

WAR ON TERRORISM: Yemeni passenger claims racial profiling at Hartsfield

GSU student detained under new U.S. policy

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
June 14, 2002 Friday, Home Edition

Copyright 2002 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
ajc.com

Section: News;

Length: 1033 words

Byline: DAN CHAPMAN

Body

A citizen of Yemen living in Atlanta said Thursday she was a victim of **racial profiling** at **Hartsfield** International Airport as a result of the Bush administration's latest anti-**terrorism policy**.

Rasha Yaqoub, a **student** at Georgia State University, said she was **detained** Monday for more than an hour at **Hartsfield** simply because she's from Yemen, a largely Muslim country in the Middle East.

Yaqoub said she was treated poorly by immigration and customs officials, was never told why she was being held and felt humiliated and threatened.

She wants an official apology from airport officials.
AJC

"They shouldn't **profile** or search certain races," Yaqoub, 24, said in an interview at her downtown Atlanta apartment. "Not all of the people are the same. Because I'm **Yemeni** doesn't mean I'm a criminal."

Immigration and Naturalization Service officials reviewed Yaqoub's allegations and determined the agency's conduct was appropriate. (Customs officials in Atlanta, Miami and Washington couldn't be reached for comment Thursday.) They deny that they single out people based on race.

Immigration and customs officers at **Hartsfield** are simply following a directive from Washington, issued last Friday, which compels them to more readily question Yemenis and search their baggage.

The INS has ordered its field agents to closely scrutinize Yemenis entering and leaving the **United States**. **U.S.** officials confirmed this week that an apartment in **New** York that once was occupied by **Yemeni** nationals contained bomb-making equipment.

"We have to remember that we are at **war** against **terrorism** and we will do what we need to do to prevent another attack in this country," said Bill Strassberger, an INS spokesman in Washington. "When we do receive information, we have to act upon it."

WAR ON TERRORISM: Yemeni passenger claims racial profiling at Hartsfield ;GSU student detained under new U.S. policy

The singling-out of Yemenis is believed to be the first time since the Sept. 11 attacks that a specific country has been targeted for heightened scrutiny.

The INS has also asked commercial and charter airlines to notify the agency whenever Yemenis are on board. In a memorandum, the INS warned all agents to be on the lookout for thermoses --- but not to open them --- and night vision goggles.

Six Yemeni adults and four children en route to a wedding in Yemen were briefly detained at Hartsfield last Friday, according to a Justice Department source. They are believed to be some of the first Yemenis held under the stringent new policy, which was decried by civil libertarians and Arab-Americans.

Yemenis targeted?

Samir Moukaddam, regional director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, said the singling-out of Yemenis makes little sense in light of the arrests of the "dirty bomber," who's s American, and the "shoe bomber," a British citizen. Hassling Yaqoub makes even less sense, he said.

"This is pure intimidation, without warning, of a young woman student," Moukaddam said. "They are ethnically profiling her on the basis of the passport she's carrying."

The Yemeni Embassy in Washington has lodged a protest with officials in Washington and Atlanta on Yaqoub's behalf, as well as against the Bush administration's policy.

Yaqoub, a GSU student since 1999, described how she was treated soon after arriving from London around 6 p.m. Monday.

All passengers were asked, before debarking, to open their passports for inspection by INS agents waiting atop the gangway. After seeing Yaqoub's Yemeni passport, an agent asked her to wait off to the side.

Once all passengers had left the plane, Yaqoub said, she was escorted to an immigration officer. Her passport was handed over. She was asked a series of questions --- Where do you go to school? When will you graduate? What is your major? Where do you live? Who do you live with? --- before her student visa was stamped.

Her passport and visa forms were then placed in an orange folder and Yaqoub was told to take a seat. After five minutes, she asked to go to the bathroom.

"They took me to a cell and told me I couldn't take my purse in with me," she said. "I got so scared because it was all steel: the toilet, water fountain, steel bench with rings on it I think for handcuffs. That's s when I started crying."

She didn't go to the bathroom.

Yaqoub was returned to the front desk, where she was again asked the same set of questions. In all, four immigration and customs officers asked her similar questions, trying, Yaqoub believes, to trip her up.

At customs, her purse was thoroughly searched. She was then finger-printed. Her passport was copied and kept. Yaqoub said another agent then questioned whether she was really attending a university. "Like he thinks I'm a liar," she said.

She was soon told to fetch her luggage. Four officers, two in front, two behind, escorted her to the baggage carousel. Her bag was meticulously searched by another official who also went through her purse again. Her passport was soon returned. Yaqoub was thanked for her patience and allowed to leave. It was after 7 p.m.

"I didn't complain or anything. I was scared that if I asked questions, it would make me more suspicious," she said. "I shouldn't be treated like that. My papers are fine."

Nothing done 'inappropriate'

WAR ON TERRORISM: Yemeni passenger claims racial profiling at Hartsfield ;GSU student detained under new U.S. policy

Willie Anderson, INS port director at Hartsfield, investigated Yaqoub's claims and found them mostly baseless. He said Yaqoub was detained no longer than 15 minutes before she was cleared for customs, "where she spent the majority of her time."

Anderson wouldn't comment on whether Yaqoub was finger-printed or had her passport copied. He said there are no bathrooms "in the immigration hallway." And, he added, racial profiling does not exist under his watch, so no apology is necessary.

"We did not do anything inappropriate with the young lady," he said.

The Bush administration instituted its new directive at a time when it is seeking closer ties with the Arab states in the war against terrorism.

Yemen, a poor country of 18 million people sandwiched between Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Sea, condemned the Sept. 11 attacks.

U.S. officials believe al-Qaida operatives were behind the October 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Yemen's port of Aden, killing 17 people.

Graphic

Photo: Rasha Yaqoub, 24, a Georgia State student, says she was searched and questioned by four immigration officers after landing at Hartsfield International Airport. / BITA HONARVAR / Staff

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); EXCISE & CUSTOMS (90%); ARAB AMERICANS (89%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (89%); TERRORISM (89%); BOMBINGS (89%); CIVIL RIGHTS (78%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); RACIAL PROFILING (78%); RACE & ETHNICITY (78%); DISCRIMINATION (78%); WAR ON TERROR (78%); ARRESTS (78%); POLICE MISCONDUCT (78%); SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACK (77%); BOMBS & EXPLOSIVE DEVICES (77%); COUNTERTERRORISM (72%); DIRTY BOMBS (72%); MUSLIMS & ISLAM (71%); JUSTICE DEPARTMENTS (71%); INTERVIEWS (70%)

Company: GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY (91%); GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY (84%)

Organization: GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY (91%); GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY (84%)

Industry: AIRPORTS (89%); AIRLINES (78%); AIRPORT OPERATION (78%); AIR CHARTER SERVICES (73%); NIGHT VISION DEVICES (50%)

Geographic: ATLANTA, GA, USA (93%); NEW YORK, USA (79%); GEORGIA, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (97%); YEMEN (96%); MIDDLE EAST (79%)

WAR ON TERRORISM: Yemeni passenger claims racial profiling at Hartsfield ;GSU student detained under new U.S. policy

Load-Date: June 14, 2002

End of Document