

# Faith groups still see problems with new immigration order

March 7, 2017

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Federal judges may find President Donald Trump's new executive order on immigration more acceptable than the last. But some religious groups and faith leaders see little meaningful difference in the new measure, signed March 6.

## **'Muslim Ban 2.0'**

"Make no mistake, this is the Muslim ban that President Trump and his aides have been promising," said Farhana Khera, president of Muslim Advocates. "The administration is just rearranging the chairs at the same table."

Critics of what Khera calls "Muslim Ban 2.0" argue it still singles out only Muslim-majority nations and fuels Islamophobia already on the rise in the United States.

"President Trump's revised executive order is still a Muslim ban, and it's still bigoted and un-American," Rabbi Jack Moline, president of the Interfaith Alliance, said in a statement.

Some faith leaders also take issue with the new order's limitations on the resettlement of refugees as a refutation of the religious requirement to shelter the most vulnerable.

"While it appears that the administration has sought to correct some of the flaws contained in the first executive order, this newly issued one still prevents us from undertaking lifesaving work during the most critical time for refugees and displaced persons in human history," said Linda Hartke,

president of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. “The new order doubles down on demonizing refugees—implying that America should fear those who have been persecuted, tortured, threatened and victimized by terrorists.”

### **Support from some conservative evangelicals**

However, some religious leaders voiced support for the new immigration order.

Immediate past Southern Baptist Convention President Ronnie Floyd reacted to the new immigration order as guest host of the Family Research Council’s “Washington Watch” radio program March 6.

Floyd—who serves on Trump’s evangelical executive advisory board—agreed with a guest’s assessment that the order addresses critics’ concerns adequately and is likely to withstand legal challenges.

“It’s so encouraging to know” the White House “deepened” its treatment of immigration in the revised order, he said.

“Pause was pushed ... to make (the order) better to help the future of America,” said Floyd, pastor of Cross Church in northwest Arkansas. He said the new order “hints at the exclusion of people” from the United States “who embrace orthodox Islam’s violent extremism.”

Jerry Johnson, president of the National Religious Broadcasters and former president of Criswell College in Dallas, tweeted that it is “time for Christian leaders to admit this factor: More than 300 refugees” currently are subjects of “terrorism investigations”—a claim made in the March 6 order.

In a separate tweet, Johnson referred to the order as “anti-jihad” and prescribing “extreme vetting.” He commended an analysis of Trump’s action by Jay Sekulow, chief counsel at the American Center for Law and

Justice.

Sekulow wrote that “significant changes” from the Jan. 27 order “not only ensure that America will be kept safe, but they also undercut the various legal challenges to the lawful order.”

The new ban differs from the executive order Trump signed Jan. 27 on several points the Trump administration hopes will blunt criticism and help the new order pass legal muster. A federal appeals court stayed Trump’s first order Feb. 3.

**The revised executive order:**

- Allows Syrians to be resettled in the United States after a 120-day ban. They were indefinitely excluded under the previous ban.
- Drops Iraq from the original list of seven Muslim-majority nations from which foreign nationals are blocked for 90 days from entering the United States. The remaining six countries are Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Sudan, Syria and Iran.
- Removes the preference given to refugees from members of minority religious groups, such as Christians.

“By removing the preference for refugees of minority religions, the revised order acknowledges a fundamental principle of our constitutional guarantee of religious freedom: We do not preference certain faiths over others,” said Amanda Tyler, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.

However, the agency she leads still has serious reservations about the executive order.

“The Baptist Joint Committee remains concerned that this administration is using religious identity as a proxy for ‘security threat’ and a reason for exclusion,” Tyler said. “To respond to these concerns and the widespread

perception that this order perpetuates religious discrimination, President Trump must renounce his prior comments calling for a Muslim ban and condemn anti-Muslim bigotry in all its forms.”

Some who advocate for the Middle East’s beleaguered Christian minorities worry the removal of special protections for minority religions necessitates a new order to address their suffering at the hands of the self-identified Islamic State.

“There’s a dire need for President Trump to issue a separate executive order—one specifically aimed to help ISIS genocide survivors in Iraq and Syria,” said Nina Shea, director of the Hudson Institute’s Center for Religious Freedom. “For three years, the Christians, Yizidis and others of the smallest religious minorities have been targeted by ISIS with beheadings, crucifixions, rape, torture and sexual enslavement.”

The new order, set to go into affect March 16, also contains exceptions for dual citizens and holders of green cards who want to travel to the United Sttes from the restricted countries.

### **‘Duty to protect the American people’**

“It is the president’s solemn duty to protect the American people,” Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told reporters after Trump signed the new order. “As threats to our security continue to evolve and change, common sense dictates that we continually re-evaluate and reassess the systems we rely upon to protect our country.”

Under the new order, no refugees will be accepted into the United States for 120 days, and the number will not exceed 50,000 refugees in a year—compared to the 110,000 allowed under former President Barack Obama.

“The language of the ban is slightly changed, but the results for refugees

are the same,” said Mark Hetfield, chief executive officer of HIAS, a Jewish agency that resettles immigrants.

“Even for the thousands of refugees who have already followed all the rules and have already been subject to extreme security vetting, President Trump will not allow them into the United States.”

[Rep. Lamar Smith](#), R-TX, expressed appreciation to Trump for his “continued commitment to protect innocent Americans.”

“I support this order that places short-term limits on the admission of new refugees and temporary immigrants from six nations deemed a security threat,” said Smith, a member of both the House Judiciary Committee and Homeland Security Committee. “This policy ensures that the government has the procedures and information in place to properly vet certain foreign nationals who seek to come to our country.”

*With additional information from Reuters, Baptist Press and the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty*