

Excluded from the USA

By Yusuf Islam

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First, I thank God for relieving me of my ordeal and delivering me home safe; also, thanks to all those who prayed for me and supported me through this whole dark episode, from eminent politicians, the press and religious leaders, to plain, everyday people. Never would I believe that such a thing could happen in the 'land of the free' – unfortunately, it did. But it's warming to have such a wave of sympathy from my friends and my worldwide well-wishers.

After the experience of my dramatic deportation from the U.S.A. it feels like I am on a different planet from the one I was on a couple of days ago; certainly the world has changed, not for the best. Two days beforehand, I had started a journey with my daughter to Nashville, intending to initiate work on a new recording project. Suddenly, our aeroplane was diverted 600 miles to Bangor International Airport and I found myself surrounded by six uniformed officers and handed over to the FBI for questioning.

The most upsetting thing at this point was being separated from my daughter, Maymanah, not knowing how she was or when and where we might be united. And since my phone was confiscated I couldn't contact my family (nor could they ring me) and they were relegated to watching the whole frightening episode on TV and surviving on scraps of information shown by the media.

My interrogators repeatedly wanted to know how my name was spelt; it sounded to me as though they had it mixed up with someone else's. Security officers finally told me that my name was on a 'No Fly List', I was classified as 'Inadmissible', and sent back to London.

The amazing thing is that I was not given (and have still not been given) any explanation whatsoever as to what it is I am accused of, or why I am now deemed an apparent security threat – let alone given an opportunity to respond to these allegations. I was simply told that the order had come from 'on high'.

We have now initiated a legal process to try to find out exactly what is going on, and to take all necessary steps to undo the very serious, and wholly unfounded, injustice which I have suffered.

I am a man of peace and denounce all forms of terrorism and injustice; it is simply outrageous for the U.S. authorities to suggest otherwise. I have dedicated my life to promoting peace and understanding throughout the world. It would be devastating were

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the charity work I do through my humanitarian relief organisation, Small Kindness, which helps countless children and families, and which is accredited by the United Nations, to be undermined by what has happened.

What makes the situation even more distressing is the fact that I have now been prevented from entering the United States – a part of God's earth that I love and whose people have always been great friends to me.

Yet, after all this, I can think of no better response than by continuing what I believe to be the tremendously important work of caring for the needy and campaigning for peace and stability in this volatile and increasingly violent world, and at the same time try to seek to clear my name of this appalling and baseless slur. In the meantime I am confident that, in the end, good sense and, above all, justice, will prevail.

Yusuf Islam's legal advisers are currently seeking clarification on the detention from the US Consulate. Cat Stevens was one of the biggest solo artists of the 1960s and 1970s, penning such songs as Matthew & Son, Moonshadow, Wild World, Peace Train and Father and Son and selling millions of LPs. Following a bout of TB early in his career, he undertook an ongoing search for peace and ultimate spiritual truth. He embraced Islam in 1977 and changed his name to Yusuf Islam. Last year he was awarded the World Social Award by former president Mikhail Gorbachev for his humanitarian relief work helping children. He also performed at Nelson Mandela's AIDS benefit concert in South Africa.