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"Immigrants make America great" sign at protest

A woman holds a sign during a Jan. 31, 2017, protest at Washington Dulles International Airport in Virginia after President Donald Trump's suspended admission of any refugees to the U.S. for 120 days and banned entry for 90 days of people from seven predominantly Muslim nations. On June 4, Trump banned entry for nationals from 12 countries. (CNS/Catholic Herald/Zoey Maraist)

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A ban by President Donald Trump that fully or partly restricts travel to the U.S. by nationals from several countries has prompted anxiety and uncertainty among Catholic immigration advocates.

On June 4, Trump issued a proclamation declaring that nationals from Afghanistan, Burma, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Haiti, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen will no longer be admitted to the U.S.

In addition, Trump partially restricted the entry of nationals from Burundi, Cuba, Laos, Sierra Leone, Togo, Turkmenistan and Venezuela.

The ban applies to both "immigrants and nonimmigrants," which U.S. immigration law respectively defines as those seeking permanent or temporary stay. Currently, there are more than 20 types of nonimmigrant visas.

"We are particularly concerned about how this policy will affect families trying to reunite in the United States," Anna Gallagher, executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc., known as CLINIC, told OSV News.

> 'We have already seen the devastating impact that cancellation of refugee and humanitarian immigration opportunities has had so far this year in terms of keeping families apart, and this policy will only deepen and extend that harm.'
> —Anna Gallagher
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For Haitian native Fr. Eugène Almonor, an Oblate of Mary Immaculate and chaplain of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Haitian Catholic Community, the ban means he will not be able to visit his immediate family, even though he is now a U.S. citizen.

Almonor said he does not want to risk traveling to Haiti.

"If I cannot come back (into the U.S.), I don't know what I can do," he said. "Last night, I couldn't sleep, because I was saying to myself, 'I have a plan to go to Haiti this year.' But if I go, could I be back?"

Even an upcoming pilgrimage to France and Italy have been thrown into question, Almonor said.

Fr. Thomas Hagan, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales and a U.S. citizen, regularly travels between the U.S. and Haiti, where he has spent three decades ministering in Port-au-Prince through Hands Together. He founded the nonprofit in 1986 to provide educational, pastoral and humanitarian development to Haiti's largest and poorest slum, Cité Soleil.

Asked by OSV News if he fears not being admitted back into the U.S. despite his American passport, Father Hagan said, "I'll have to see. I'll let you know if there's any trouble."

Among the reasons Trump cited for the ban were foreign policy, national security, counterterrorism concerns, high rates of visa overstay and the listed nations' "historically" refusing to accept their deported citizens.

The policy — subject to regular review, and more robust than a similar ban for several Muslim nations under the first Trump administration — specifically applies to foreign nationals of the designated countries who are outside the U.S. and do not have a valid visa on the effective date of the ban, June 9 at 12:01 a.m. EDT.

Haiti airport

A person walks outside Toussaint Louverture International Airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Nov. 13, 2024. U.S. President Donald Trump on June 4 announced that citizens of 12 countries including Haiti would be banned from visiting the United States. (OSV News/Reuters/Marckinson Pierre)

"Lawful permanent" residents of the U.S., and those holding immigrant and nonimmigrant visas issued before that date, are not impacted. Also excepted are those who have been granted asylum, refugees already admitted to the U.S., or individuals granted protection from deportation under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment of Punishment. The proclamation also stated that individuals may continue to seek such protections "consistent with the laws of the United States."

Dual nationals who hold citizenship in one of the designated countries are exempted if they travel on a passport issued by an unaffected nation.

Other exceptions include immediate family immigrant visas "with clear and convincing evidence of identity and family relationship," such as DNA data; adoptions; Afghan Special Immigrant Visas; Special Immigrant Visas for United States Government employees; and immigrant visas for ethnic and religious minorities facing persecution in Iran.

The ban does not impact diplomats, NATO staff, employees of designated international organizations (such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), and individuals in "immediate and continuous transit" through the U.S. on official business or directly to the United Nations headquarters in New York.

Also outside the ban are athletes, coaches, immediate family and key staff for the World Cup, the Olympics and any other major sporting event approved by the U.S. secretary of state.

Both Hagan and Almonor said the ban for Haiti was too harsh.

"I don't think there's a need to block everybody coming from Haiti. That doesn't make sense, especially (for) a lot of good people," Hagan said.

"Haiti considers the United States like a friendly country," Almonor said. "If you are friends, why (the ban)? ... I think it is not good for Haitian people, as well as for American people, because between the American people and Haitian people, there is ... a good relationship."

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Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami told OSV News the ban on Haiti comes as travel to and from that nation is limited anyway, with visa requests to the U.S. embassy at a standstill and only limited flights to the nation.

"More troubling," he said, is the Trump administration's ending of the temporary protected status, or TPS, and humanitarian visas for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans.

"Some 500,000 will be affected by the ending of the humanitarian visas — making people who came here legally and were granted work permits suddenly illegal and without permission to work," Wenski said in a June 5 email to OSV News. "The same with the end of the TPS program that affects several thousand more including Haitians, Venezuelans and Nicaraguans."

The archbishop said that Immigration and Customs Enforcement has "stepped up enforcement, taking into custody not only 'bad actors' (those with criminal records) but others as well. Detention centers are overcrowded, families are anxious, employers are flummoxed (about) how to replace those who will lose their work permits."

"We have already seen the devastating impact that cancellation of refugee and humanitarian immigration opportunities has had so far this year in terms of keeping families apart, and this policy will only deepen and extend that harm," said CLINIC's

Gallagher. "We remain committed to supporting immigrant families and advocating for policies that promote family unity and align with Catholic values of mercy and justice. It is essential that our leaders reflect these values in their actions, ensuring that all individuals are treated with the respect and fairness they deserve."