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Muslim scholars no longer banned from US

by Daniel Burke by Religion News Service

WASHINGTON -- The State Department announced Jan. 20 that two prominent Muslim intellectuals will no longer be barred from traveling to the U.S. based on past accusations that they had supported terrorism.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton signed orders allowing Tariq Ramadan and Adam Habib to re-apply for U.S. visas, said State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley.

Ramadan, a Swiss citizen who teaches at Oxford University in England, had been barred from entering the U.S. since 2004 for allegedly endorsing terrorism. At the time, he had planned to take a tenured position at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind.

Ramadan had donated about \$1,000 to a Swiss-based charity that gave funds to Hamas, the militant Palestinian group, according to *The New York Times*, but denied knowledge of the charity's ties to Hamas.

Habib is a scholar at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa.

Ramadan's denial had been a cause celebre for civil rights activists, who accused the Bush administration of using the Patriot Act to silence critics of its anti-terrorism policies and the war in Iraq.

"As we look at it, we do not think that either one of them represents a threat to the United States," Crowley said at a press briefing on Wednesday, adding that both men will have to re-apply for visas.

Crowley said lifting the ban is "consistent with President Obama's outreach" to Muslims. "We want to have the opportunity potentially to have Islamic scholars come to the United States and have dialogue with other faith communities and people here in our country," he said.

In statement published by Reuters, Ramadan said the move ?brings to an end a dark period in American politics that saw security considerations invoked to block critical debate through a policy of exclusion and baseless allegation.?

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