

Linked in prayer and protestOrando y protestando

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Linked in prayer and protest

Rally marks travel ban anniversary

Story and photos by Gregg McQueen

Over one hundred.

That's the number of actions and events Murad Awawdeh estimates has been organized across the state in the past year "where people stood up and said, 'This is not the U.S. that we know and love, this is not who we are.'"



Circle of support.

Awawdeh, who serves as Vice President of Advocacy at the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), would know. The group has helped bring together fellow activists and supporters for the numerous demonstrations in the last year.

On Fri., Jan. 26th, advocates gathered for a rally and prayer session in Washington Square Park, to mark the one-year anniversary since President Donald Trump's travel ban.

Organized by NYIC together with interfaith advocacy groups, the event gathered supporters around the Washington Square arch for speeches denouncing Trump's immigration policies, followed by Jummah, a Muslim congregational prayer held every Friday around noontime.



Leading in prayer.

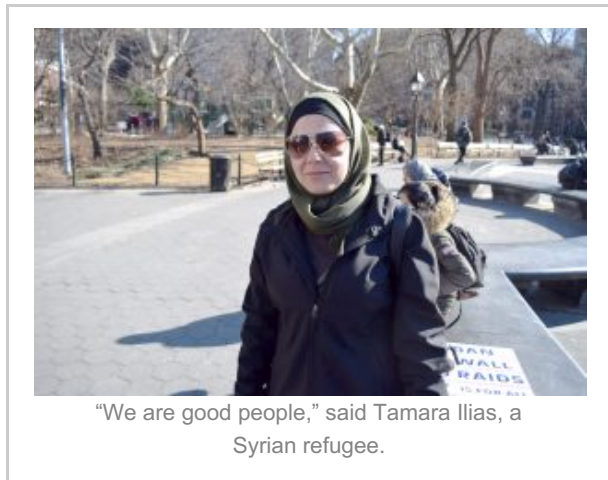
During the prayer session, advocates formed a human chain around those who were praying.

Washington Square Park was also the site of a rally that drew 10,000 people one year ago.

“Last year was our year of resistance,” Awawdeh said. “This year is the year that we all rise together.”

“The work we have in front of us is going to be difficult,” said City Councilmember Carlos Menchaca, Chair of the Committee on Immigration. “The kind of work and the kind of resistance is not just in Washington. It’s in New York State in Albany and it’s here in our own city.”

“I’m going to invite you to join the resistance as we say, ‘No wall,’ as we say, ‘No ban,’ as we say, ‘Yes to immigrants,’” added Menchaca.



Trump’s travel ban was first initiated last January, halting immigration from six Muslim-majority countries and instating a temporary ban on all refugees.

After court challenges, Trump has been forced to issue two updates to his travel ban.

In October 2017, two federal judges issued temporary halts to the ban, while in December, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down these injunctions to allow full enforcement of the ban.



The Supreme Court said this month that it would hear a challenge to the third version of the

ban.

In addition to the travel ban, the Trump administration has also reduced the U.S. refugee quota to its the lowest level in years.

“The ceiling for refugee arrivals has been slashed to only 45,000 this fiscal year,” said Kelly Agnew-Barajas, Director of Refugee Resettlement for Catholic Charities Community Services. “With the additional hurdles that they are adding every day for refugee processing, it’s unlikely that more than 20,000 refugees would ever arrive this year.”

Ann Toback, Executive Director of The Workmen’s Circle, said the world is experiencing its greatest refugee crisis since World War II.



“The work we have in front of us is going to be difficult,” said Councilmember Carlos Menchaca.

“To so many refugees, being denied entry could be a death sentence,” Toback stated.

Tamara Ilias, a Syrian refugee, came to the U.S. in June 2017. She fled civil war in her home country and was stuck in Lebanon for six months while attempting to join relatives in New York City, she said.

“I all the time prayed, my God, help me,” said an emotional Ilias at the rally.

“We are good people, we just need [a] chance, we just need peace, safety, justice,” she said.

Alias, her husband and three children were able to arrive in the Bronx last June, with the help of Catholic Charities. She said life is now “very happy,” especially for her kids.

“It’s good now. They’re in school, they have friends, they’ve learned English. They have a home,” she said.

Rabbi Lauren Grabelle Herrmann of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism commented that activism during the past year has brought immigrant communities and their advocates closer together.



“We’re in this together,” said Rabbi Lauren Grabelle Herrmann.

“We have seen who we are,” she said. “We’ve been at rallies together, we’ve been at airports together. We’re in this together.”

Tefik Mahmut, a graduate student from the University of Oxford, said he visits New York City frequently to attend pro-immigrant rallies.



A promise made.

“I’m Muslim, and I’m a migrant, so I feel a moral obligation to support my Muslim fellows,” said Mahmut. “That’s what we have to do, raise up our voice against discrimination and raise up our voice against inequality.”

He said that the Trump presidency has unified immigrant communities and their advocates.

“Groups are gathering together and focusing together, and I didn’t see this cohesiveness before, this unity before, so that’s the bright side of it,” Mahmut remarked. “I do believe that there’s going to be an impact sooner or later.”

For more information, please visit www.nycic.org or call 212.627.2227.







