

## U.S. ends Muslim registry

**By Cam Simpson and Flynn McRoberts. Cam Simpson reported from Washington and Flynn McRoberts from Chicago. Tribune national correspondent Frank James contributed from Washington.,**

Tribune staff reporters

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**T**he Department of Homeland Security said Monday that it is largely scrapping a controversial Justice Department-initiated program requiring men from predominantly Muslim nations to come in for questioning, fingerprinting and photographing.

The domestic registration program, which resulted in more than 83,000 foreign men in the U.S. being labeled "high national security concerns" because of their nationalities, also led to deportation proceedings against almost 14,000 of the men. Many of them had overstayed visas or ignored previous deportation orders.

But the mandate, unveiled in June 2002 by Atty. Gen. John Ashcroft as a counterterrorism initiative, did not produce terrorism charges against anyone.

The program also sowed resentment in communities in America and abroad, deepening suspicions among Muslims that the U.S. government is anti-Islam.

The administration's announcement that it would suspend most of the requirements came as many in the first group of about 4,000 men scheduled to renew their registrations were filing into immigration offices throughout the country.

While blanket registration requirements are being dropped, officials said a small but unspecified number of men out of the more than 83,000 who originally registered could be required to come in for new interviews. The men would be alerted by government notices, officials said.

The Tribune highlighted the domestic registration program last month in a three-part series, "Tossed Out of America," which looked at the toll the initiative and others built on profiling by nationality have taken on individuals and families. A wave of deportations has sent men from predominantly Muslim nations to uncertain futures, separating them from wives and children, including U.S. citizens, while thousands of others fled immigrant enclaves in fear.

In dropping most of the registration requirements Monday, Homeland Security Department officials, who inherited responsibility for the program from the Justice Department in March, said they were not responding to "recent public pressure" and that they have been reviewing the effort for more than a month. The domestic program mandated registration--under threat of deportation--for all men from 24 predominantly Muslim nations and North Korea.

Immigrant groups applauded Monday's move but said it comes too late.

They said there will be no relief for the almost 14,000 men in deportation proceedings as a result of the registration process, although it appears a large number of new cases feared by leaders in immigrant communities will be averted.

"We're glad that the Department of Homeland Security has seen the wisdom of suspending the program," said Fred Tsao of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights. "However, feeling glad about this is like being thankful to a bully after he has stopped hitting us. Much of the damage has already been done."

The Homeland Security Department said it also is dropping a companion requirement that those who registered at secondary screening posts set up at the nation's borders submit to interviews 30 days after their arrival in the country.

U.S.: 11 had terrorist links

Although none of the more than 83,000 men who registered with the government were charged with terrorism, officials said a few were identified as having terrorist links. Border and domestic checks combined yielded 11 such men, they said, declining to say how many of them were in the U.S.

But Asa Hutchinson, Homeland Security undersecretary for border and transportation security, said Monday that there were few, if any, counterterrorism benefits from the domestic registration part of the program.

Any leads, he said, "were largely, if not all, from the port-of-entry inspection. . . . We looked at what kind of benefit, what kind of leads were being generated by the domestic reregistration, and it was minimal in number."

While Hutchinson said, "I applaud the Justice Department for implementing this," he also said his agency now has to focus on "individualized, intelligence-based investigations" instead of "huge, broad categories," such as nationality.

The border checks are being overtaken by a new system, in the works before Ashcroft's June 2002 announcement, that ultimately will track entries and exits of all of the roughly 35million foreign visitors who enter the U.S. annually.

There has been widespread confusion about the status of the domestic registration program in immigrant communities since last week, when word first leaked out that changes were being considered. Many men still were coming in to reregister at immigration offices, following the government orders they were given a year ago.

Security and insecurity

One of those men, Abdessamad Benioul, 29, a Chicago cabdriver from Morocco, said he understood the government's need to make Americans feel safer after the Sept. 11 attacks. But in requiring men from Muslim countries to register, "They make foreigners who spent so many years here working hard, getting up early every morning, trying to live the American dream, they make these people feel insecure in order to make the American people feel secure," said Benioul, who reregistered last week at the Kluczynski Federal Building in the Loop.

The program also required people who had to register to follow special procedures when they left the country, or face being barred from readmission.

visited on 9/5/2014

That will not be dropped under the changes outlined Monday. And immigration lawyers feared the announcement would confuse those leaving the country about their responsibilities, possibly resulting in people being barred from re-entering the U.S. for what amounts to paperwork problems.

Sadrudin Noorani, a business owner who escorted hundreds of South Asians to registration last winter in Chicago, said he was relieved for the Devon Avenue families who would not have to register again.

"I have seen personally the tears in their eyes. I have seen their suffering. I have seen their anxiety," Noorani said. "So I feel a great deal of relief that those people will not be crying again like they were last January and February."

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ON THE INTERNET: A Tribune special report

TOSSSED OUT OF AMERICA

The Tribune last month documented how the U.S. program to register foreign visitors from mostly Muslim countries led to deportation proceedings against thousands of men but failed to yield a single charge of terrorism. Find the full series at [chicagotribune.com/immigration](http://chicagotribune.com/immigration)

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