



Council on American-Islamic Relations

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May 15, 2024

Ms. Anna Hinken
Non-Government Organization Liaison
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Dear Ms. Hinken:

We are writing to again request your immediate assistance concerning reported racist and abusive treatment that U.S. citizen Taher Herzallah, a senior director of the non-profit advocacy organization American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), experiences at the hands of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents when he returns to the United States. CAIR remains concerned that Mr. Herzallah is targeted by CBP due to his political viewpoints and that this remains part of a pattern of conduct targeting a duly registered non-profit organization.

Herzallah was returning to the US on April 28 through Toronto Pearson International Airport (YYZ). He reports to us that he was pulled into secondary screening after CBP staff conducted a routine scan of his passport. An apparent flag may have appeared on the agent's screen after that scan. He cooperated well beyond what was needed to demonstrate he is a citizen eligible to reenter the U.S. Despite this cooperation, he was informed that if he declined to answer questions, CBP was empowered to deny him permission to board his flight. Instead, he would be compelled to go to a land entry point where it's reasonable to assume he would be subjected to the same abusive and threatening treatment. Mr. Herzallah continued cooperating up until one of the CBP agents said something to the effect of "so you are organizing those Palestine protests." An American citizen's political viewpoints and participation in our democratic processes are not legitimate subjects for assessing reentry into the nation.

In March 2022 we wrote to you after Herzallah was returning from attending an event overseas that saw participation from "numerous activists, faith leaders and diplomats, including former Secretary of State, John Kerry." At that time, we wrote, "[w]hile Mr. Herzallah waiting in line to cross the border, a CBP agent picked him out of line by sight, pulled him aside for secondary screening and subjected him to four hours of abusive treatment. In addition to interrogating Mr. Herzallah about his experiences in Doha, the agent demanded his phone, accused him of being a liar, detained him for four hours without reason, and even asked him, 'where did you learn to speak English so well?' (Mr. Herzallah is an American citizen).

We look forward to hearing from you about steps you are taking to ensure Mr. Herzallah's future experiences with CBP exclude the apparent targeting of Mr. Herzallah based on his political beliefs. If you can please confirm receipt of this letter by email due to its timely and sensitive nature, it would be much appreciated. We look forward to resolving this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Corey Saylor".

Corey Saylor
Research and Advocacy Director

Washington D.C.

Alabama Arizona California Colorado Connecticut Florida Georgia Illinois Kansas Kentucky Maryland
Massachusetts Michigan Minnesota Missouri New Jersey New York North Carolina Ohio Oklahoma Pennsylvania
Texas Washington

CC:

Kevin Flores, Acting Deputy Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Cynthia Morales, Chief of Staff, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Royce Murray, Assistant Secretary for Policy, Department of Homeland Security

Jennifer Atala, Senior Policy Advisor, Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Marian Drake, Senior Policy Advisor, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Renee Dupee, Community Engagement Section Chief, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Ms. Brenda Abdelall, Assistant Secretary of Partnership and Engagement, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Mr. David Lindner, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties Officer, National Vetting Center, U.S. Customs and Border Protection

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