

ONE YEAR LATER ... It's hard to believe it has been one year since I was deported from the United States. On January 29th 2018 I was taken out of my cell early in the morning, driven from Youngstown to Cleveland, where I stayed in another cell at the ICE headquarters for 3 hours. From there they took me to the Cleveland Airport on a flight to Chicago and from Chicago to Amman, Jordan, after almost 40 years of being in the United States of America.

The question that remains is why was I deported? Why did this happen to me? And why does it continue to happen to so many immigrants? I do believe it has nothing to do with upholding any system of "laws" as ICE or the Trump Administration might want us to believe. It has much more to do with the fulfillment of promises that Trump made to his constituency. He told them that he would "fix" the immigration "problem" in this country. Whenever I hear people talking about immigration as a problem, I am confused. Immigrants are what make up the United States of America. From Donald Trump himself, to his wife, to everyone who holds an American passport, somewhere down the line, your existence here in this country originated from an immigrant. Unless you are Native American. Therefore, to be against immigrants is essentially to be against what the United States really is. To be against immigrants is to be against the United States.

I had been fighting a battle with immigration since before Donald Trump, but after Trump, ICE became much more aggressive. He gave them a lot more space to move and be authoritative, and actually violate the law rather than enforce it. Whatever it took to show dominance rather than governance. This is clearly illustrated by the absurdity of events that happened in my particular case. If you all remember, my wife and I purchased a ticket to leave the U.S. on January 7th 2018, a voluntary departure on my part. However, ICE called me on January 6th to inform me I didn't have to leave. Then on January 16 they ambushed me, locked me up for two weeks and deported me on the 29th of January 2018. This was done purely because it was a high profile case. The media was very interested and there was a lot of publicity around it. It was a stunt, a kind of message sent to the American people from Trump and ICE that they would be ruthless in the execution of their "policies."

As you read this, tens of thousands of families are being split apart due to the insane and inhumane state of immigration in this country. The news is filled with talk about this border wall, which would be built with taxpayer money, and which has no real meaning or purpose whatsoever, aside from instigating white nationalist support in the name of control for the administration. We must realize what is going on and we must do better.

On a lighter note, I also want to thank everyone for the tremendous amount of support that my family and I received from the Youngstown community, from the Cleveland community and from all over the United States and the world. Finding the right words is difficult because it has meant so much to me. Big and warm thank you to my outstanding lawyer David Leopold, Congressman Tim Ryan, to Mayor Tito Brown, to the members of City Counsel and to Tracey Winbush. To the hundreds and thousands of people who stood and showed their support through demonstrations in the street or by putting on events in local churches and community centers, or by speaking to the media. Especially those special letters I received from my cell. Thank you to our community for really coming together. It was really the silver lining of the nightmare.

Finally, I am in Amman, Jordan right now. My life has changed tremendously since last year. Many things were lost or broken or split apart, but my wife and I are here. We're in good shape, in good spirits, and we continue to receive a lot of support even from from here. One of the major things that happened was the wedding of my daughter Lina. Many people, family and friends, came from the US and other parts of the world to celebrate with us and we all had a fantastic reunion together.

You know, not a day has gone by that I don't think about the thousands and thousands of people in the U.S. who going through the same thing I've gone through. They need the support of each and every one of you now more than ever. Please don't give up.

Sending love,  
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