

May 06, 2015
The Honorable Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

May I present to you a dilemma in the Immigration policy that needs your immediate attention. Foreign professionals, like me, have suffered the consequences of an obsolete and contradictory immigration law. Now your proposed reform is not ample enough to embrace us and it is a huge oversight. In my opinion, we need an inclusive immigration reform that provides a work permit to develop entrepreneurial businesses so we can “Dream Big Dreams.”

I. US Is Missing the Opportunity of a Dynamic Professional Workforce.

Foreign professionals have been displaced from their countries for diverse reasons. I am a victim of the Venezuelan corruption that caused its economy to collapse. With the work permit we could start our companies rather than wasting our productive years. Our emerging companies would expand creating jobs, exploding other trades, and fomenting the country’s economy growth. US companies have been bringing in professionals from abroad despite the advantage we have living in this country, sharing its culture, and speaking its language but a legal status have been denied to us. It is demoralizing not to be welcomed when others have been accepted without the training and skills we possess.

I was born in Venezuela but I grew up in Colombia. Due to my economic situation I abandoned my architectural studies and I moved to Venezuela. Later, I graduated as an architect and also I completed a Hospitality Business Administration Specialty (I am including my resume for some background information). When I was 25 years old and I wanted to do business and visit the US. Incredibly, when I requested the visa the US embassy in Venezuela told me: **“No sorry, you are a professional, you do not have ties in your country, and you could stay in the US”**. My qualities were seen as deterrents by US authorities. With a tourist visa I entered to US thirteen times but I had a limited business. I cannot apply for a demanding unfilled position, develop a business with my creative ideas, be a mentor or advocate for young people, or be a certified physical instructor knowing that I have the required skills for these positions that people ask me to perform.

II. Immigration Alternatives Do Not Work For Us Either.

Foreign professionals living in US do not have the possibilities to change their legal status. We cannot be eligible for the **Diversity Immigrant Visa** program. The H-1B or EB visas require either a corporate sponsor or a large investment. Professionals, like me, do not have these but we have been blessed with our education and our acquired expertise. Most of us are honest and disciplined people who did not take any shortcut to receive “the papers”.

In 2000 I waited for the I-94 extension that did not arrive despite the INS told me that it would come by mail. In my entrance on April 10, 2001, unexpectedly my visa was canceled; it would expire in September 2005. The INS said that I was in a “Limbo Status” because I stayed some more days than the I-94 stated and I had to pay a fine. I was ready to apply for an H-1B visa or one of the EB visas but **sadly all my chances had vanished**. I was devastated and disoriented. The next day, I went to my PO Box and Mr. (Name withheld) the post office employee, gave me a ten month misplaced mail box that contained the longed for I-94 extension.

III. Bureaucracy and Mistakes Cause Harms in Applicants.

Besides the USPS mistakes the bureaucracy restricts the process causing delays and distress to applicants especially for victims of crime, like me, applying for the U visa. There is no way to know the status of the case for being a “sensitive” case. In one occasion in my town even my own “public record” was denied to me.

In 2002, I suffered two unrelated violent assaults in less than three months. One occurred on April 21 in North Carolina and the other in July 12 in Illinois. As a result I applied for the U visa. In March 2014, again the Post Office Service failed to deliver my documents on time. I had to request a motion to reopen my Case # (Number withheld), request a waived fee, and resend the documents. Recently my case was referred to Washington. After almost three years process, I have spent money, time, energy, and I am worn out.

Ironically the US embassy has been giving the US visa to **“Young professionals submitting strong bank statements”**. They have been asking for some of the qualifications I had years ago but were then considered my shortcomings. Also, I did not receive a response to my mother case who was a victim also while she visited me. For me the “American Dream” is almost impossible. **Therefore the immigration policy must change. It is about time that an “Entrepreneur Visa” for professionals with advanced skills, meeting certain requirements, be created.**

I wanted to share my story years ago and I noticed recently that you invited young people to your public speaking events. Also The White House website is asking people to share their stories in order to be heard. Mr. President, I wish you success in the last years of your presidential mandate overcoming the obstacles and the opposition presented. I strongly believe in your programs such as the Immigration Reform and thank you for your openness to this issue. It has been a high honor to write to you. I appreciate your attention to my letter and thank you for your time.

Most Respectfully,

Esther Herran