

A Message of Welcome from SSA to Our International Colleagues

Editor's note: The following was delivered at the SSA Annual Meeting Luncheon, 18 April 2017, in Denver, Colorado.

Good afternoon, friends and colleagues. I speak today on behalf of those who have no voice, because they were not allowed to join us here. I am referring to the travel ban that has prohibited many of our colleagues from attending the Annual Meeting of the Seismological Society of America. I have no intention of preaching to the choir. Those in this room know that none of us chose our place or circumstances of birth, and thus discrimination on these grounds is indefensible and disgraceful. This is not entirely a new or short-term issue. In recent years, it has become increasingly common for people born in some countries to be unable to visit the U.S.A. What happens is this: the person applies for a U.S. visa, and then travels hundreds of kilometers for a visa interview, where they hand over their passport. Then they wait. In theory, the passport should be returned a few weeks later, stamped with a visitor visa for use within the next three months. But often, the documents are not actually



returned until *after* the meeting is over—the visa is not technically denied; it is simply never issued. And sometimes, people are held for extra screening for so many hours at the border, even with a valid visa, that all flights for the day have gone and they have no choice but to return home. My success rate in bringing my beautiful Iranian students and post-docs to

SSA in the last few years has fallen below 50%. But it was possible to lie to myself—surely this was a result of bureaucratic bungling or incompetence, rather than deliberate malice. Such soothing self-speak is no longer viable now that discrimination against all who committed the sin of being born in the wrong country is an official goal of the administration.

We need to face what has happened. This is a challenge for organizations outside of the U.S.A. For example, the Girl Guides of Canada have canceled their summer camps in California, and all other programs involving travel to the U.S.A., because many of the Girl Guides are unable to participate. Universities and companies face similar challenges in attending scientific conferences in the U.S.A. I left three of my post-docs behind this year. I decided to come, in the interests of speaking up on their behalf, but am struggling with decisions regarding future meetings. For me, the SSA meeting has always been my scientific home; but how can it be called home, if your family has been locked out?

So what should SSA be doing? SSA President Jim Mori has issued a statement in opposition to the travel ban. SSA has signed a multisociety letter, and been in touch with contacts on Capitol Hill. These actions are a start, but I would urge each of you to think about what you personally can do. Write your representatives. Join a protest. Move future meetings to locations where all delegates will be welcome. Speak up for what is right, even if it seems that no one is listening.

In closing, I invite everyone in the room to stand, in a gesture of welcome, respect, and solidarity, for all those who were not allowed to join us here today. We miss you, we wish you were here, and we hope to welcome you home to SSA soon. ✉

Gail M. Atkinson
University of Western Ontario
gmatkinson@aol.com

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