

By Hilal A. Lashuel

The America I believe in

This past week, I was supposed to visit Boston and New York City to meet with a pharmaceutical company about a potential partnership, participate in a meeting for an international consortium of which I am an integral part, and attend the annual meeting of a charitable foundation that supports some of my research. Instead, as a Muslim and a U.S. citizen from Yemen now living in Switzerland, I chose to cancel my trip because of President Donald Trump's executive order banning people of certain nationalities from entering the United States. I still participated in these events to the extent I could, aided by technology, but I would have had a richer experience if I had been there in person. Nonetheless, I felt it would not be right for me to make the trip.

I chose to stay away for three reasons. First, as a U.S. citizen naturalized soon after I was born in Yemen to a U.S.-citizen father, I would have been allowed in under the order, but I wanted to show my solidarity with those who may no longer be able to move freely just because of their nationality or religion. Second, I wanted to sensitize others in my scientific community to the issue. By seeing me participate through videoconferencing, I hoped that my colleagues who weren't directly affected would gain a fuller understanding of the challenges that scientists with connections to the banned countries are facing. Third, I wanted to retain my view of the United States as an inclusive, tolerant, and supportive country.

That had been my experience since I arrived in New York City from Yemen with my brother when I was 15 years old. Our father, living elsewhere for work, was only able to check on us occasionally, so we were pretty much on our own. We learned English and worked almost full-time to support ourselves while going to school. Our parents, who hadn't had the opportunity to go to school, instilled in us the belief that education is the most powerful tool for success. But at times, college seemed out of reach. All along the way, though, I encountered welcoming and generous American teachers, mentors, friends, and neighbors who appreciated my hard work and dedication and never gave up on me. Their encouragement and support helped me not give up on my dreams, including pursuing a career in academic research.

When I left for a faculty position in Switzerland, I took great memories with me. Years later, I was happy to have the opportunity to spend a sabbatical year in California, during which my children—who were all born in the United States—reconnected with their American roots. My son, now



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see fellow scientists, Nobel laureates, and university presidents show their support for scientists of all nationalities and religions.

I remain committed to working with my colleagues and partners in the United States to achieve our shared scientific mission. Although I chose to not attend my recent meetings in person, I plan to travel there for future events. I believe that a blanket boycott of U.S.-based meetings would be wrong and damaging to the advancement of science and the scientific community. Science today is a global endeavor, and we need to show that nothing can stop us. As we figure out how to respond to new limits on immigration and travel, I hope we can find ways to engage and support those affected by those limits and bring the scientific community together, not put up more barriers. ■

Hilal A. Lashuel is a professor of life sciences at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne. Send your career story to SciCareerEditor@aaas.org.

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