

Open letter: We protest discriminatory changes to the US visa waiver program

We, the undersigned, express our outrage at recent changes to the US visa waiver program.

These changes require citizens of 38 countries (including UK citizens), traditionally eligible to travel to the US without visa under its visa waiver programme, to obtain a visa to enter the US if they:

- are dual nationals of Syria, Iraq, Iran, or Sudan;
- have travelled to Syria, Iraq, Iran, or Sudan within the past five years.

These changes will not make the US – or any other country – safer. As argued by European ambassadors to the US in an open letter, the visa waiver programme ‘makes travel to the U.S. both easier and safer’ by creating an environment of cooperation and sharing security intelligence between participating countries. It does not compromise the security of the US or that of any other country.

Changes to the US visa waiver program will also lead to discrimination between British nationals depending on their country of origin and their previous travel history. This by default creates a category of first and second-class British passport holders, a notion to which we are unequivocally opposed. British nationals are equal under the law; they receive equal protection under the state regardless of their country of origin, and this should be reflected in how they are treated abroad.

Of course, the reciprocal nature of the visa waiver program means that the 38 participating countries may implement further discriminatory measures against US citizens of Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, or Sudanese origin, as well as individuals who have travelled to these countries. This will only further an unjust cycle of discrimination and target a group of people who have done no wrong.

Additionally, rather than affecting individuals who travelled to Syria, Iraq, Iran, or Sudan with terrorism-related purposes (who overwhelmingly do not use conventional travel routes), the new policy is instead likely to target legitimate travellers to these countries – including humanitarian aid workers, journalists, and medical workers.

There are other ways to protect national security interests than in creating discriminatory policies against dual nationals of targeted states or individuals who travelled to these states. It is ultimately conduct, and not identity, which should serve as the basis for visa restrictions.

As British citizens, professionals, academics, doctors, groups, and supporters, we will not tolerate such discriminatory policies that divide us into first and second-class British passport holders and do nothing to increase our safety and security. We are calling upon our Government, including our Prime Minister, elected Members of British and European Parliaments, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, and others, to formally protest these new measures to the US State Department, the American embassy in London, and through any other available diplomatic routes.

Signed:

1. Rethink Rebuild Society
2. Syria Solidarity Movement
3. Syrian Association of Yorkshire
4. Kurds House
5. Scotland4Syria
6. Syrian Welsh Society
7. Peace and Justice for Syria
8. Mr. Walid Saffour, President of Syrian Human Rights Committee
9. Ms. Reem Assil, Chair, Syrian Platform for Peace UK
10. Mr. Peter Tatchell, Director, Peter Tatchell Foundation
11. Mr. Paul Ingram, Executive Director, British American Security Information Council (BASIC)
12. Dr. Husam Alwaer, Senior Lecturer, University of Dundee, School of Social Sciences (Architecture and Planning)
13. Dr. Mohammad Isreb, Lecturer of Pharmaceutics at the University of Bradford
14. Dr. Sharif Al-Ghazal, Consultant Surgeon and Senior Honorary Lecturer Medical School University of Leeds
15. Mr. Anas Nashawi, Dentist in Lincolnshire
16. Mr. Omar Alkadri, PhD Student in Telecom at KCL and a member of the Syrian community
17. Mr. Obada AL-Hariri, Member of Syrian community
18. Mrs. Yasmine Nahlawi, Doctoral Candidate at Newcastle University
19. Dr. Amer Masri, Scotland4Syria
20. Ahmad Mujahed Nayef
21. M Amin Ammar
22. Zakaria Twait
23. Dr. Adel Moufti, University of Manchester
24. Mr. Mustafa Osman, Member of Syrian community
25. Mr Najwan Hudaihed, Member of Syrian community
26. Mr Ahmad Al-haji
27. Mrs. Samera Tayan
28. Dr. Firas Aljanadi, Syrian refugee
29. Mr Abdulkarim Alanazi
30. Ms. Saina Behnejad, Iranian student
31. Ms. Sairah Yassir, Community Activist
32. Dr. Mohamed Kara-Mohamed, Senior Experimental Officer at the University of Manchester
33. Dr. Hammoud Akeel
34. Mr. Adnan Al-Haj Ali, Activist
35. Mrs. Manal Eissa
36. Mr. Khaled Blali, Member of Syrian community
37. Mr. Mahmod Asaad
38. Mr. Radwan Alhousni, Member of Syrian community
39. Mr. Mahmod Asaad
40. Mrs. Margaret Abouharb-Barker
41. Dr. Hiba Bacha, Rheumatology Specialist Doctor
42. Ms. Anna Strain
43. Mr. Stefan Haselwimmer, Refugee Campaigner

44. Ms. Sarah Atkinson
45. Mr. Mazan Alabrash Alshaar, Medical Physicist
46. Ms. Deborah Tosler
47. Mr. Jordan Sliz
48. Mrs. Heba Issa, HR Manger
49. Mrs. Hellen Bersacola, PhD Student
50. Ms. Shelley Milne, Freelance Humanitarian Journalist
51. Dr. Basma Issa
52. Dr. Syrsa Tomok
53. Mr. Angus Clark
54. Dr. Sara Atassi, Paediatric ST4 in Northwest Deanery
55. Ms. SJ Rogers
56. Ms. Maha Qureshi, Member of Syrian community
57. Mr. Deaa Rajeh, Member of Syrian community
58. Ms. Susan Tosler
59. Mr. Mohamed Belal Sabbagh, General Dental Practitioner
60. Ms. Eliza Hardwick, University of Oxford student
61. Mr. Peter Hill, Junior Research Fellow in Oriental Studies, Christ Church, University of Oxford
62. Ms. Shevin Barkho
63. Ms. Rosie Cammack, Student at the University of Oxford
64. Mr. Iyad Seif, Syrian refugee
65. Mr. Abdullah Hanoun
66. Ms. Muzna Al-Naib, Syria Solidarity UK
67. Mr. Rayan Azhari, Architect & member of Syrian community
68. Mr. Atamli Reine, Oxford University
69. Ms. Clara A Connolly, Immigration Lawyer
70. Mr. Abdulaziz Almashi, Syria Solidarity Movement
71. Mr. Ammar Sawaf, Acupuncturist
72. Mr. Harry Shotton, Student at the School of Oriental and African Studies
73. Mr. Husam Helmi, PhD Student
74. Ms. Jomana Al Ahmad, Student at UCL
75. Mr. Mazen Ejbaei, Help4Syria
76. Ms. Shirin Bairkdar,
77. Mr. Adam Suleman, Consultant at Harrods
78. Mr. Jonathan Brown, Risk Manager at CEGA Group Services & former resident in Syria.
79. Mr. Tim Eaton
80. Mr. Amjad Selo, PhD researcher at University of Nottingham- Member of the Syrian Community of Nottinghamshire
81. Mr. Osamah Aiar, Student at SOAS, Member of Syrian community
82. Ms. Raghda Armela, Social Policy student at the University of Salford
83. Ms. Safaa Armela, Mental Health Nurse student at the University of Salford