen v. Ashcroft*), a lawsuit filed in 2002 on behalf of a class of Muslim, South Asian, and Arab non-citizens swept up in connection with the 9/11 investigation. From October 2001 to May 2002, Hany was detained at the Metropolitan Detention Center (MDC) in Brooklyn, New York, where he was held in harsh and punishing solitary confinement in the Administrative Maximum Special Housing Unit (ADMAX SHU). Like nearly a hundred other men, Hany was detained as a "terrorism suspect" based solely on his race, religion, ethnicity, and immigration status, and abused in brutal detention conditions for the many months it took the FBI and CIA to clear him of any connection to terrorism.

In January 2001, Hany entered the U.S. on a tourist visa along with his older brother Yasser. They shared an apartment in Brooklyn with several friends from Egypt and Morocco. Hany reflects positively on his time in the U.S., The United States is the best place I have ever lived, especially New York City where I had too many sweet memories: the neighborhoods, the loving people, and my friends. I wanted to be able to see everything. I visited all the different tourist attractions like the State of Liberty. I enjoyed long walks in the streets of Manhattan.

Hany's idyllic life changed on September 30, 2001, when FBI and INS agents visited the apartment that he shared with Yasser and their friends. The agents interrogated the men asking them questions about their immigration status and terrorist activity in the United States. They all denied any involvement in the September 11th terrorist attacks or any other terrorist activity. When the interrogation was over, the agents arrested Hany, Yasser, and an Egyptian roommate, and denied their request to call an attorney. Without their consent, the agents conducted a search of the apartment, seizing personal belongings. They were taken to the Varick Street immigration facility in Manhattan, where they were questioned again. Hany and Yasser were held for approximately 24 hours at the INS facility in Manhattan.

Hany has described how it felt to be targeted by the U.S. government because of his race and his religion: At first I did not expect or even imagine that this could happen to me; it was a big shock to me. Even after my arrest I believed that it would take a day or two because I was innocent. To me the biggest shock was that I was detained because I was a Muslim. It was a very sad feeling. Before all that happened, I never felt any racism or persecution from the American people who I believe are better than that.

On October 1, 2001, Hany and Yasser were taken to MDC in handcuffs, chains, and shackles.

When they arrived, they were fingerprinted, strip searched, and given orange jumpsuits to wear. They were escorted to the Special Housing Unit on the ninth floor, had their heads repeatedly slammed into the wall and called "Fucking Muslims" and "terrorists" along the way. When Hany tried to explain that they were just there on immigration charges, one guard told him to shut up, stating that If you open your mouth, I will crush you under the elevator, just like at the World Trade Center. Hany was subjected to frequent physical and verbal abuse, including ethnic and anti-Muslim slurs, during his time in MDC. He was denied access to the outside world, arbitrarily and abusively strip-searched, subjected to sleep deprivation and interference with his religious practice, denied basic personal items like soap and toilet paper, and deprived of adequate food. The FBI never developed any evidence to tie Hany to any terrorist activity, or indicate that he might be dangerous. His identity as a Muslim from Egypt was the only reason he was suspected of a connection to terrorism.

In February, Hany was moved without explanation from the punishing conditions in the ADMAX SHU to a general population unit, where conditions were much less harsh. Although the change was a relief, Hany worried constantly about his brother, who was now in solitary confinement in the ADMAX SHU. They were unable to see each other, but allowed to write letters back and forth, passed by prison guards.

My detention is one of the worst times in my life, all of what I believed the US to be changed. I used to believe that America was the role model for democracy. I had the worst treatment from the guards. I have seen all the values of freedom and human rights violated just because I was an Arab and Muslim, Hany recalls about his time in MDC.

Hany was finally released and deported on May 29, 2002. He and his brother faced many hardships when they returned to Egypt, where the stigma of detention followed them. He was questioned extensively by Egyptian security officials who had trouble understanding how they could have been detained for such a long time without charge by the U.S. He suffered from serious depression and could not sleep for days, and found it hard to leave his home and talk to family and friends. With time, Hany has been able to rebuild his life. Things are much better now, he says. He is married and has a daughter.

In 2009, Hany and four other plaintiffs reached a monetary settlement with the government. To continue the work of holding high-level officials accountable, CCR filed an amended complaint with additional plaintiffs, and the case remains pending.

This lawsuit is very important to me because I want to see the America that I used to know before; the land of freedoms and democracy. I hope there will be no discrimination because of race, religion, or origins.

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