



Ismail Alghazali's Oral Statement as Prepared

Joint Congressional Hearing: Oversight of the Trump Administration's Muslim Ban – September 24, 2019

Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship and Committee on Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Joint Hearing

My name is Ismail Alghazali. I live in New York City, the greatest city in the world.

I work at a bodega — a small neighborhood market—in Brooklyn. This work doesn't make me rich, but I love it because I get to meet so many people — people of all races and all religions.

When anyone comes to the store, I want to take care of them. And I know all my regular customers by name.

Today, I'm here to tell you the story of my family: my wonderful wife, Hend and our two beautiful children. Khaled, my son who is a year and a half old, and my newborn daughter, Rahf.

I've never even met my daughter.

I have never held her in my arms.

I've only seen her through photos and videos.

I do not have words to describe the love that I carry in my heart for my wife and my kids. It hurts me so much that it's now been more than a year since I've seen my family.

Hend, Khaled, Rahf and I were separated from each other by thousands of miles because of the Muslim Ban.

I knew I wanted to marry Hend right away after I met her. We fell in love and got married in Yemen before our families and friends in 2013.

Hend has the best heart. She wants to take care of people. In fact, she wants to become a nurse. She can't do this in Yemen. But she can pursue her dreams in America.

We had just been married but I had to leave Hend behind and go back to America.

I had to feed my family. My job was back in New York. And I needed to be in the US to apply for my family to join me.

In my heart, I felt that we would be together in America soon. I am a U.S. citizen. We were married.

What could go wrong?

After the first visa interview in New York, I returned to Yemen to be with Hend.

After 2 long years of waiting, the date for our immigration interview had finally arrived. My friends and coworkers loaned me the money I needed for the trip.

Together, we travelled to Djibouti for the interview. When we arrived, Hend was eight months pregnant with our son. Her pregnancy had been difficult. Doctors had discovered she had a heart condition.

We knew that the Muslim Ban stopped Yemenis from entering the US. But it also allows waivers for family members of U.S. citizens.

Hend should have been eligible for a waiver - I'm a U.S. citizen, she's my wife and she needs medical care for a serious health condition.

But, the interview did not go as we expected. Our meeting did not even last five minutes. They returned Hend's passport and they said that her visa had been denied because of the Muslim Ban.

Even though Hend was my wife, we were not eligible for a waiver.

We were stuck in Djibouti. I was not able to work there. The money I borrowed was running out. I was not sure what to do next.

Hend went into labor late one night.

For most couples, this is a happy occasion.

For us, it was the scariest experience of my life.

It took me 30 minutes to find a cab while my wife was in pain.

Hend's contractions were coming faster and faster. We were 5 minutes away from the hospital but there was no time left.

Hend gave birth to our son, Khaled, in the back of that cab.

I'll never forget that night and how hopeless I felt.

I stayed as long as I could - I had ten months to be with my family. But I had to go back to New York and provide for them. And Hend was expecting our second child.

Leaving them behind again was more painful than I could have imagined.

In April of this year, my wife gave birth to our daughter, Rahf, in Yemen and it broke my heart that I wasn't there for her.

Now, I have been asked to come back and reinterview for the waiver.

I still have hope that we will be together again as a family here.

I will show my family New York City.

Hend will become a nurse.

My son and daughter will go to school and pursue their own dreams.

I pray that you will find it in your hearts to allow families like mine to be together.

Please end this ban. Thank you.