



Ottawa, February 16, 2017

An edifying outpouring of protest has followed President Trump’s travel ban on immigrants, visa holders and refugees from seven Muslim majority countries. This has occurred at the same time as we grapple with the implications of the recent terror attack against Muslims here in Canada – and what it means in terms of our self-image as a society that celebrates diversity. Academic organizations in the U.S. and Canada, including broadly-based coalitions of scholars as well as specific ones representing historians, have rightly condemned the ban directed at a particular religious group. As the legal struggle unfolds in the U.S. over the ban, many historians working in Canada have asked what we can do to raise awareness of the fundamentally discriminatory assumptions of the ban and its very serious and potentially tragic implications should it be reinstated or even re-crafted in new language. After some discussions within the CHA executive, we want to suggest a number of options, and we welcome feedback from our members.

Scholarly associations like ours must speak out about the direct effects of the ban on scholars and the dissemination of ideas. We can post statements on our website, but we must also talk about this issue within our universities, departments and networks of scholars. The teaching and research communities believe strongly in the flow of ideas, scholars, and students across borders. The ban threatens to disrupt networks of research, limit the dissemination of research, bar scholars from attending conferences, prevent them from returning to their home universities, prevent international students from going to the U.S., and it also may affect scholars seeking refugee status. These effects have already been felt, and even though the ban is temporarily lifted, the chill of fear it has created will remain.

Historians could join members of the Canadian legal community in asking the government to suspend the existing “Safe Third Country Agreement” with the U.S. Two hundred legal scholars in Canada have signed a [letter to the Hon. Ahmed D. Hussen](#), Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, to this effect, pointing out that Trump’s executive order has demonstrated that the U.S. is not a ‘safe’ place for refugees. We should no longer turn back refugee claimants coming into Canada from the U.S. border, given the evidence that they will not be treated fairly in the U.S.

We can link these current events to our teaching and discussion with students and the wider Canadian community. Historians are well placed to discuss the history of racism, human rights, religious tolerance, and xenophobia within Canada and globally. We are acutely aware of both the historical record of human rights abuses, and the efforts of people to protect and defend them. The violence, displacement

and denigration that accompany intolerance and persecution are a sorry part of the Canadian and global historical record of which we have close and complex knowledge. We can share that knowledge and encourage discussion and debate, not only in our classes but also with the wider community. Given that the recent murder of Muslim worshippers in their Quebec City mosque occurred in the context of the ban, and was clearly motivated by racial and religious hate, it is all the more important to raise issues of racism and intolerance within our own universities and communities.

On a more individual level, we need to keep in touch with colleagues and students directly affected by this ban and by the fear that has been engendered by the Quebec City attack. Most universities have set up protocols to deal with students and faculty who are, and might be affected, by the ban. Some academics have stated they cannot or will not travel to the U.S., having been legally advised that the situation for them is precarious, or because they disagree so strongly with the ban. We can direct affected individuals to sites of information, but we also need to reassure them of our support, our opposition to the ban and to hatred targeted at Muslims in Canada and abroad, and our commitment to a more tolerant society in which students and scholars of all backgrounds can study and share their research and ideas without intimidation and fear.

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