

## Turkish immigrant granted stay of deportation at eleventh hour



Ibrahim Parlak, owner of popular Harbert, Mich., restaurant Cafe Gulistan, fled Turkey for the U.S. in 1991 after spending 16 months in prison. The Department of Homeland Security just extended Parlak's deferral of deportation, which was set to expire Thursday, by 90 days. "I'm a little relieved, but nothing is over," Parlak said.

(E. Jason Wambsgans / Chicago Tribune)

Matt McCallChicago Tribune

Ibrahim Parlak will spend Christmas with his family this year without fearing for his life.

The [Department of Homeland Security](#) extended his deferral of deportation, which was set to expire Thursday, by 90 days. In 2004, Homeland Security charged Parlak with lying on his green card application about a prison term. He's fought the allegations ever since.

"I'm a little relieved, but nothing is over," Parlak said.

Robert Carpenter, Parlak's attorney, received a call Wednesday from the Detroit branch of Homeland Security informing him of the extension, which was based on a request filed Dec. 1 by Carpenter.

Debbie Cannon, a spokeswoman for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which is involved in his case, said she cannot comment on ongoing litigation.

Parlak, owner of popular Harbert, Mich., restaurant Cafe Gulistan, fled Turkey for the U.S. in 1991 after spending 16 months in prison, where he said he was tortured and interrogated over an alleged connection to a 1987 border dispute between the Kurdistan Worker's Party, or PKK, and Turkish government in which Turkish soldiers were killed. Parlak said he was present when the gun battle began but ran when the shooting started.



[Restaurant owner faces deportation to Turkey after 24 years: 'It's not going to be a welcoming party'](#)

An immigration attorney handling Parlak's case checked the "no" box next to a question about serving prison time because he had been a political prisoner of the military, Carpenter said.

A candlelight vigil at Cafe Gulistan was planned for Wednesday night so local friends, family and even a group of Kurds from Chicago could show their support, but after the announcement the point of the gathering changed.

"We are there to give our hearts and celebrate Christmas," Parlak said.

Going back to Turkey could be dangerous for Parlak.

Bahoz Broosk, 27, one of the Kurds who traveled from Chicago to see Parlak, said that if Parlak were sent back to Turkey he would be jailed, tortured and killed. Broosk immigrated to the U.S. from Turkey in 2010.

"All Kurds are terrorists in the eyes of the government," he said. "He will have nowhere to run."

Although his supporters are cautiously optimistic about his chances to stay in the U.S., the extension does not end the case against him.

"We're encouraged," Michele Gazzolo said. She and Parlak have a daughter. "But we also know that without continuing to bring attention to it, there's no guarantee how it will end up."

U.S. Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., a longtime ally of Parlak who has introduced legislation to give Parlak legal permanent residency at the start of each congressional session for 10 years, said he will continue fighting for Parlak.

"We are pleased and relieved at the decision to grant Ibrahim a 90-day extension," he wrote in a statement to the Tribune. "We will continue our diligent pursuit of a permanent solution that will prevent Ibrahim from being religiously persecuted and keep him where he rightfully belongs: his home in Southwest Michigan."

Carpenter said Parlak is waiting for approval of a motion to reopen his case on the basis that he could be detained and tortured on his arrival to Turkey. When Parlak first appealed his deportation in 2004, he cited U.N. Convention Against Torture guidelines that prevent the deportation of someone to a country where it is more than 50 percent likely they will be tortured. His appeal was denied because at the time Turkey was improving its human rights record during a bid to join the [European Union](#). However, Turkey's bid was later denied.

"Things have changed dramatically in Turkey since then," Carpenter said. "There is an ironclad crackdown on Kurds, PKK affiliates and supposed PKK affiliates. The Turkish government has made it clear that they are anticipating and even gleeful about his return."

Carpenter is compiling evidence, including threatening headlines from the Turkish media, in the hope that the U.S. government will reopen the case.

After Parlak applied to be a naturalized citizen in 1999, his name was flagged by Homeland Security. Turkey had resented Parlak in the firefight, and the U.S. government had since classified the PKK as a terrorist organization in 1997. That meant Parlak could be classified as a terrorist too.

For now, Parlak can only keep trying to fight his deportation.

"We'll continue working even harder so we can stop this madness once and for all," he said. "This is my country, and I'm not gonna let anyone take that away from me."