

REFUGEES IN GEORGIA; Syrian family finds 'a future' in Georgia

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
July 31, 2017 Monday, Main Edition

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
ajc.com

Section: NEWS; Pg. 1A

Length: 2008 words

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Body

Nawroz Youssef and her Kurdish **family** made a break for it four years ago after the Islamic State invaded their village in northern Syria, destroyed its mosque and started executing people one by one, some with a sword. A neighbor and one of her father's cousins were among the victims amid Syria's brutal civil war, a humanitarian crisis that has plunged the country into darkness and deprivation.

Youssef, a birdlike girl with brown eyes and a soft voice, was held hostage along with her **family** for a day before the terrorists let them go. They fled to Turkey. Her older brother, Alan, suffers from cerebral palsy and cannot walk. So her father carried him for three days.

Now 12 years old, Nawroz is thriving in Decatur. A straight-A student who is quickly mastering English, she was recently granted admission to the Paideia School, a prestigious independent school in Druid Hills. She wants to become a doctor. Her father, Taha, is getting help for the post-traumatic stress disorder he developed after witnessing the atrocities in his hometown. And her older brother is receiving physical therapy, the kind of help he couldn't get during the war.

None of this would be possible if the **family** were to attempt to resettle in the U.S. under the restrictions the Trump administration has been enforcing as part of its travel ban, a measure it says is necessary to ensure national security. Nawroz and her **family** arrived in **Georgia** two years ago without having a "close familial relationship" here. **Refugees** must have such relationships here before they may resettle in this country, the Trump administration argues as part of its interpretation of a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling.

A federal judge in Hawaii issued an order July 13 to expand the exemptions in the travel ban for **refugees**, favoring those who have been given a "formal assurance" from a resettlement agency. Nawroz's **family** came to the U.S. with the help of a **refugee** resettlement organization in Atlanta. But the Supreme Court has put the Hawaii judge's ruling on hold, pending a decision by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

It's unclear how many **refugees** could be turned away as part of Trump's directive. But as of June 30, there were 26,353 from around the world who had been vetted and were waiting to resettle in the U.S., according to Baltimore-based Lutheran Immigration and **Refugee** Service, which cited U.S. State Department figures. **Refugee** advocates

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are suing to halt the travel ban. The Supreme Court is expected to hear challenges to the executive order in October.

Meanwhile, Nawroz is missing her home, school and friends in Syria, even her family's herd of sheep. But she is glad to be out of harm's way, going back to school and learning English in the United States. Fellow refugees, humanitarian workers and others have rallied around her family in Georgia.

"I have a future," she said. "I have friends. And so I love America a lot."

Safety and the rule of law

Last month, the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated key parts of Trump's revised travel ban while agreeing to hear legal challenges to his executive order. In its ruling, the high court partially granted the Trump administration's request to lift preliminary injunctions against the directive and let it block visitors from six

Muslim-majority countries for 90 days, freeze the nation's refugee resettlement program for 120 days and limit the number of refugees who may be brought here this fiscal year to 50,000, down from about 85,000 the year before. (The 50,000-cap has already been reached for this year.)

But the court said those restrictions cannot be applied to people with a "bona fide relationship with a person or entity in the United States." The court also used the phrase "close familial relationship." The Trump administration has defined that to include parents, fiancés, spouses and children. In the ruling he issued this month, U.S. District Judge Derrick Watson, a President Barack Obama appointee, ordered the exemptions to also apply to grandparents, grandchildren, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and cousins in the U.S. The Supreme Court has sided with Watson on this part of his ruling.

During the court battles over his executive order, Trump argued he has the legal authority to restrict immigration as president. The high court agreed to a point, saying in its ruling that "the balance tips in favor of the government's compelling need to provide for the nation's security."

Trump has said his travel ban is meant to give his administration time to tighten up its screening process for visitors and to protect the United States from terrorist attacks. But refugees, advocates say, receive the most thorough screenings of any travelers to the United States. The vetting process for Nawroz's family, for example, took nearly two years. Critics also say Trump has so far failed to demonstrate how his travel ban could make the U.S. safer.

In his March 6 executive order, Trump said more than 300 people who have been admitted to the U.S. as refugees were the subjects of counterterrorism probes by the FBI. Trump administration officials have declined to identify their native countries or their immigration status, though they said they came from around the world and that some could now be lawful permanent residents or naturalized U.S. citizens. The FBI declined to comment.

But since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, no one in the U.S. has been killed by extremists with family backgrounds in the six countries covered by the travel ban, according to a report published in January by Charles Kurzman, a sociology professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a specialist in Islamic movements. The Cato Institute, a libertarian group based in Washington, released a report the same month that says no one from those six countries killed any Americans in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil between 1975 and 2015.

Jim Jess, a north Cobb County resident and the vice chairman of the Georgia Tea Party Inc., said there are other things at stake beyond national security, such as upholding the rule of law. Like Trump, Jess believes the president has the power to temporarily restrict travel to the United States.

"The whole thing with bringing people here -- I would rather see them create safe zones in their countries," said Jess, a magazine editor who voted for Trump. "Yeah, we want to be welcoming to other people in the world. But does that mean we have to assume the burden for every nation that has a problem?"

"Syria is a chaotic nation," he continued. "It is a failed state, if you will. They really need to solve their own problems over there. And we can certainly assist them in that. The idea of a no-fly zone -- a safe zone for refugees -- that

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would make a whole lot more sense than trying to disperse those people to other countries. And in doing that you also safeguard countries from terrorist threats."

Wheels for Alan

Nawroz's mother, Hayat Ibrahim, recently prepared a generous smorgasbord in their modest Decatur apartment. On her dining room table she set out a large dish of rice sprinkled with roasted cashews, plates of hummus garnished with tomatoes and parsley, and a platter of juicy baked chicken. The meal signaled her family's deep gratitude. Their guests had just arrived with an important gift: a donated car. Just outside their door was parked a shiny black 2013 Hyundai Sonata. It will help them get Alan to his physical therapy sessions.

A freelance journalist and a pair of former refugees from Syria and Bosnia raised more than \$8,000 for the car through a GoFundMe online account. Smiling broadly, Alan and his siblings and parents took turns inspecting the sedan and imagining themselves riding in it.

The gift represents another example of how the Atlanta region has embraced them. The family is also giving back. Hayat cooked food for an April event in Clarkston that brought Syrian refugees and U.S. military veterans together to foster understanding. She also prepares meals for sick people in her community. Nawroz, who speaks Kurdish, Arabic and Turkish, helps fellow refugees fill out application forms for medical care and interprets for them as they hunt for apartments and shop for groceries.

Her father, Taha, a farmer who has twinkling eyes and who limps from a gunshot wound inflicted by the Bashar Assad regime, marveled at the generosity of the guests who had gathered in his home. He poured them hot chai from a silver kettle and gestured to a small U.S. flag that sits by his front door.

"I feel welcome all the time," he said. "I'm so happy."

Those who could be turned away

Atlanta-area refugee resettlement agencies are now scrambling to figure out how the travel ban will affect their clients -- and their budgets. Each year, they help resettle in Georgia several thousand refugees fleeing persecution from around the world.

New American Pathways, which resettled Nawroz's family, has been expecting 109 refugees through Sept. 30 from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia and Syria. Before the federal judge in Hawaii issued his order and the Supreme Court responded, the agency was preparing for that number to fall substantially. Also before those court decisions, officials at World Relief Atlanta and Lutheran Services of Georgia said dozens of their clients from around the world would not be able to resettle in the state this fiscal year because of the way the Trump administration was enforcing the travel ban.

Emily Walters Laney, the director of refugee and immigration services for Lutheran Services of Georgia, said in a July 6 email that her agency stood to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding if the government's travel restrictions were upheld. Her agency, she added, "has not filled vacant positions and laid off several staff earlier in the year, and more cuts will likely come prior to the end of this ban."

"Another implication to consider is our employers," she said. "We have multiple employers who call us frequently with openings for our clients. With no refugees arriving (or very few), this could have impacts on the employers we work with as well, which impacts several industries in the Atlanta and Savannah areas."

Becoming American Peer inside Nawroz's tidy

room and you won't see any hints of the horrors her family experienced in Syria's civil war, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions of others. Instead, there hanging on her walls are her bright crayon drawings of Santa Claus, Christmas trees and Thanksgiving scenes. Another depicts butterflies floating in the air alongside a girl closely resembling Nawroz in a long pink dress.

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Hoping to one day become U.S. citizens, Nawroz and her **family** have already embraced the culture. One of her **family**'s favorite games -- Jenga -- sits boxed up in her room. Nawroz is reading the first book in the "Harry Potter" fantasy novel series. Some **family** friends recently brought her and her older sister, Randa, to an Atlanta United soccer game at **Georgia** Tech. They fondly remember how the fans excitedly gave each other high-fives and chanted "A-T-L!"

Nawroz shares her room with Randa, 17, who supported the family in Turkey by working long hours at a garment factory. Alan, 15, sleeps in the same room. Their three narrow twin beds are lined up next to each other. Nawroz climbed atop one and chatted about her future.

Alan, she said, has inspired her to want to become a doctor and help children. So has Dr. Heval Kelli, a fellow Kurd who came to **Georgia** as a **refugee** from Syria and worked his way up from washing dishes at a local Mediterranean restaurant to serving as a cardiology fellow at Emory University. Kelli cares for Nawroz's father and joined several others in helping raise money for their **family** car.

"I'm so happy in America," Nawroz said.

"And I am thanking all of the people who are

in America that are helping us. Thank you for welcoming us to America."

(Box)

Check out a video to learn more details about the Trump administration's travel restrictions at myAJC.com.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspapers

Subject: ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAQ & THE LEVANT (90%); **REFUGEES** (89%); SUPREME COURTS (88%); RESETTLEMENT & REPATRIATION (87%); DECISIONS & RULINGS (86%); LAW COURTS & TRIBUNALS (85%); MUSLIMS & ISLAM (78%); RELIGION (78%); SYRIAN CRISIS (78%); TERRORISM (77%); POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (76%); CIVIL WAR (76%); HOSTAGE TAKING (71%); NATIONAL SECURITY (70%); PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS (69%); STATE DEPARTMENTS & FOREIGN SERVICES (69%); CEREBRAL PALSY (69%); EXECUTIVE ORDERS (67%); APPEALS (67%); APPELLATE DECISIONS (67%); JUDGES (67%); LITIGATION (67%); SUITS & CLAIMS (64%); IMMIGRATION (63%); APPEALS COURTS (62%); PHYSICAL THERAPY (52%)

Industry: TRAVEL BANS (86%)

Geographic: ATLANTA, GA, USA (72%); HAWAII, USA (92%); **GEORGIA**, USA (79%); MARYLAND, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (95%); SYRIA (93%); TURKEY (79%)

Load-Date: July 31, 2017

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