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MY TURN OMAR BAH

American greatness rests in compassion

There have been mixed reactions across the country — and around the world — to the Supreme Court's recent decision upholding President Donald Trump's ban on travel from seven countries, five of them predominantly Muslim.

But I wish to digress from the Supreme Court's ruling to discuss the very moral and humanitarian basis upon which this nation was founded. America is a rainbow nation of natives, immigrants, refugees and a variety of cultures and creeds. It was founded on the fundamental desire for freedom, human rights and equality. It cherishes a strong belief in being a global leader in good governance and service to humanity.

Given the ideals that define the character of this country, I see no basis or justification for the Supreme Court upholding a policy bent on targeting a certain group of people for who they are — their color, religion, and country of origin.

This is morally and humanly unsettling. We need the strongest voices of conscience to be heard, loud and clear.

As a refugee who has received the utmost of American protection and benevolence, I am saddened that many people who are currently languishing in vulnerable situations in camps around the world will be most affected.

At the Refugee Dream Center, we serve and interact with people from all over the world. Their most common statement is an expression of gratitude to America for giving them a chance at a second life. But this year, many are not coming. We are working with people who have been here for several months or years, but not newcomers.

This is because, even before the Supreme Court's ruling, the Trump administration had a travel ban, just in a different form. Just two years ago, the United States took in roughly 100,000 refugees, the largest number for a single country in the world. That number dropped to about 53,000 last year. And this fiscal year (Oct. 1, 2017, to Sept. 30, 2018), the United States is expected to resettle only about 20,000 refugees.

According to the Refugee Council USA monthly refugee admittance tracker, an average of only 1,500 refugees are arriving in this country, compared with 8,000 in previous years. And

the numbers keep dropping. In June, only 901 refugees arrived, and among these, only 47 were from the Middle East.

These figures are an indication that this administration had already kick-started the refugee ban — and, by extension, the Muslim ban. That is why my reaction to the high court's ruling is to not be surprised, like many. I only want to seize the moment to join the many voices of people of conscience across the United States who make the moral and humanitarian argument rather than taking a legal position.

As this administration rejoices about this ruling, let us remind them of the millions of people suffering across the globe, who ask for only one thing — to be helped to survive, to eat and drink, to live in safety. Let us remind them that such policy is not a true representation of the American spirit of utmost goodness. Let us remind them that our voices will be strong and unwavering.

We hope that, after reflecting, the administration will see the importance of continuing to keep the American promise, especially to the most vulnerable people on earth.

— Omar Bah is the founder and executive director of the Refugee Dream Center, in Providence. He is a former refugee (now a U.S. citizen) from the Gambia, and the author of the book, "Africa's Hell on Earth: The Ordeal of an African Journalist."

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