

Letter to President Englert and Provost Epps

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January 31, 2017

Dear President Englert and Provost Epps,

We, faculty of Temple University, call on you as President and Provost of the University formally to denounce the Executive Order banning the entry of all nationals from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Libya and Somalia. This order is racist in targeting nations with majority Muslim populations. It is inhumane in refusing to aid refugees from desperately war-torn conditions, which the United States has had a hand in creating. The ban is already restricting the travel of individuals in this country as well as those stopped at the borders; it will tear apart families; and it is terrorizing Muslim-American communities, who know they are being stigmatized, racially profiled, and identified as potential terrorists.

We are asking you to take a public stand because this executive order is also an assault on all institutions of higher education. It drastically curtails our ability to do our work as teachers, students, researchers, and scholars in every academic field. Temple has taken leadership in the area of global studies and in assuring a curriculum with an international component, not to mention our emphasis on study abroad programs across the world. This ban will diminish the university as a site of international cooperation and will compromise the transnational production of knowledge. Under this ban, international students, faculty, staff and researchers will be excluded from our campuses, and some will be stranded away from their families. We will be hampered in convening international conferences, hosting international fellowships, and conducting collaborative research. The ban will have terrible repercussions beyond the seven-targeted nations. Students from other countries will be afraid, rightfully, to attend schools in such a discriminatory atmosphere. Academics from many countries will understandably boycott our institutions to protest. And of course, there will be retaliatory bans. Ideas cannot freely circulate when the mobility of our international community is restricted. Academic freedom depends on the freedom of movement across borders.

Others have drawn heartbreaking parallels between the ban on Muslim refugees today and the refusal to open our doors to Jewish refugees in the 1930s and 40s. We should recall another historical lesson. As you well know, intellectuals fleeing from Nazi Germany helped create distinguished American institutions, including the New School for Social Research, the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, and Brandeis University. Consider where our institutions of higher education would be today without the fundamental contributions since World War II of refugees and immigrants from all over the world. This includes every field in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Respect for this history should help us respond to the current emergency. Moreover, universities like Temple are filled with second-generation immigrant students whose parents entered the U.S. in the post-1965 immigrant wave. These students especially need to hear that the leaders of their educational institutions stand behind them as they face an increasingly anti-immigrant public environment.

In addition to making a public statement, we hope the university will commit resources to legally challenging the executive order. Our university counsel and our law school, with its strong international focus, have expertise to share. We should be able to draw on our knowledge and our interests to offer amicus briefs in the cases being brought already by the ACLU and CAIR, and the many that will follow.

In taking a strong position against the ban, your leadership could help Temple reach out to other universities and colleges, and other professional organizations, such as the AAUP and ACLS. Collaborative effort is essential now to fight this attack on the values and the workings of the entire academic community.

We are sure you have thought about these issues and are aware of many more repercussions across the university and academia at large and among our international students. Many colleagues will appreciate your leadership during such challenging times. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely yours,

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