

ICE agents arrest Kansas chemistry professor who was taking his daughter to school

By Meenakshi Jagadeesan
7 February 2018

On January 24, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents arrested Syed Ahmed Jamal at his home in Lawrence, Kansas as he was preparing to take his daughter to school. Jamal, a 54-year old adjunct professor of chemistry at Park University in Parkville, Kansas, has been charged with being in the United States illegally.

The manner in which the arrest was carried out as well as the details of the case have drawn the attention of local, national and international media. Jamal was arrested in his own front-yard in the presence of his young daughter, handcuffed and taken to the car before his family could reach him. As his wife rushed out along with their teenage son and tried to hug Jamal, she was warned by an ICE agent that she could be charged with interfering with an arrest. For two weeks Jamal has been held in a Missouri jail, 160 miles away from his wife and three children.

Jamal arrived in the United States 30 years ago on a student visa from Bangladesh. After completing his degree at the University of Kansas, and a brief return to Bangladesh, he acquired an H1-B visa to work at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri. He continued his education, pursuing a doctoral degree at the University of Kansas in molecular biosciences and pharmaceutical engineering, exchanging the H1-B for a student visa. At the time of his arrest, Jamal was on a temporary work permit that enabled him to get an adjunct position at Park University, while carrying out research at various local hospitals.

According to ICE, while Jamal entered the country legally, he twice overstayed a visa and in 2011 violated a judge's order to leave the country. As reported in the *Washington Post*, the agency initially also claimed that Jamal had been arrested on a misdemeanor charge in 2012, but issued a new statement Monday night after it could not confirm the charge.

Jeffrey Y. Bennett, an immigration lawyer who has

filed a request to stay Jamal's deportation order, confirmed that in 2011, Jamal's visa had become invalid. At that point, he was given a "voluntary departure order" to leave the United States. Non-fulfilment of that order meant that Jamal was vulnerable to being arrested and deported by ICE agents.

Based on an active ICE arrest warrant, Jamal was taken into custody in September 2012, but released on the condition that he continue to check in with ICE. Bennett stated that this was possible because of the way in which ICE functioned under the Obama administration: "At that time, President Obama directed the Department of Homeland Security to exercise prosecutorial discretion on certain people who could legally be deported... and refrain from deporting them if they have more favorable factors than negative factors in their life."

Jamal, by all accounts, fit that category. A teacher and a volunteer at the Lawrence public schools, Jamal was the sole provider in his family. His three children—aged 14, 12 and 7—are US citizens, and all of his siblings live in the United States as citizens. His criminal record, as his lawyer stated, consisted of nothing more than "speeding tickets, basically."

In the weeks since his arrest, Jamal's friends, family and neighbors have organized a change.org petition hoping to persuade the authorities to grant him permission to stay. The petition, which has garnered over 34,000 signatures at the time of this writing, includes a letter from Jamal's oldest son Taseen. The letter highlights the potential danger to Jamal's life from radical Islamist groups in Bangladesh should he be deported, and ends with a simple, heart-rending plea for help in bringing his father back: "A home is not a home without a father."

Jamal's case is far from unique. In January alone, there were multiple cases of ICE arresting and deporting immigrants who have lived in the US for decades, tearing apart families. Jorge Garcia, a 39-year old landscaper

from Lincoln Park, Michigan was forced to leave behind his wife and two teenage children, after he was detained and deported to Mexico last month.

Garcia had been brought to the United States illegally as a 10-year-old. After his marriage 15 years ago, he and his wife—an American citizen and retired auto worker—attempted to get him legal status, but instead ended up being enmeshed in deportation proceedings. Too old to qualify for DACA, Garcia managed to get a stay order given his lack of a criminal record. However, ICE revoked those orders at the end of last year, forcing Garcia to leave the country.

In mid-January, Lukasz Niec, a doctor of Polish origin who had been living in the United States for 40 years, was arrested on two misdemeanor charges dating back several decades.

Niec's sister told *The Washington Post* that the charges stemmed from a fight following a car accident in 1992, which left Niec with a conviction for malicious destruction of property. The second charge, involving a conviction for receiving and concealing stolen property, had been expunged from Niec's record.

The local NBC affiliate in Grand Rapids, Michigan reported that dozens of doctors and hospital employees have written letters in support of Niec, an internal medicine specialist, calling for his release particularly since the hospital is facing a shortage of doctors during flu season. Niec, who has lived in Michigan since he was child, has an American wife and two children. He now faces deportation to Poland, a country whose language he does not speak and where he has no relatives.

These arrests are a part of a new and growing trend in anti-immigration policy. While the Obama administration carried out massive deportations, there appeared for some immigrants with families and no criminal record the possibility of finding some room within the system to procure temporary stay orders. This practice provided only a veneer of humanity to the administration's brutal immigration policies, which has now been completely stripped away.

Soon after his inauguration, Donald Trump vowed to deport 2 to 3 million undocumented immigrants, claiming that most of them possess criminal records and pose a threat to the safety of various communities and the security of the nation at large.

Trump's Executive Order on Interior Enforcement, signed on January 25, 2017, however, made it plain that the dragnet would not be limited to immigrants with criminal records but would extend to "all removable

aliens." Soon after, the Department of Homeland Security issued memorandums that essentially stripped all deportation priorities, a fundamental shift away from the Obama administration's guidelines to prioritize criminals and recent border crossers.

In the year since, ICE agents have made the news for arresting immigrant workers leaving church, standing outside court houses, taking their children to school, accompanying family members to immigration status check-ins or merely attempting to earn an honest living.

In September 2017, Juan Hernandez Cuevas, along with four other men working in an auto shop, was arrested by men carrying semi-automatic weapons and wearing vests with only the word "Police" on them. As reported in the *Los Angeles Times*, Hernandez had no idea which law enforcement agency had arrested him until he was at the downtown Los Angeles processing facility and saw the word "immigration" written on a wall.

The ICE agents who arrested Cuevas and his coworkers had come armed only with a warrant for the owner of the shop, who had an outstanding deportation order based on multiple DUI convictions. Without identifying themselves or asking about the immigration status of anyone in the shop, they proceeded to arrest all of the employees in a practice which the Trump administration has deemed "collateral arrests."

Last month, ICE agents raided nearly one hundred 7-Eleven stores across 17 states, arresting 21 undocumented workers and immediately starting deportation proceedings against them. As Muzaffar Chisti of the Migration Policy Institute, a non-partisan group that researches immigration issues, told *USA Today*, the broadening scope of arrests and deportations "shows that there are no longer any priorities. Everyone is a priority."

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