

Pursuing a Life in the U.S.

An unjust obstacle in pursuit of the American Dream

Like tens of millions of other immigrants who have come to this wonderful land seeking freedom and opportunity, Imam Qatanani came to the United States with his wife and three young children in 1996 with the hopes of realizing the American dream. The family has been blessed with three more American born children and has grown together and established its foundation in the historic city of Paterson, New Jersey..

In July of 2006, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services denied the family's adjustment of status application and the Imam and his family were put into removal proceedings. The basis for the denial was a detention of the Imam in 1993 by Israeli authorities when he journeyed from his home in Jordan to visit his family in the West Bank. During this era, mass detention for Palestinians was common practice whenever political turmoil in the region arose. On his immigration application, the Imam and his attorneys answered "No" when asked if he was ever arrested. Imam Qatanani and his experienced attorneys believed that he was "detained" and not "arrested" because he was never charged with any crime, never faced neither a civilian nor military judge and ultimately was unconditionally released after 3 months without any word of why he was detained.

It should also be noted while the Imam responded in a legally justified manner to the issue of arrest or detention, he has been forthright with government officials during interviews and discussions regarding his period of detention.

"I've seen with my own eyes a gentleman who's had a tremendous positive influence in the community...But he's done nothing but good since he's been in the US and many of us are ready to stand up and go to the court to testify about him if need be."

Bill Pascrell, US Congressman for NJ.

Primarily based on this innocuous episode that occurred over thirteen years ago, the Imam, his wife and his oldest three children's application for permanent residency has been in limbo. This uncertain status has caused untold hardships for the family. Both the imam and his wife's driving privileges were revoked for the past three years. His wife Somaia, a school teacher, has faced the daily quandary of not being able to drive herself or her children to their school. The family, on two occasions during this period, faced the scary situation of children falling ill late at night, and with no access to transportation, dealing with the indignity of literally walking to the nearest hospital in the darkness of night.