

## **Testimony of Dr. Abdollah (Iman) Dehzangi**

### **To: The U.S. House of Representative, Committees of the Judiciary and Foreign Affairs**

Dear respected members of the U.S. House of Representative, committee of the Judiciary and Foreign Affairs.

Thank you for your service and for giving me this opportunity to share my case and story regarding the Muslim ban and how it affects me and my wife, Dr. Ghazaleh Taherzadeh. I am one of thousands that have been affected by the Muslim ban and represent the most heavily impacted community - Iranians. One of the sad stories of separation and heartbreak. Of people who came to United States of America to start a new life in this wonderful country, and like many others, have strived to help make their new home a better place. Those that hope to one day proudly call this land of the free and home of the brave their home and serve this country under the same flag as those came before them. Yet, they have been treated like criminals and as a threat for no reason other than where they were born or what religion they practice. It is our story that I would like to share with you, respected members of the House of Representative, the stronghold of law and order under U.S. Constitution.

I am Dr. Abdollah Dehzangi, Assistant Professor at the department of Computer Science at Morgan State University (MSU) in Baltimore, MD<sup>1</sup>. I am also serving as the director of Master of Science in Bioinformatics program at MSU. As a professor at Morgan State University which is a Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU), I serve my community at Baltimore and the State of Maryland. Since the start of my service, I have taught over 200 students in three different undergraduate and two different graduate courses. I helped redesign the master in Bioinformatics program and bachelor in computer science curriculum. I submitted several grants to the National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Institute of Health (NIH). I am currently serving as a co-director of the Bioinformatics and Biostatistics team for a grant awarded from NIH for over \$14.5 Million dollars (Research Centers in Minority Institutions (RCMI)).

Before coming to MSU, I was a Postdoctoral research scholar at the University of Iowa (UIOWA) in the Department of Psychiatry, Carver College of Medicine. I received my PhD in computer science from Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. During my PhD, I served as a researcher at National ICT Australia (NICTA). I did my Master Degree in computer science and information technology at Multimedia University in Cyberjaya, Malaysia, and received my Bachelor's degree in Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) at Shiraz University in Shiraz, Iran. From the time that I moved to the United States in 2015, I have always been financially independent and served at the highest level of education and training in this country as a postdoctoral research scholar

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<sup>1</sup> Link to Academic profile to Morgan State University:

[https://www.morgan.edu/school\\_of\\_computer\\_mathematical\\_and\\_natural\\_sciences/departments\\_and\\_programs/computer\\_science/faculty\\_and\\_staff/iman\\_\(abdollah\)\\_dehzangi.html](https://www.morgan.edu/school_of_computer_mathematical_and_natural_sciences/departments_and_programs/computer_science/faculty_and_staff/iman_(abdollah)_dehzangi.html)

and professor. Needless to say, I immigrated to the United States because I thought my knowledge and experience would make me a valuable contribution to this country.

My research focus is on machine learning, artificial intelligence, and bioinformatics & computational biology. I work on the challenges associated with the design and development of robust, general, and accurate systems for several important problems in these fields such as, protein local and global structure prediction, genome variants analysis, and cancer subtype classification. My research in these areas has led to more than 65 publications in prestigious peer-reviewed journals and conferences with over 1600 citations (h-index = 24 and i10-index = 42)<sup>2</sup>. Over 20 of my scientific articles were published after I moved to United States with the affiliation of University of Iowa (UIOWA) and Morgan State University (MSU). I also received over 1000 citations since October 2015 and after I moved to United States.

I moved to United States on September 2015 with an H1B visa to serve as postdoctoral research scholar at the University of Iowa, Carver College of Medicine. My green card was granted on December 29, 2015 as a family-based green card which I applied for through my mother, Mrs. Zahra Sadeghian. I moved here to join my family and pursue my career in research and academics as U.S. is at the forefront of research and technology advancement. It has always been my dream to build my career and conduct high impact research in America because I believed I could help advance our collective knowledge and training to the best extent of my abilities. In fact, this applies to my entire family. I have two brothers in the U.S., Dr. Arash Dehzangi, who is currently serving as an assistant professor at the School of Engineering at North Western University, and Dr. Omid Dehzangi, who is currently serving as an assistant professor at the School of Medicine at West Virginia State University. I left Iran in April 2008 and never returned (over 11 years). I've lived in three different countries and three different continents and obtained my degrees and gained experience every step of the way. I also have full clearance and no criminal background in any of those countries and continents.

Note that I am presenting my and my family's qualifications to highlight that those that immigrate through family can plant roots, build a family, and contribute to our country culturally. Those that bring with themselves skills and expertise to serve the United States of America to make it a better place for all of us. I believe this is the same case for many others that have been granted U.S. citizenship through a family petition, despite negative portraits that have been painted by some that want to profit from fear and xenophobia.

After I moved to the United States, my partner of eight years - Dr. Ghazaleh Taherzadeh - and I decided to enshrine our love in marriage. We realized that after eight years, we no longer can be apart and longed to spend the rest of our lives together. We happily married in September 2016 and I launched an I-130, petition for alien relative, application for her by October 2016 to join me. We knew this process is going to take up to two years, so she could join me after she completed her PhD in Australia. We believed that with the strong bond and love between us, we could

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<sup>2</sup> Link to google scholar citations for Dr. Abdollah (Iman) Dehzangi:  
<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=YXLOWd0AAAAJ&hl=en>

overcome the difficulty of a long-distance relationship, with the hope of rejoining again and finally live happily ever after. However, our dreams and hopes are all shattered after the Muslim ban imposed to several countries, including Iran. This cruel policy threw our lives into disarray.

Ghazaleh and I met in Malaysia in 2008 while we both were students at Multimedia University in Malaysia. Throughout our long relationship, with lots of ups and downs, we reached to a special mutual understanding, respect and love for each other. Dr. Ghazaleh Taherzadeh, currently lives and works in Brisbane, Queensland (QLD), Australia. She completed her PhD in May 2018 in Bioinformatics and Computational Biology from Griffith University, Gold Coast, QLD, Australia. She completed her Undergraduate degree in computer science in 2011 from Multimedia University (MMU) and her Master degree, also in computer science, from the University of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Malaysia in 2013.

Ghazaleh has been living outside Iran (except few visits to her family) since 2007 when she moved to Singapore with her family and then to Malaysia to pursue her bachelor degree. Throughout her studies, she has been a recipient of many scholarships and rewards from different institutes including the Griffith University Higher Degree Research scholarship (GUPRS) and the Griffith University International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (GUIPRS). Her research is in the areas of artificial intelligence (AI), bioinformatics, and computational biology and has led to 20 publications in prestigious peer-reviewed journals and conferences with over 200 citations (h-index = 8 and i10-index = 8)<sup>3</sup>. In fact, in my humble opinion, considering her CV as a fresh PhD graduate, she is a valuable asset to any institute. Such skills and experiences will absolutely be in the national interest of the United States. The full list of her academic and career achievements as well as her volunteer activities are provided in her CV, which I have submitted for the record.

Again, I would like to note that I am listing my wife, Dr. Ghazaleh Taherzadeh's qualifications to demonstrate her skills and expertise to show that she is potential asset to the United States. It is to demonstrate that in many cases, including ours, those that are waiting for their visa are assets to the United States. They should not be banned because of their nationality or their religion. My question is that if this law has been passed to prevent those that are a threat, then why is it directly impacting me, my family, and my wife? Why am I separated from my wife? Considering this testimony, do you think that we present any threat? My belief is that such an unjust law, in fact, prevents the United States from benefiting not just from our skills, but also from who we are as people.

By April 2018, she received an offer to serve as a postdoctoral research scholar at the Department of Cell Biology and Molecular Genetics at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD). Her aim is to conduct high impact research in the field of Bioinformatics, drug design and drug discovery. Her long-term aim is to continue a career in academy as a professor and active researcher. This offer has been a wonderful opportunity for her. However, despite the effort from UMD, she was not able to apply for H1B from outside the United States because of the Muslim ban. In fact, denial and delay of her request for a waiver indirectly caused a delay in the research

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<sup>3</sup> Link to google scholar citations for Dr. Ghazaleh Taherzadeh:  
<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=YXLOWd0AAAAJ&hl=en>

progress that she was employed for. Besides, the search process for a new postdoctoral researcher with her qualifications also introduces further delays, which consequently introduces costs from tax payers as this project is funded by the National Institute of Health (NIH).

After over two years, she finally was invited for her I-130 visa interview in February 2019. She was notified during her interview that her visa application was denied and that she had to apply for a waiver. We were greatly dismayed, though knew this was a possibility as a result of the Muslim ban. So, we completed a waiver request with a supporting letter from Senator Van Hollen of Maryland, my employer, the Department of Computer Science at Morgan State University (MSU), and her potential employer at the University of Maryland, College Park.

The consulate mentioned that the waiver process is going to take time and that we could follow up after 6 months. We did as they advised and followed up in August 2019. Senator Van Hollen kindly submitted the follow up letter and the response we received was that this process is going to take longer. Unfortunately, there is no timeline. She has lost the job offer that was extended to her as there was no end in sight to this process. Despite that, due to her impressive CV and publication records, she was advised that if she is admitted to the United States, she will be considered immediately. Hence, we are hopeful that she would be able to continue her career in academics upon arrival. However, the rejection of the visa application, uncertainty of how long the review process of a waiver, and losing such a wonderful job opportunity have obviously introduced lots of hardship, stress, and difficulty to our lives. Considering that we both have lived outside of Iran for more than 10 years and she has obtained clearance from several different countries including Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia, it is not very clear how our case can be an issue of national security.

Denial of her visa and entry caused us and our family undue hardship because we missed the support and companionship that we desperately seek. My wife is alone in Australia and I am without her here. I am separated from the person closest to me in life and I don't know when we will be together, forced to go through the celebrations and hardships in life apart. Our separation is unsustainable and is against public policy of family unity. Due to the uncertainty and hardship of waiting for a waiver, we are limited to choose between joining each other or waiting for an uncertain amount of time.

Denial of her request for a waiver or further delay in the process will force me, against our will, to quit my service at Morgan State University to reunite with my wife in Australia. Such an act will cost time and skill lost to MSU, Baltimore, the State of Maryland and U.S in general. It will also cost tax payers to recruit a new professor with the same qualifications at Morgan State University. After four years of my active time as a researcher and professor in the United States, it is a very hard and heat breaking decision to make.

Our hope was to move to the United States, pursue our careers and dreams, build a family, and contribute to the science and well-being of our society and community. I also feel uncomfortable that as program director and supervisor, I have to leave my students! I am concerned about those courses that I prepared and how they are going to be taught! I am also sorry that my absence will

introduce an extra task to my colleagues to cover those courses. I feel that I might fail my beloved University, department, and friends but there is no alternative for me. I want to be with my beloved wife and I am being denied my love and future because I am Iranian.

We are desperate, stressed, and left with little hope. The indefinite waiting with little hope affects our relationship, lives, and future. We both are unable to work and live to the full extent of our potential, having to spend a great amount of energy to overcome these hardships. Such a situation is unsustainable and unhealthy.

I want to reiterate that we are not a threat to the United States, but I know, this is already well-known. No one can be found to be a threat based upon their nationality or religion. Threats must be determined based upon facts and evidence—there are no such facts about my wife.

As I finish this testimony, filed with sorrow, despair, and sadness, looking at all we did to be of worth to our society, family, and community, and cleaning tears from my eyes, I wish to leave you with the knowledge that this unfair and xenophobic ban is destroying our lives and bond. We do not know what is going to happen and how long we have to wait. We do not know when or where we can be united. We do not know why the America we have dreamed of has put us in this situation.

For all the reasons stated above, we would like to raise our voice to the House of Representatives, a stronghold of law and order under U.S. Constitution, to please help us to build our lives and to stop this injustice. We are one in several thousand that have been affected by the Muslim ban. Many more have similar stories, similar hardships, and similar sorrow and sadness. Those that hope to one day call this land of the free and home of the brave their home and serve this country under the same flag. Yet, they have been banned because of their nationality and religion. This is discrimination. This is unconstitutional.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Abdollah Dehzangi  
09/21/2019