

# Human Rights First

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

<https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/al-chang-veteran>

### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Work With Asylum Seekers

If you are seeking asylum, we can help

Areas of Focus

Current Initiatives

[When veterans serve](#), they do so without regard to race, gender, creed, or religion. Veterans are as diverse as America itself but if there is one thing that unites them all: the unwavering commitment to defending the dignity and freedoms of all people. For many veterans, that commitment starts with the close bonds formed with the interpreters and translators who serve at their side during wartime.

Meet Al Chang, a U.S. Air Force veteran, a first generation Korean-American, and Columbia University student.

Al served overseas with Nadi, an Afghan man who helped his unit gather intelligence on impending threats and attacks. Over time, their relationship evolved into a real friendship. The pair worked hand-in-hand until it was time for Al's unit to return to the United States, an eventuality they had both known would come, but that neither was prepared to face.

I walked up to him, and he had a sullen expression on his face, recalls Al. He sat there expressionless. He said he saw on the television that America will leave. I'm scared, he said because when you do, the Taliban will come back, and they will execute my family. I still get chills down my spine just recollecting those words.

Al is a now veteran leader. He's the president of the [Columbia University Military Veterans](#), and he's an outspoken advocate for the allies who face grave danger because of their service to our country.

I think the military is a family, and I don't think the lines of that brotherhood are necessarily demarcated by ethnic or agency affiliation, says Chang. It is incredibly important to embrace refugees, and in particular through the SIV (special Immigrant Visa) program. It is ultimately they who have to remain in that environment, completely out in the open after having taken immense risk on behalf of us.

For Al, helping the most vulnerable U.S. allies resettle in the United States is not only strategically and morally important; it strengthens the nation and swells its ranks with the next generation of citizens eager to serve their nation and their communities. Chang speaks from experience. My parents were immigrants from an underdeveloped part of Korea he says, and it's only because they made those sacrifices as immigrants here in America that I had this opportunity to attend Columbia and have these doors of social mobility open to me. I truly don't believe it would be possible in any other nation.

In the fight to aid our wartime allies like Nadi and thousands of others, Al and other veterans face an uphill battle. The [recent presidential executive order on refugees and immigrants](#) has severely [undercut the refugee program used to aid our Iraqi allies](#), and the fate of the effort to aid our Afghan allies through the Special Immigrant Visa program [is uncertain](#).

[Veterans for American Ideals](#), a project of Human Rights First, empowers veterans to challenge the United States to live up to the ideals that inspired them to serve in the first place. We are focused on protecting refugees, preserving the Special Immigrant Visa program for interpreters and translators who served U.S. forces, and countering anti-Muslim bigotry.

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Reports

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